

THE IMPACT OF THE RUBBER BOOM ON THE
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE BOLIVIAN LOWLANDS
(1850-1920)

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By

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ABSTRACT

One of the most pressing issues in the world is how to reconcile the capitalist world order with Third World labor systems, environmental concerns, and the struggle for indigenous autonomy. Northeastern Bolivia during the rubber boom period is the perfect laboratory for examining these important issues. The demand for rubber inserted this region into the Atlantic economy and started a cycle of profound transformations. These transformations created patterns in labor relations that critically affected the Amazonian environment and societies and eventually led to the organization of indigenous groups in a way that have had significant effects to the present.

There has been a considerable amount of scholarly publication on the Amazonian rubber boom. Most of it has concentrated either on the Brazilian rubber boom or on the Upper Amazon, particularly around the Putumayo area, which is shared by Colombia, Peru and Ecuador. However, the impact of the rubber boom was felt throughout Amazonia and it revolutionized the economies, societies and environment of every

Amazonian country. Although Bolivia has traditionally been viewed as an Andean country, sixty per cent of its territory is in the lowlands and it was perhaps more affected by the rubber boom than any other South American country. Thanks to the rubber boom, Bolivia started to pay attention to its vast eastern regions, there was an increase in colonization and exploration of Bolivia's Amazonian territories and the political and cultural identities of the eastern half of the country were shaped.

My dissertation explores how the rubber boom altered the demography and ecology of the Bolivian lowlands. It analyzes which indigenous groups existed before the boom and how it affected them. It demonstrates that the rubber boom was responsible for altering the ethnic map of the area. It also looks at the role of Creole immigrants in the rubber boom, the creation of local elites and their interactions with the Bolivian state. In other words, it examines the culture of both the dominant and the dominated. By using a multidisciplinary approach, it explores the complexity of the rubber boom and it demystifies the strictly economic history that has been written about the area to date. This integrated approach sheds light on how the local, the national and the international interacted in one of South America's most isolated areas during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Amazonian rubber boom in Bolivia was very different from its neighbors' boom. Because Bolivia's Amazonian areas were very isolated, the rubber boom was very self-contained and there was little outside interference. Rubber production and navigation was mostly in the hands of local rubber barons. In addition, the weakness of the Bolivian state during most of the rubber boom meant that it had minimal influence in

the area. In most cases, it delegated many of its functions to local rubber barons such as the powerful Casa Suárez.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2. THE SETTING	33
CHAPTER 3. FROM CASCARILLEROS TO SIRINGUEROS.....	97
CHAPTER 4. RUBBER AREAS, CASAS COMERCIALES AND PATRONES; THE MATURITY OF THE BOLIVIAN RUBBER BOOM.....	171
CHAPTER 5. BOLIVIA'S RUBBER BARONS, ENTREPRENEURS OR SLAVERS?	236
CHAPTER 6. THE RUBBER BOOM AND THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE LOWLANDS	288
CHAPTER 7. LABOR AND THE BOLIVIAN RUBBER BARRACA	378
CHAPTER 8. THE BOLIVIAN STATE AND THE RUBBER INDUSTRY	440
CONCLUSIONS.....	477
GLOSSARY	496
REFERENCES	501

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Bolivian Territorial Losses after Independence	46
Figure 2. Bolivia’s Ecological Areas.....	51
Figure 3. <i>Cachuela</i> on the Mamoré River, near Guajarà-Mirim, during the Dry Season.....	59
Figure 4. Lowland vs. Highland Depts.	68
Figure 5. Map of the Route from Apolo to the Peruvian Port of Mollendo.....	121
Figure 6. Leco Indians Operating a Callapo down to the Beni River	122
Figure 7. Making the First Incision and Placing the Tichelas	137
Figure 8. Portaging a Batelote around the Cachuelas	154
Figure 9. Weight and Value of Bolivian Rubber Exports, 1890-1916	166
Figure 10. Map of Bolivia and Adjacent Areas during the Amazonian Rubber Boom	174
Figure 11. The River Network North of San Ignacio de Velasco.....	180
Figure 12. Map of Rubber Areas of La Paz Department	185
Figure 13. Bolivian Rubber Exports by Area (1911-1916)	101
Figure 14. Population of the City and Department of Santa Cruz by Race (1881).....	198
Figure 15. Population of Vaca Díez Province by Race (1913).....	210
Figure 16. Head Office of the Maison Brailard in Riberalta in the Early 1900s	213
Figure 17. Bolivia’s First Steam-powered Launch, The Brailard.....	222
Figure 18. The Steamer Rodolfo Aráuz.....	224
Figure 19. The Barracón Ortón.....	250
Figure 20. Nicolás Suárez during the 1910s	259
Figure 21. Wooden Chapel in Cachuela Esperanza.....	268
Figure 22. Engine of British-built Train in Cachuela Esperanza.....	271
Figure 23. Jornaleros’ Birthplace at Cachuela Esperanza, 1910.....	275
Figure 24. Jornaleros’ Birthplace at Cachuela Esperanza, by Age Group.....	276
Figure 25. Present Ethno-linguistic Groups of the Bolivian Lowlands	291

Figure 26. Map of Missions and Ethnic Groups in Lowland Bolivia, 1883-84.....	295
Figure 27. Migration Patterns during the Bolivian Rubber Boom.....	323
Figure 28. Diagram of the Settlement Pattern of a Bolivian Rubber Estate	381
Figure 29. An Idealized Version of the Barraca of a Wealthy Gomero in the Lower Madeira	383
Figure 30. Location of Rubber Barracas in the Territorio Nacional de Colonias and Vaca Díez Province, 1916-22	388
Figure 31. Organizational Chart of a Typical Rubber Enterprise	391
Figure 32. A Family of Rubber Tappers going to their Estradas.....	394
Figure 33. Racial Categories in Barraca Ingavi (1910)	403
Figure 34. Racial Categories in the Madre de Dios barracas (1898).....	404
Figure 35. Racial Categories in the Military Census of 1916.....	404
Figure 36. Offices of the National Delegation in Puerto Acre c. 1900.....	443
Figure 37. Bolivian Rubber Bolachas ready to be Shipped at Abuná Station	451

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Main Explorers of Bolivian Amazonia in the 19th Century	114
Table 2. Value and Weight of Bolivian Exports in 1883.....	128
Table 3. Fleteros on the Beni River (1896)	156
Table 4. Value of Barraca Illampu	159
Table 5. Origin, Weight and Value of Imports in Villa Bella (Dec. 1891).....	163
Table 6. Rubber Exports through Brazilian ports (1909-16)	188
Table 7. Country of Origin and Sex of Riberalta's Urban Population, (1929)	212
Table 8. Main Bolivian and Foreign Casas Comerciales.....	227
Table 9. Export Totals for Bolivia's top Rubber Producers in 1911	282
Table 10. Workers'Origins of Barraca Ingavi in 1910	406
Table 11. Account Balance between Honorio Peña and Lucía Rocha (1892-95).....	414
Table 12. Main Sources of Revenue of the Bolivian Government (1890-1902)	444

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The Amazon basin is one of the least understood regions of the world. Since its discovery and exploration by colonial powers, it has fallen into the realm of myth and fantasy. Even the name of the great river reflects the fantasy that fierce female warriors inhabited it. At present, despite the upsurge of interest in the rapid ecological degradation and disappearance of the world's main source of oxygen, popular perceptions of Amazonia reflect this tradition of myths and inaccuracies. The myth of El Dorado followed the Amazon warriors' myth and in the nineteenth century, most perceptions of Amazonia featured cannibals, headhunters and naked natives.

As in most of Latin America, in Amazonia the industrialization of the Northern Atlantic world brought about an unprecedented demand for raw materials. Europeans and North Americans set out to explore both markets and products that would propel their agricultural and industrial revolutions. This produced a series of economic booms and busts that have become symptomatic of the Latin American economies. Economic booms became busts as the industrial world started to produce certain products synthetically or produced them more cheaply elsewhere. These booms affected different regions at different times. Since colonial times, Bolivia's economy was based on silver mining. During most of the nineteenth century, silver mining continued to sustain

Conservative regimes based in the southern cities of Sucre and Potosí. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, tin mining, based on the cities of La Paz and Oruro became important and tin eventually became Bolivia's main export. Until the loss of the Pacific coast to Chile, the guano and phosphate booms also affected Bolivia. These booms fueled the nineteenth-century agricultural revolution, which led to increased production of food and increased population in countries where the industrial revolution had taken off. As guano deposits in Peru's coast were depleted, the industrialized nations found more accessible deposits in the Caribbean and the Pacific islands and, as chemical fertilizers became more readily available, Peru lost its chief source of income.¹ The use of chemical fertilizers used raw materials such as phosphates and saltpeter, which were abundant in the desert on the Pacific Coast between Bolivia, Chile and Peru. Chile's interest in its neighbors' guano and phosphate resources eventually led to the War of the Pacific (1879-1884) which ended with Bolivia's cession of its coastline to Chile and with Chile's occupation of Peru for three years.

These booms, however, only affected Bolivia's western highlands and led to a predominantly Pacific-oriented economy. Meanwhile, Bolivia's ruling elites continued to ignore the potential wealth of the country's extensive lowlands. The transitional zone of the Yungas partly integrated with the world economy through the cinchona boom and, to a certain degree, through a growing domestic and international demand for coca fueled by the domestic mining booms and by growing research on pharmacology internationally.

¹ For the implications of the Peruvian guano boom, see Paul Gootenberg, *Between Silver and Guano: Commercial Policy and the State in Postindependence Peru* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), and id., *Imagining Development: Economic Ideas in Peru's "Fictitious prosperity" of Guano, 1840-1880* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

The rest of the lowlands languished until their integration into the Atlantic economies through the Amazonian rubber boom. Even though some rubber used the traditional Pacific routes, the rubber boom was the first Bolivian economic boom that concentrated on exporting through Bolivia's eastern border with Brazil.

It is debatable whether these booms led to nation building or to strengthening local elites. Development was minimal and, in most cases, there was a tendency to create monopolies. The presence of the state was also mostly nominal and it was happy to delegate its functions to local merchants or to foreign companies. Despite the rhetoric of development and citizenship, the maximization of profits before the resource became cheaper or unavailable was the driving force behind most economic booms. Since most of these booms took place in inaccessible areas, away from urban areas or involved a dangerous working environment, labor became of the utmost importance. The need for cheap labor overshadowed concerns for building a "modern" nation and coercive labor practices were either re-instituted or modified. Throughout most of Latin America, booms caused a resurgence of coercive labor regimes ranging from slavery to debt peonage that often involved massive and forced movements of people. The companies operating the guano islands, for example, employed indentured Chinese servants, kidnapped Easter Islanders, ex-slaves and convicts. The henequen boom in Yucatan increased the level of exploitation of the Maya and the phosphate boom relied on displaced peasants from the Central Valley of Chile.² The reliance on coercive labor is

² See Allen & Joseph Wells, Gilbert M., *Summer of Discontent, Seasons of Upheaval; Elite Politics and Rural Insurgency in Yucatan, 1876-1915* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996) and

also related to the boom's relative lack of impact on local economies. Booms rarely developed sustainable economic development as local or foreign elites siphoned off most of the profits and the subsistence level of most of the population failed to produce any "spin-off" effects.

The Amazonian Rubber Boom

Even though Europeans were aware of natural rubber since colonial times and many native peoples of the Americas had used it to construct rubber balls, waterproof clothing and torches, it was not until the nineteenth century that Europeans developed an interest in its elastic and waterproof characteristics. Rubber's sensitivity to temperature changes restricted these characteristics. Raw rubber becomes extremely hard when exposed to cold yet it becomes soft and pliable when exposed to heat. Charles Goodyear's development of the vulcanization process, which rendered natural rubber hard and insensitive to either high or cold temperatures through exposing it to sustained high heat, resolved these problems. Although there had already been a certain demand for rubber, European ingenuity discovered many applications for natural rubber "ranging from sprockets, belts, hoses, and tiles to suspenders, shoes and rain coats."³ World demand for rubber increased dramatically at the end of the nineteenth century with the massive production of bicycles and, in the early twentieth century, with the introduction of

Gootenberg *Between Silver and Guano*. For Chile, see Julio Pinto Vallejos, "La caldera del desierto. Los trabajadores del guano y los inicios de la cuestión social." *Proposiciones* 19 (1990), and id., *Desgarros y utopías en la pampa salitrera: la consolidación de la identidad obrera en tiempos de la cuestión social, 1890-1923* (Santiago, Chile: LOM Ediciones, 2007).

³ Barbara Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom, 1850-1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 8.

automobiles, all of which needed tires, ideally of rubber.

Until the early twentieth century, the Amazon basin produced most of the world's rubber. High demand led to the location of other sources elsewhere. After the British successfully managed to transplant Amazonian rubber trees to their Southeast Asia colonies, plantation rubber started to compete with the Amazonian product. European powers, such as France, Belgium and Germany planted trees in Southeast Asia and West Africa. Furthermore, other varieties of rubber were exploited in Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean.

Despite much rhetoric and failed attempts, rubber plantations never succeeded in Amazonia.⁴ When rubber was exhausted in one area, the solution was to seek it in other areas and eventually the whole Amazon basin was involved in rubber production. Although most rubber was channeled through the Brazilian cities of Belem and Manaus, the rubber boom affected every single corner of Amazonia. Rubber tappers explored the most remote parts of Amazonian tributaries in search for virgin rubber trees and the Amazonian sections of Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and the Guyanas were gradually incorporated into the rush for rubber.

If the impact of the rubber boom on both the industrialized world and Latin America is considered, the amount of scholarship that it has generated is rather meager. Nevertheless, a handful of scholars have dealt with several aspects of its history. Barbara

⁴ For a discussion of belated attempt to develop rubber plantations in the Brazilian Amazon, see Warren Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber: a Study in Environmental History* (New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

Weinstein wrote the seminal work that inspired another generation of scholars.⁵ Her book concentrated primarily on the rubber boom in Brazil, (particularly in the competition between the states of Pará and Amazonas and their respective capitals, Belem and Manaus) but its implications are relevant to many other Amazonian countries. Though the economics of the rubber boom were at the core of the book, she also introduced other extremely important aspects of the boom such as the creation and competition between local elites, the relevance of production systems, the role of the state and the ethnic identity of Amazonian *caboclos* (in Brazil, a *caboclo* is a person of mixed descent, usually indigenous, European and African). Besides being a pioneering work on the subject, the book has been significant in dispelling many of the assumptions of dependency theory. She attempted to explain the persistence of underdevelopment in the region by stating that despite the highly capitalized nature of the export economy, the persistence of pre-capitalist labor relations shaped the nature of the boom. According to her, a more "modern" or capitalist form of wage labor did not develop because there was an alliance between rubber tappers and rubber traders that prevented a further rationalization of the rubber industry. Rubber tappers, in particular, tended to value their independence and disdained wage labor and, as a result, actively resisted the pressure to create rubber plantations in Amazonia. Barbara Weinstein did not underestimate the role of foreign capital in the Amazon, but clearly demonstrated that many of the traits of the rubber boom were set off by national and local causes, that actively shaped both the

⁵ Weinstein, *Amazon Rubber Boom*.

production, and commercialization processes of Amazonian rubber.⁶

Brazilian historians have concentrated on various aspects of the Amazonian rubber boom. Roberto Santos, for example, concentrated on the economic history of the Amazonian rubber boom and its precedents and legacies. Like Weinstein, he was puzzled by the Amazon rubber boom's legacy of underdevelopment. Other historians looked into the social and political history of the city of Manaus during the rubber boom.⁷ Antônio J. Loureiro examined the impact of the collapse of the rubber boom, also stressing the city of Manaus.⁸ Additionally, Manoel Rodrigues Ferreira analyzed the history of the Madeira Mamoré railway, which was completed in 1912 after decades of setbacks. It was supposed to facilitate the export of Bolivian rubber through the Madeira River, but it was finished just as the rubber boom started its decline.⁹ The social historian Francisco Foot analyzed cultural aspects of the Amazonian rubber boom and the contradictions between the brutal reality of tapping rubber in Amazonia and the aura of modernity that rubber barons attempted to project and recreate.¹⁰ On the other hand,

⁶ Ibid.; Barbara Weinstein, "Persistence of Caboclo Culture in the Amazon: the Impact of the Rubber Trade, 1850-1920," in *The Amazon Caboclo: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Eugene Philip Parker (Williamsburg, VA: Dept. of Anthropology, College of William and Mary, 1985); id., "The Persistence of Precapitalist Relations of Production in a Tropical Export Economy: The Amazon Rubber Trade, 1850-1920," in *Proletarians and Protest. The Roots of Class Formation in an Industrializing World*, ed. Michael Hanagan and Charles Stephenson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).

⁷ Roberto Santos, *História econômica da Amazônia (1800-1920)* (São Paulo: T.A. Queiroz, 1980); Eloína Monteiro dos Santos, *A rebelião de 1924 em Manaus* (Manaus: SUFRAMA; Ed. Calderaro, 1985); E. Bradford Burns, "Manaus, 1910: Portrait of a Boom Town," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 7, no. 3 (1965).

⁸ Antônio José Souto Loureiro, *A Grande Crise (1908-1916)* (Manaus: T. Loureiro & Cia, 1986).

⁹ Manoel Rodrigues Ferreira, *A ferrovia do diabo: história de uma estrada de ferro na Amazônia* (São Paulo: Edições Melhoramentos, 1960). Valerie F. Fifer has analyzed the same from a Bolivian perspective, see "The Empire Builders: A History of the Bolivian Rubber Boom and the Rise of the House of Suarez." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 2, no. 2 (1970).

¹⁰ Francisco Foot, *Trem-fantasma: a ferrovia Madeira-Mamoré e a modernidade na selva* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2005).

Cristina Scheibe Wolf looked at women's history in the remote Juruá and Acre basins during the rubber boom. She analyzed how women and ethnicity interacted during an extremely violent period that was characterized by the violent capture of indigenous women to be sold to the highest bidder. Like Weinstein, she also looked at Amazonian *caboclo* identity and stated that the term was used to deny tribal Indians' ethnic identity.¹¹

In one of the most influential books about the environmental history of Latin America, Warren Dean analyzed Brazil's post-boom attempts to create rubber plantations. According to Dean, this was mainly due to ecological reasons. Neither Brazilians nor their North American advisors were able to control the rubber blight that infested the trees planted in attempts to create rubber plantations in Amazonia.¹² On the other hand, both labor and plant diseases were easily controlled in the plantation environments of Southeast Asia.

Oliver T. Coomes and Bradford L. Barham have revisited much of the literature on the rubber boom and have analyzed it from the perspective of economic theory. According to them, it was precisely the high profit margins generated by Amazonian wild rubber that prevented the development of plantations in the Amazon. Plantations would have been uneconomical since they needed to attract a very scarce labor force and required significant investment in infrastructure. Even if the rubber blight had been overcome, the high cost of transportation, of importing food and labor and of "controlling" workers in a riverine environment that facilitates mobility would have

¹¹ Cristina Scheibe Wolff, *Mulheres da Floresta: Uma História, Alto Juruá, Acre (1890-1945)* (São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 1999).

¹² Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber*.

prevented the creation of plantations in the Amazon River. These three approaches seem to stress the relevance of economic and/or environmental forces and do not dwell too much on the impact of the rubber boom on the local population.¹³ These authors also stressed that it is difficult to generalize about the entire Amazonian basin. Like Barbara Weinstein, they also stressed that labor was relatively free due to the nature of the Amazonian environment. They warned that these conditions were prevalent in the lower Amazon and that the upper Amazonian region had a closed economy, where local rubber barons such as Suárez, Fitzcarrald or the Arana brothers controlled all aspects of rubber extraction and export.¹⁴ On the other hand, indigenous labor was prevalent in the upper Amazon whereas it had all but disappeared in the lower Amazon. The success of Peruvian and Bolivian rubber barons was partly due to their ability to harness the labor force of the region's unincorporated and incorporated indigenous peoples through various coercive labor schemes.

Blanca Muratorio and Michael T. Taussig analyzed the impact of the rubber boom on particular indigenous groups from ethnohistorical and anthropological perspectives.¹⁵ Rather than concentrating on economic forces, these two authors concentrated on the "black legend" of rubber. As many other booms, the rubber boom produced extreme

¹³ Oliver T. Coomes and Bradford L. Barham, "Prosperity's Promise, The Amazonian Rubber Boom and Distorted Economic Development," ed. David J. Robinson (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996); id., "The Amazon Rubber Boom: Labour Control, Resistance and Failed Plantation Development Revisited," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 2 (1994).

¹⁴ Id., "Wild Rubber: Industrial Organisation and the Microeconomics of Extraction during the Amazonian Rubber Boom (1860-1920)," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (1994): 37.

¹⁵ Blanca Muratorio, *The Life and Times of Grandfather Alonso; Culture and History in the Upper Amazon* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Michael T. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man; A Study of Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987); id., "Culture of Terror--Space of Death; Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Terror," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 3 (1984).

forms of exploitation. The treatment of rubber workers in the Belgian Congo,¹⁶ Southeast Asia and in the Putumayo area (shared among Ecuador, Colombia and Peru) caused international outcries and the intervention of both politicians and the anti-slavery movement.¹⁷ Muratorio studied one of the many "intermediary" groups in the transitional world between the Andes and the Amazon, the Quichua-speaking Napo-runas or Tena-Archidona of the Napo River in present-day Ecuador. Although the work is an ethnohistory of this particular ethnic group from colonial times to the twentieth century, the rubber boom and the place that it has on the collective memory of the group plays a central role. Although *caucheros* kidnapped some Napo-runas and took them to the Putumayo and even as far as the Madre de Dios, those who stayed in the Napo River were able to play missionaries, state representatives and several rubber companies against each other and to create a certain sense of community and independence. The Napo-runas' forest skills, especially their ability to locate rubber strands, were essential in preserving their relative autonomy. Muratorio's history is similar to some transitional groups of the Bolivian lowlands, such as the Tacana. Although rubber barons valued their forest skills, neither the state nor missionaries had a strong presence in the Bolivian rubber areas, so they were not as successful as their Ecuadorian counterparts in preserving their autonomy.

¹⁶ For a history of atrocities against indigenous rubber workers in the Belgian Congo, see Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

¹⁷ Some well publicized contemporary accounts include Roger Casement, *Correspondence Reflecting the Treatment of the British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1912); W. E. Hardenburg, *The Putumayo, The Devil's Paradise* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1912).

Michael T. Taussig, an anthropologist trained as a physician, looked at the Putumayo horrors from a psychoanalytical perspective and attempted to explain why and how both rubber tappers and indigenous peoples used terror in the Putumayo era. According to him, the Putumayo became a “death space” in which the colonizers and the colonized practiced atrocities and mirrored each other. Terror bonded both the “civilized” Europeans and the “wild” Indians. For example, Europeans labeled Indians as cannibals and the Indians reciprocated by committing the atrocities that they were accused of committing. Yet, Europeans outdid natives in terror tactics; they routinely, murdered, maimed and tortured Indians to obtain rubber.

Michael E. Stanfield re-examined the Putumayo area and the Putumayo scandal from a comparative perspective. Although his book highlights the indigenous populations of the area, its main strength is that it compares Peru, Colombia, Brazil and Ecuador and offers an across-the-board and integrated analysis of how these different countries struggled to control Amazonia. It also offers a comparative perspective on different state policies and their impact on local populations. Nevertheless, Stanfield integrates the indigenous people of the area with the national, trans-Amazonian and Atlantic world and shows how they simultaneously resisted and benefited from the vast social, political, environmental, economic and cultural transformations that the rubber boom brought to Amazonia. In Stanfield, the indigenous people of the Putumayo area cease to appear as mere and passive victims of the rubber boom and display a certain degree of agency. Moreover, he argues that common perceptions about "imperial" and national political developments do not suffice to explain the Amazonian rubber boom.

Local elites, national governments, and international "imperialists" were both in competition and in cooperation with each other and very often behaved in contradictory and irrational ways to protect their perceived interests.¹⁸

Spanish historian Pilar García Jordán and her associates offered a similar comparative approach with an emphasis on institutional history and sources, which in this case included Bolivia.¹⁹ In her *Cruz y Arado, fusiles y discursos*, she compared Bolivian and Peruvian efforts to "nationalize" their frontiers. In the nineteenth century both countries attempted to secure control of their Amazonian (and in Bolivia's case Chaco) territories against the ambitions of their neighbors by using a three-pronged approach. According to the governing elites of both countries, the frontier should have been "nationalized" through military forts, missions and planned immigration. Military forts established sovereignty and could be used to prevent raids of foreigners and unfriendly Indians, missions were used to "civilize" Indians and to teach them how to become full citizens and, finally immigration both from within the country and abroad would populate the frontier with "civilized" groups. These policies were designed in Lima and La Paz from an elite perspective and, in most cases, they fell short of their grand expectations. Ironically, liberal secularizing governments applied the old colonial methods of "reducing" Indians under the guise of order and progress and with the firm support of the

¹⁸ Michael Edward Stanfield, *Red Rubber, Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

¹⁹ Pilar García Jordán, "Misiones, fronteras y nacionalización en la Amazonía andina: Perú, Ecuador y Bolivia (siglos XIX-XX)," in *La nacionalización de la Amazonía*, ed. Pilar García Jordán and Núria Sala i Vila (Barcelona: Publicacions Universitat de Barcelona, 1998); Pilar García Jordán, *Cruz y arado, fusiles y discursos: la construcción de los Orientes en el Perú y Bolivia, 1820-1940* (Lima: IFEA; IEP, 2001); id., ed., *Fronteras, colonización y mano de obra indígena en la Amazonía Andina (Siglos XIX-XX)* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú/Universitat de Barcelona, 1998).

once-despised Roman Catholic Church. This being said, and despite many national and international tensions, during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century the Bolivian and Peruvian governments were indeed able to extend their influence on their frontiers and to install an administrative apparatus there.²⁰

Oriente vs. Lowlands

As we have seen, both the Putumayo region and the Brazilian Amazon have generated significant scholarship. A comparative study of the rubber boom and the regions it affected in Latin America remains to be done. The Bolivian rubber boom, along with the rubber boom in Venezuela and the Guyanas, has received very little attention. Yet, Bolivia presents an important case study. Although most people consider Bolivia an Andean country, over sixty per cent of its territory is lowland, part of the Amazon and the River Plate basins. Bolivia's Amazonian territories have an extremely diverse human and ecological landscape that ranges from sub-tropical Andean foothills and Yungas to the extensive floodplains of Moxos to the properly Amazonian ecosystems of the northern Department of Pando and the Vaca Díez province of the Department of Beni.²¹

This varied landscape has always created a diverse mix of cultures. The linguistic

²⁰ Peru, e.g., created the new department of Loreto in 1853 with Iquitos as its capital and Bolivia created its department of Beni in 1842 and its *Territorio Nacional de Colonias* in its Northern Amazonian territories in 1900. The most significant internal conflict in Peru was Loreto's separatist movement in 1896, in Bolivia the Brazilian-led separatist movement of its Acre territory eventually led to a full-fledged war with Brazil (1901), which ended with Bolivia's cession of Acre to Brazil in exchange for a monetary compensation and the promise of a railway from Porto Velho into Bolivia's Amazon.

²¹ The most up-to-date Geography of Bolivia is Ismael Montes de Oca, *Geografía y recursos naturales de Bolivia*. 3ra. ed. (La Paz: EDOBOL, 1997).

affiliation of Bolivian lowland natives belongs to the most important linguistic branches of the Amazon (Arawak, Tupi-Guarani, Pano and Gê) as well as a large number of independent linguistic groups (Tacana, Leco, Cayuvava, etc.) and some unique *lingua francas* created by missionaries such as the Chiquitano or Tacana Quechua. The material culture of these groups is also as varied as their languages.²² The Arawak-speaking Moxos created sophisticated hydraulic systems since pre-historic times, whereas many lowland hunting and gathering groups were "contacted" in the late twentieth century.²³ Bolivia is also one of the few South American countries that still cling to the myth that there are still uncontacted ethnic groups (such as the Toromona).

Since the colonization and conquest of Bolivia was staged from highland Peru and what is today known as Bolivia was known as Upper Peru, Bolivia's history has always been highland-centric. During the colonial and early republican periods, Bolivia's economy tended to center on the western highlands and to link Bolivia with Peru and Chile. The eastern lowlands were never considered economically important, since they did not participate in the highlands' mining economy. However, this changed after the War of the Pacific (1879-1884); Bolivia lost access to the sea and became landlocked.

The defeat led to an increased interest in outlets to the Atlantic through the Río de la Plata and Amazonian basins. During the nineteenth century, the cinchona boom and the rubber boom finally brought attention to the eastern part of the country. Yet, to date,

²² For a survey of Bolivian Amazonian ethnic groups in the late twentieth century, see Ana María Lema, ed., *Pueblos Indígenas de la Amazonía Boliviana* (La Paz: AIP; FIDA; CAF, 1997).

²³ William M. Denevan, *The Aboriginal Cultural Geography of the Llanos de Mojos of Bolivia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); Clark Erickson, "Los caminos prehispánicos de la Amazonía boliviana," in *Caminos precolombinos: las vías, los ingenieros y los viajeros*, ed. Leonor Herrera and Marianne Cardale de Schrimppff (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2000).

the lowlands maintain a spirit of political, social and cultural irredentism. In Bolivia, the cleavage between highlanders or *collas* and lowlanders or *cambas* substituted the division that exists between coast and highland in other Andean countries.²⁴ The highland/lowland dichotomy has permeated most of Bolivian republican history and is becoming increasingly important in the twentieth century, as the eastern lowlands become more populated and economically important.²⁵

Historiography about the Bolivian Amazon has stressed this division between the highlands and the lowlands and most Bolivian historians have written histories of the "Oriente." The Oriente is considered a political, cultural and social opposite of the highlands and centers on the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, which spearheaded eastern expansion into Amazonia and the Chaco. There is a long list of historians of the Bolivian Oriente who have written histories of the *cruceños* as precursors of Western civilization in the far-reaching frontiers of the nation, heroically civilizing native populations despite the complacency and alleged lack of interest of the Sucre and La Paz central governments.²⁶

²⁴ The term *colla* stems from the Inca province of Kollasuyu, which covered most of present-day highland Bolivia. There is some controversy about the Guaraní term *camba*, but it was used to describe rural Guaraní-speaking peasants around Santa Cruz. At present, it has lost its pejorative meaning and *cruceño* nationalists use it to describe their autonomist/separatist aspirations vis à vis what they perceived to be a La Paz (*colla*) centralizing government, their political movement is called "la Nación Camba." For a discussion of the term *camba*, see Paula Peña Hasbún, *La permanente construcción de lo cruceño: un estudio sobre la identidad en Santa Cruz de la Sierra* (La Paz: Facultad de Humanidades UAGRM; CEDURE; PIEB, 2003), 117-18, and Thierry Saignes, *Ava y karai: ensayos sobre la frontera chiriguano, siglos XVI-XX* (La Paz: Hisbol, 1990).

²⁵ For a contemporary look at the relationship between highlanders and lowlanders, see Allyn MacLean Stearman, *Camba and Kolla: Migration and Development in Santa Cruz, Bolivia* (Orlando: University of Central Florida Press, 1985).

²⁶ Enrique Finot, *Historia de la conquista del oriente boliviano* (prólogo de Roberto Levillier) (Buenos Aires: Librería "Cervantes," J. Suárez, 1939); José Luís Roca, *Economía y sociedad en el Oriente*

However, most historians have stressed the story of what Jean Claude Roux and Pilar García Jordán call one of the "Orientes," that is the River Plate basin or Chaco.²⁷ In particular, many historians have analyzed the history of the Guaraní-speaking Chiriguano, since they were one of the last groups to keep de facto independence, along with Chile's and Argentina's Mapuche and Mexico's Yaqui until the end of the nineteenth century.²⁸

There is a dearth of historical analyses about Bolivia's Amazonian basin. Most historians of the Bolivian Amazon have concentrated on the colonial past of the region and in particular on the Jesuit missions of Moxos and Chiquitos.²⁹ David Block wrote the most influential monograph on the Moxos missions that extended to the rubber boom. He pointed out that the late nineteenth century signaled the agony of the Moxos' "mission culture" and their gradual decline and incorporation of the community members as landless peons of the white and mestizo property owners of the area.³⁰ Some studies of

boliviano, siglos XVI-XX, (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: COTAS, 2001); Hernando Sanabria Fernández, *En busca de Eldorado, la colonización del Oriente boliviano por los cruceños* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia: Universidad Gabriel René Moreno, 1958).

²⁷ Jean-Claude Roux, *La Bolivie orientale: confins inexplorés, battues aux Indiens et économie de pillage, 1825-1992* (Paris: Harmattan, 2000); García Jordán, *Cruz y arado*.

²⁸ Sonia Alconini, "The Southeastern Inka Frontier against the Chiriguano: Structure and Dynamics of the Inka Imperial Borderlands," *Latin American Antiquity* 15, no. 4 (2004); Erick D. Langer, *Economic Change and Rural Resistance in Southern Bolivia, 1880-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); id., "The Eastern Andean Frontier (Bolivia and Argentina) and Latin American Frontiers: Comparative Contexts (19th and 20th Centuries)," *The Americas* 59, no. 1 (2002); id., *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree: Franciscan Missions on the Chiriguano Frontier in the Heart of South America, 1830-1949* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Francisco Pifarré, *Historia de un pueblo, Los Guaraní-chiriguano*; 2 (La Paz: CIPCA, 1989); Saignes, *Ava y karai*; Hernando Sanabria Fernández, *Apiaguaiqui-Tumpa; biografía del pueblo chiriguano y de su último caudillo* (La Paz: Ed. Los Amigos del Libro, 1972).

²⁹ For an analysis of the Chiquito missions during colonial times, see Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700-1850* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

³⁰ David Block, *Mission Culture on the Upper Amazon: Native Tradition, Jesuit Enterprise and Secular Policy in Moxos, 1660-1880* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

the Moxos area have provided historical interpretations of the nineteenth century. The many uprisings and millenarian movements of the savanna Indians have been reviewed in several scholarly books and articles.³¹ Since the Moxo were among the main victims of the early rubber boom in the Madeira River, and the forced removal of Moxo Indians from their traditional ex-missions was the motivation behind these movements, their analysis is essential to understanding the dynamics of the Bolivian rubber boom. Open Moxo rebellions were quickly repressed and their leaders summarily executed, but the Moxo responded by adopting other strategies. Even though the rubber boom had greatly reduced their population and autonomy, they managed to recreate part of their mission culture in remote settlements away from the rubber areas or their supply routes. Through millenarian movements, the Moxo left, for the first time since Jesuit encounters, their savanna mission towns and became more Amazonian in the remote jungles of the Beni. These strategies were relatively successful, since rubber enterprises were forced to recruit indigenous labor elsewhere in the lowlands. Research on the Moxo also suggests that they carried out multiethnic alliances to better survive their environment.

It is impossible to analyze the Bolivian rubber boom without taking into account the geographical and environmental factors that shaped it. The Bolivian Amazon was

³¹ Zulema Lehm Ardaya, *Loma Santa: Procesos de reducción, dispersión y reocupación del espacio de los indígenas moxeños* (La Paz: UMSA, 1991); id., *Milenarismo y movimientos sociales en la Amazonía Boliviana: búsqueda de la Loma Santa y la Marcha Indígena para el Territorio y la Dignidad* (Quito: FLACSO, 1993) and Gary Van Valen, “The Ventriloquist Messiah and his Followers: Mojo Indian Responses to the Rubber Boom in Eastern Bolivia, 1860-1930” (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 2003). For ethnographies of the Moxo, see J. Jones, “Conflict between Whites and Indians on the Llanos de Moxos, Beni department: A Case Study in Development from the Cattle Regions of the Bolivian Oriente” (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1980) and Jürgen Riester, *En busca de la loma santa* (Cochabamba, Bolivia: Los amigos del libro, 1976).

particularly isolated and its many rivers did not easily lead to the Amazon, unlike the cases in Brazil, Peru or even Colombia. Access to the Amazon was through the Madeira River that was separated from the other great Bolivian rivers, the Mamoré, the Beni and the Madre de Dios by a series of dangerous *cachuelas* or rapids. Until U.S. engineers with the help of an international assortment of poorly paid laborers (who died by the hundreds from malaria and malnutrition), bypassed these rapids through the Madeira-Mamoré Railway in the early twentieth century, passage from Bolivia's rubber areas to the Madeira and its steamships was unusually arduous and dangerous. Access from the rest of the country was also tricky. To reach the Amazon from La Paz, Cochabamba or Sucre meant descending through nearly impassable mountain paths or crossing swift Andean rapids. It should be noted that no significant rivers enter Bolivia. Its most important rivers, whether in the Amazon, Rio de la Plata or Pacific basin point away from Bolivia, so it is always much easier to get away from Bolivia than to return to it.

Because of this isolation, the Bolivian rubber boom did not give birth to large urban centers like Iquitos, Manaus or Belem do Pará. The force of the Bolivian state was also particularly weak and took a long time to make its presence felt in the rubber regions. These two factors led to a large degree of rubber baron autonomy. The Bolivian rubber barons were able to control vast areas with little interference and one of them, Nicolás Suárez, became one of the most powerful and well-known rubber barons in the continent, along with Peru's Fitzcarrald and the Arana brothers.³²

³² For a look into the Suárez empire, see Fifer, "The Empire Builders;" id., *Bolivia, Land, Location and Politics since 1825*, (New York & Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Pilar Gamarra Téllez,

Unlike other Latin American booms, or even unlike some other Amazonian areas during the rubber boom, the isolation of the area also prevented the immigration of a foreign labor force. Most rubber tappers were Bolivian indigenous peoples. The scarcity of labor produced massive labor mobilizations at the local level that affected most of the lowlands. Uncontacted Indians were enslaved and the once fertile savannas of the Moxos were abandoned to provide rowers to ship rubber to Manaus and Belem. Rubber *enganchadores* also imported many Chiquitano and Chiriguano Indians from the department of Santa Cruz and indentured many mestizo *mozos* from the city of Santa Cruz and its surrounding areas.³³ It also used the many ethnic groups from the Andean foothills, such as the Leco or Tacana.³⁴

The Bolivian rubber boom did not produce spectacular opera houses nor attempted to bring Caruso into the jungle: it was less urban than elsewhere and most Bolivian rubber barons lived in their *centros* and *barracas*.³⁵ Yet, through the demand for rubber in far-away places, these isolated *centros*, in terms of consumption also

“Haciendas y peones en el régimen hacendatario gomero boliviano. Las bases económicas de un poder regional: La casa Suárez (1880-1940)” (Tesis de Lic., UMSA, 1992), as well as Robert Leland Smale, “The Bolivian Rubber Industry, 1880-1930: A Geography of Control” (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1998) and Michael Deprez, “The Rise and Decline of the Rubber House of Suarez” (M.Ph. thesis, Oxford University, Trinity, 1998).

³³ *Enganchadores* were employed by rubber companies to recruit labor in Beni, Caupolicán and Santa Cruz and were paid by the amount of laborers that they were able to deliver to the rubber areas. The *enganche* was an advance on the salary to be earned in the rubber fields. Eventually it became part of a tapper’s debt to the rubber company.

³⁴ See Gamarra Téllez, “Haciendas y peones”; Pablo Pacheco, *Integración económica y fragmentación social. El itinerario de las barracas en la Amazonía boliviana* (La Paz: CEDLA, 1992); Roca, *Economía y sociedad*.

³⁵ For a study of the survival of rubber boom labor practices into the late twentieth century, see Pacheco, *Integración económica*. A *barraca* was the point where tappers would gather their rubber to be sent to the various rubber companies and where the rubber company’s manager resided. It was usually divided into several *centros* or huts located in the midst of rubber groves, where tappers (*picadores*) gathered and processed raw rubber to be sent to the *barraca*.

became little Europes. Local and international commercial houses, as elsewhere, exchanged rubber for luxury items such as champagne, pianos, or sewing machines and portaged them through the Madeira rapids on the backs of Indians to the isolated havens of local rubber barons.

Although there was significant immigration from elsewhere, such as Germany, Portugal, Spain, Japan, the Middle East, Italy and many Latin American countries and the rubber area became a magnet for international adventurers, Bolivia's indigenous peoples carried out most of the work. International commercial houses were not as important as local rubber barons. These local rubber barons controlled their areas like personal empires and reproduced the practices of mines and haciendas. They inherited debt peonage and the time-honored use of physical punishment from the hacienda system. They also used the *enganche* system (the recruitment of workers by paying a cash advance) to lure workers to the distant rubber areas and, once there, tied peons to the *barraca* by forcing them to purchase supplies on credit at inflated prices. Debt peonage dominated labor relations in the rubber areas. *Barracas* prominently displayed stocks and whips, which were used to enforce discipline in the rubber *barracas*. In addition, *patrones* had private armies of *capangas* (thugs) to control their workers and prosecute runaways.

Even though Peru and Brazil disputed Bolivia's rubber areas, a distant state and relatively well-established local elite had controlled these regions for centuries. Both the Bolivian state and local elites had a long tradition of dealings with indigenous peoples. After the collapse of Jesuit missions in Moxos, for example, rapacious Creoles and

mestizos, who caused a never-ending series of indigenous rebellions that continued until the late nineteenth century, invaded the area. Local authorities responded to these rebellions by public floggings, execution of the leaders and confiscation of their properties. In 1887, for example, mestizos whipped and executed the leader of a Moxo millenarian movement, Andrés Guayocho, in Trinidad. Later they circulated rumors that the elderly cacique Nicanor Cuvene and his wife Nicolasa Nosa were planning an uprising and proceeded to remove them from church and whipped nine men and one woman to death.³⁶ Following a centuries-old tradition, *rifleros* from Santa Cruz were used to repress rebellious Indians and they were often paid with Indian laborers and/or property, which increased the violence of mestizo/Indian relations in the Beni. The result of these rebellions was that Indian communities in Moxos gradually lost their autonomy and its members were forced to work as semi-slaved laborers in local haciendas or in the rubber boom. The failure of armed rebellion also led to periodic messianic movements in search of a mythical land, which would have no whites and would recreate mission times. Many indigenous groups abandoned agriculture and interned themselves in the jungle to escape slave raiders and missions. The rubber boom was the final blow of a long-established process. It "discovered" some groups, acculturated or destroyed others and displaced most of them.

After the rubber boom, the ethnic map of the area changed, numerous groups disappeared or became nearly extinct. The Bolivian lowlands, which with the exception

³⁶ See Gumercindo Gómez de Arteche, *JHS. Misión de los pp. Astraín, Manzanedo y Arteche ca. 1887* (Trinidad, Beni: CIDOB, 1989), 204-06.

of the city of Santa Cruz had been largely indigenous, became mestizo. The need for rubber profits destroyed republican rhetoric about citizenship and equality and indigenous groups were denied their most basic rights. Until their "re-discovery" during the ethnic revitalization movements of the late twentieth century, Amazonian Indians disappeared and the area was considered as a "desert" void of people. This phenomenon was very similar to the history of the North American West during the same period. The rubber boom, then, became a powerful conquest and acculturation tool. Rubber barons opened up remote areas and incorporated indigenous peoples into their enterprises. The methods they used varied by rubber baron, by geographical area and by chronology. In some areas, indigenous peoples willingly joined the rubber *barracas* to escape missions or traditional enemies while in others rubber barons employed professional Indian hunters who violently enslaved unincorporated Indians. A large majority of the labor force of the Bolivian rubber industry were indigenous peoples from a myriad of ethnic groups. Yet, by the end of the rubber boom, most of Bolivia's rubber areas were considered Spanish-speaking and mestizo. Many indigenous peoples fled to remote areas or to neighboring countries, and many died of disease or malnutrition, but the majority were subject to the intense and coercive acculturation processes of the rubber *barraca*. What is remarkable about the Bolivian rubber boom is that the state had a very limited role in "opening up" its Amazonian frontier. In Argentina, the state sponsored the famous Conquest of the Desert campaigns against Pampean and Patagonian Indians. The Chilean state also had similar campaigns after the War of the Pacific (1879-84) and, during the same period, the Mexican state initiated wars with the Yaqui and the Maya. In Bolivia,

the state was present in the Chaco frontier and participated actively in the wars against the Chiriguano.³⁷ Thus, exploitation of indigenous labor during the rubber boom could be justified as a general trend towards overcoming “savagery” and a step towards civilizing indigenous peoples through work.

This dissertation explores the rubber boom by analyzing indigenous labor. Most studies of the rubber boom have looked at its economic aspects or at how it benefitted local elites and national states or they have looked at its links with the Atlantic economies. An analysis of labor practices provides a closer and more textured analysis and shows how the demand for a wild Amazonian product in the industrializing Atlantic economies had an enormous impact on one of Latin America’s most remote corners. It illustrates how the rubber boom shaped and transformed the many indigenous societies of the Bolivian lowlands and how indigenous societies responded to and shaped their labor relations. In order to do so, it looks at the ethnic composition of the Bolivian lowlands before and after the boom and analyzes the ethnogenesis of the area. It also looks at the formation of local elites and links their practices to nation building and the formation of the Bolivian state.³⁸ As was the case elsewhere, opening up the frontier areas also

³⁷ For Argentina’s Conquest of the Desert, see Juan Carlos Walther, *La conquista del desierto: síntesis histórica de los principales sucesos ocurridos y operaciones militares realizadas en La Pampa y Patagonia, contra los indios* (años 1527-1885), 3. ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1970), and David Viñas, *Indios, ejército y frontera*, 2 ed. (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1982); for the Yaqui, see Evelyn Hu-DeHart, *Yaqui resistance and survival: the struggle for land and autonomy, 1821-1910* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984) and the classic Nelson A. Reed, *The Caste War of Yucatan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964) for the Maya. For the Chaco frontier, see Langer, “The Eastern Andean Frontier (Bolivia and Argentina) and Latin American Frontiers: Comparative Contexts (19th and 20th Centuries).”

³⁸ Besides García Jordán and Roux, the expansion into Bolivia's Amazonian region is considered by Andreu Viola Recasens, “Tierra de nadie: representaciones del espacio y cultura de frontera de los territorios caucheros bolivianos, 1880-1930,” *Revista Andina* 12::2 (1994) and Clara López Beltrán,

entailed environmental transformation. Although the rubber boom was not as destructive as other extractive economies, it did alter the Amazonian environment. The migration of outsiders to areas that had been neglected since the colonial period unleashed epidemics and caused the destruction of fauna and flora. The Amazonian environment was also one of the main obstacles to the exploitation of rubber, so it is important to analyze what the rubber industry did to overcome it. Such an approach requires a lens that takes into account ethnohistory, social, cultural and environmental history.

This integrated approach starts by proposing to study the Bolivian lowlands as opposed as the political concept of the “Oriente.” The rubber boom affected every part of the Bolivian lowlands, from the Chiriguano Cordillera to the La Paz Yungas, and its participants came from many different geographical areas, including areas of ecological and cultural transition that are not easily defined, such as the Yungas or the Chapare or the Chiquitano.³⁹ Therefore, the lowlands are not be considered an opposition to the highlands, the cultural and environmental kaleidoscope that descends gradually from the high peaks of the Andes to the Madeira River cannot be broken up into compartments and it should be noted that the Andes and the lowlands have had continuous contact since prehistoric times.⁴⁰

"Exploración y ocupación del Acre (1850-1900)," *Revista de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales* 8, no. 1-2 (2002).

³⁹ Langer, *Economic Change and Rural Resistance* mentioned the forced transportation of Chiriguanos from Southern Bolivia to the rubber forests, 144-46.

⁴⁰ For a history of the relationship between highlands and lowlands, see Thierry Saignes, *Los Andes orientales: historia de un olvido* (Lima; Cochabamba: IFEA; CERES, 1985) and France Marie Renard-Casevitz, Thierry Saignes, and Anne Christine Taylor, *L'Inca, l'Espagnol et les sauvages: rapports entre les sociétés amazoniennes et andines du XVe au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1986). The later has been translated and published as id., *Al este de los Andes: relaciones*

This being said, it is also important to include the Bolivian rubber boom within a trans-Amazonian context, rather than seeing the Bolivian Amazon as "east of the Andes," it should be inserted within the Amazonian boom at large. Brazilian influence on Bolivian rubber culture, for example, is undeniable, and is particularly relevant in its language and practices. Bolivian rubber workers tapped *siringa* in *estradas* with a *machadinho* and were more in touch with Manaus or Belem than La Paz or Sucre economically, socially, and, to a certain extent, culturally. Despite the conflicts with Brazil and Peru and the many border disputes there was, to a certain, extent border permeability and Indians of Moxos were employed as porters in Manaus and Brazilian *caboclos* were tapping rubber in the Acre and the *Territorio Nacional de Colonias*.

As stated above, most historians of the Bolivian rubber boom have denied ethnicity. They have concentrated on economic processes or on the lives of powerful rubber barons bringing "order and progress" to the untamed frontier or to the actions of the Bolivian state in the frontier. José Luís Roca stated, for example that "except in isolated cases, Amazonian Indians were not sedentary agriculturalists, but nomadic hunters and gatherers." Contemporary ethnographies indicated the opposite. In fact, only a minority of the Indians of the Bolivian lowlands was nomadic hunters and gatherers and had been mostly forced to be so by white aggression. In a study of Nicolás Suárez's rubber empire, concentrating on labor, Pilar Gamarra also ignored the ethnicity of

entre las sociedades amazónicas y andinas entre los siglos XV y XVII (Quito; Lima: Ediciones Abya-Yala; IFEA, 1988).

barraca workers.⁴¹

My hypothesis is that the Bolivian rubber boom was very different from that of its neighbors and that many of the assumptions and theories that apply to the Amazonian rubber boom in general, do not apply to Bolivia. This is particularly true concerning the Brazilian rubber boom. For instance, the weakness of the Bolivian state, especially if it is compared with the presence of regional and national state agents in the development of the Brazilian rubber industry, is striking.

Despite its central location in the South American continent, Bolivia's Amazonia is very isolated from the rest of the continent. Several mountain chains separate it from the highlands, the Chaco separates it from the River Plate basin and the *cachuelas* and the Pantanal separate it from the rest of Amazonia. As a result, the Bolivian rubber boom was very self-contained and was relatively immune to foreign economic, social, cultural and political influences. Moreover, despite the influence of local elites and high degrees of exploitation, Indians laborers were able to pull their weight within the rubber economy. This was due to the scarcity of labor and the geographical constraints of the Bolivian Amazon. They mostly were successful in shaping and manipulating their destinies. Despite the dislocation that the rubber boom brought, Indian culture persisted and, at least initially, was reproduced within *barracas* and *centros*.

These interethnic dynamics have shaped the political, social and economic culture of contemporary lowland Bolivia. In some areas, such as Moxos, dislocation of Indian cultures led to their gradual loss of territory and autonomy and to their incorporation into

⁴¹ Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, 225; Gamarra Téllez, "Haciendas y peones."

the hacienda system of the mestizo immigrants that came with the rubber boom. In other areas, it led to the creation of a local *camba* culture in which local Indians became acculturated rural peons, linked to cattle haciendas through a debt peonage system. Elsewhere, despite the loss of autonomy, local language and culture persisted but Indians were also incorporated into the hacienda system. Acculturation was stronger in the rubber areas. As local indigenous peoples disappeared, new arrivals were incorporated to rubber *barracas*. The multiculturalism of rubber *barracas*, their isolation from each other, as well as the coercive nature of work in the rubber industry, led to a rapid acculturation of their workers and the loss ethnic cohesiveness. Although they never became proletarians, *barraca* workers also became *cambas*, like many of their hacienda counterparts. However, the rubber boom also led to patterns of flight and rebellion. Many Indian groups left their traditional areas to flee oppression and recreate their culture in the isolated forests of the Bolivian Amazon. They also created many multiethnic alliances or created all together imagined ethnic groups. The dislocation of the Indians of the Moxos savannas led to both an initial loss of traditional authority and an increase of ethnic revitalization movements that also incorporated many other ethnic groups.

The Bolivian *barraca* had a majority of indigenous laborers and they came from vastly different societies. Indians, who participated in the “mission culture” that David Block has analyzed, lived with captured Amazonian Araona or Pacaguara “savages” and

with runaways from Franciscan missions or with captured Chiriguano from the Chaco.⁴² These different types of laborers shared their fate with mestizos from most of the Bolivian lowlands and, through their experiences in the rubber *barraca*, formed a distinct mestizo *camba* culture. Yet, there was a degree of ethnic specialization. The *barraca* experience was by no means equal for every indigenous group; they were expected to fulfill different roles within the hierarchy of the rubber industry.

Barbara Weinstein and Oliver T. Coomes' assertions about the relatively non-exploitative nature of the rubber industry do not apply to the Bolivian case. Bolivia's rubber areas were removed from Amazonian ports and from the Bolivian state. Therefore, they did not receive the benefits of "capitalism" or a relatively benevolent state. Autocratic rubber barons, who, despite the scarcity of labor, were extremely monopolistic and exploitative, controlled them. Rubber *barracas* had a definite hierarchy based on perceived ethnicity. "White" Bolivians and Europeans were at the top and indigenous peoples were at the bottom. A hierarchy among indigenous peoples that divided them into civilized and savage Indians was in place. Bolivia's rubber industry also became increasingly monopolistic and had an unusual degree of vertical integration. By the outset of the twentieth century, Suárez Hermanos controlled most aspects of the economy of Bolivia's Amazonian area and, therefore, rubber producers could not sell their rubbers to other companies, as was the case in Brazil.

Although I do not write an ethnohistory of the many lowland ethnic groups during the Bolivian boom, I incorporate ethnicity into the dissertation. I also explore to what

⁴² Block, *Mission Culture*.

extent they were able to keep their ethnicity and to what extent they became the Bolivian equivalent of the Brazilian "caboclo" *siringueiros* that Barbara Weinstein studied. I also look at the role of Creole immigrants in the rubber boom and at how they viewed themselves, their subalterns, and the Bolivian state. In other words, I examine the culture of both the dominant and the dominated. By integrating ethnohistory, with labor, and cultural history, I explore the complexity of the rubber boom and I go beyond the strictly economic history that has been written about the area to date. As elsewhere in Latin America, ethnic identity was a very fluid and relative term and, to a certain degree, it was "invented," but there is no doubt that the upper echelons of society considered themselves "white" and that most of the oppressed were indigenous. The most "civilized" Indians of the colonial missions became temporarily "savages" to escape oppression and often formed multiethnic communities and the most "savage" Indians were often the most willing to cooperate with *siringueros*. Ethnic identity in the Bolivian lowlands is very different from Andean ethnic identities. After all, the lowlands had an uneven exposure to colonialism and its institutions. Moreover, these regions contained a bewildering variety of ethnic groups who lacked the cohesiveness of Andean communities.

Unfortunately, the Amazonian climate has not been very kind to the preservation of documents. Besides this, the weak presence of the Bolivian state in the area and the isolation of *centros* and *barracas* have not generated a large amount of documentation about the Bolivian rubber boom. Extant documentary evidence is heterogeneous. Because of this, this dissertation is based on a wide variety of dispersed primary sources

ranging from company records, pamphlets, local newspapers and travelers' accounts that have to be approached with caution.

The collections of the Archivo Nacional de Bolivia in Sucre house most of the government correspondence related to the rubber boom as well as a significant collection of pamphlets, newspapers and books written by contemporary observers. Unfortunately, the archives of the Prefecture of the Beni were intentionally burned during the 1970s so any materials issued by this body of government have to be accessed through their copies in Sucre or their correspondence with other prefectures such as the Santa Cruz and La Paz prefectures.

The collections of the Archivo de La Paz have some important documentation about La Paz's tropical provinces of Larecaja and Caupolicán, which participated in the Bolivian rubber boom. It also houses an important collection of correspondence by General Pando, one of the first explorers of the Acre, who would become both a National Delegate in the Northwest and the first Liberal President of the Republic and the disparate collections of the Sociedad Geográfica de la Paz. The Archivo of the Universidad Gabriel René Moreno, in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, also houses important documents related to Santa Cruz's participation in the rubber boom, as well as important correspondence between the Prefecture of Santa Cruz and the Prefecture of the Beni, as well as correspondence and reports from the various sub-prefectures in the department. The Biblioteca Etnológica de la Universidad Católica de Cochabamba lists relevant ethnological sources classified by ethnic group and houses copies of important

documents of the Colegio de Tarata, which was responsible for Franciscan missions around the rubber areas.

The uncatalogued archives of the Casa Suárez in Guayaramerín, despite their sorry state and years of neglect, are also extremely rich in details. Of particular importance is the correspondence between the Casa Matriz (Head Office) and the managers of the house's *barracas* and *centros*. Since most of Bolivia's rubber producers ended up as debtors of Suárez Hermanos and their properties were eventually taken over by the company, the archives also house important materials from other rubber barons such as Nicanor Salvatierra and Antonio Vaca Díez. A recent addition to this archival collection has been the Riberalta judicial archives also in sorry state and unclassified. They demonstrate how many tappers were successful in channeling their complaints through the area's infamous judicial system and offer rich texture and context.

The Library of Congress' rich collection of travel accounts, as well as their collection of contemporary geographical and ethnological journals has been used extensively, as well as some semi-fictional accounts of the rubber boom written by Bolivian intellectuals who participated in it.

Rather than using a chronological structure, this dissertation is ordered using a thematic approach that analyzes particular aspects of the Bolivian rubber boom and links them to the overall theme of research. Chapter 2 places the Bolivian lowlands within an environmental, historical and cultural context and traces the historical development of its regions until the start of the rubber boom. It demonstrates that the rubber boom was only one episode of centuries of contact between the highlands and the lowlands. Chapter 3

documents the history of the exploration of the lowlands by Bolivians and foreigners and also evaluates the impact of the *cascarilla* (cinchona) boom and how it coincided with the rubber boom for a few decades. It also explores how certain indigenous groups became involved with the *cascarilla* export cycle and how they transitioned into the rubber cycle. Chapter 4 offers more details about the Bolivian rubber industry. It discusses the different rubber-producing areas of Bolivia and it analyzes both foreign and Bolivian *casas comerciales* and how they dealt with the export/import cycle. Besides rubber areas, it also explores the different urban areas of the Bolivian lowlands and their links with the rubber boom. The infamous rubber barons, their origins, their tactics and their rise and fall are addressed in chapter 5. Chapter 6 looks at the many indigenous groups that were affected by the rubber boom, at their history and how they interacted through the different phases of the rubber boom. Chapter 7 takes a closer look at the Bolivian *barraca*. It looks at this peculiar institution and analyzes the composition of its labor force (ethnicity, sex and age), labor hierarchy and categories, contracts, and the labor systems that were used (such as debt peonage and *enganche*). Finally, chapter 8 concludes by looking at the relationship between the Bolivian state and the rubber boom. It describes how the Bolivian state tried to administer its Amazonian territories, how it implemented taxation of a valuable commodity and how effective its legislation was on land tenure and labor.

CHAPTER 2. THE SETTING

This chapter provides the backdrop to the main narrative of this dissertation, the history of the Amazonian rubber boom in Bolivia. It starts by providing an overview of Bolivia's history in the nineteenth century and of how it relates to the Bolivian lowlands. Then it describes the complex landscape of the Bolivian lowlands defines different regions of Bolivia's lowlands. Finally, it provides an overview of the little-known history of the Bolivian lowlands from pre-Columbian times to the nineteenth century.

Although contemporaries often described the lowlands in terms of “discovered” territories, there is a long history of contacts between the cultures of the Andes, the Amazon basin and the Pampean region. The cinchona and rubber boom and bust cycles of the nineteenth century were not, therefore, a new encounter between these worlds. These worlds had been in contact since pre-Columbian times and the sudden interest of republican governments in their far-flung frontiers were a result of a need to capitalize on the richness of the resources of the lowlands. This encounter, though, was uneven. The trend that had been started during the Inca and colonial periods of domination from the highlands towards the lowlands was continued during the republican period. Despite nation and state-building rhetoric, Bolivia's central governments viewed the lowlands as mere “colonies” and went as far as naming their northernmost Amazonian territories as

the *Territorio Nacional de Colonias*. By the end of the rubber boom, the Departments of Santa Cruz, Beni and the former *Territorio Nacional de Colonias* (which became the Department of Pando in 1938) had accumulated a long list of grievances against the Bolivian central government (whether in Sucre or La Paz) that would eventually form one of the most important divides of modern Bolivia. Since the election of Evo Morales as President of Bolivia, this cleavage has deepened and has even fueled separatist movements such as the so-called *Nación Camba* movement.

Bolivia's Nineteenth Century

Bolivia entered the twentieth century by undertaking a complete census of the country under the direction of its brand-new *Oficina Nacional de Inmigración, Estadística y Propaganda Geográfica* headed by the archetype of the new liberal professional bureaucrats, French-educated José Vicente Ballivián.¹ Although students of Bolivia have always questioned the reliability of Bolivian censuses, especially when they deal with rural or frontier areas, this census was a remarkable achievement that stressed the liberals' ideals of progress and modernization. Despite the efforts of a plethora of modernizing (in word or in deed) Liberal and Conservative governments, in the early twentieth century the Republic continued to be disappointingly indigenous and the Bolivian elites' "whitening" projects seemed to have failed.

The first census of the Republic had been taken in 1846 under the supervision of

¹ See Seemin Qayum, "Nationalism, Internal Colonization and the Spatial Imagination: The Geographic Society of La Paz" in *Turn-of-the Century Bolivia: Studies in the Formation of the Nation-State in Latin America*, ed. James Dunkerley (London: Institute of Latin American Studies; University of London, 2002).

José María Dalence and had estimated that Bolivia held a total population of 1.4 million. According to Dalence's calculations, less than twenty per cent of the population spoke Spanish. The remaining eighty per were either monolingual or bilingual Andean peasants who spoke Quechua or Aymara (or both). The native peoples of the eastern lowlands were classified as "unpacified" Indians, were not included under the Bolivian population and were estimated to be 700,000.² In 1900, the total population of Bolivia was 1,744,568, of which an estimated 920,000 were members of unspecified indigenous groups. Of these, 829,000 "complied with the laws of the Republic" and 91,000 in a "state of complete savagery." Furthermore, the census also added other ethnic groups such as Mestizo (28%), White (13%), Black (less than 1%) and Unspecified (7%).³ Like in all other censuses of Bolivia, the definition of ethnic groups is problematic. The term "white" for example was applied to the upper echelons of society whether they were racially white or not. The Santa Cruz intellectual Justo Leigue Moreno expressed the relationship between perceived race and language when he stated in an official Bolivian Geography textbook that "the enlightened and civilized part of the country speaks Spanish."⁴ The term *mestizo* or *cholo* may be interpreted in many ways and has many variations in different geographical areas and during different historical periods. For

² José María Dalence, *Bosquejo estadístico de Bolivia, 1851* (La Paz: Ed. de la UMSA, 1992).

³ Bolivia, Oficina Nacional de Inmigración Estadística y Propaganda Geográfica, *Censo general de la población de la República de Bolivia según el empadronamiento del 1 de Septiembre de 1900* (La Paz: J.M. Gamarra, 1902-04), 28; Erland Nordenskiöld, *Exploraciones y Aventuras*, trans. Gudrun Birk & Angel E. García (La Paz: APCOB, 2001), 2-3, also analyzed the results of the census. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ Justo Leigue Moreno, *Nociones de Geografía de Bolivia, partes política y descriptiva adoptada por el II Congreso Municipal por Justo Leigue Moreno, miembro correspondiente de la Sociedad de Geografía de Ginebra y socio colaborador de la Sociedad Geográfica de Sucre* (Sucre: Tip. "La Libertad," 1891), 49.

instance, most Bolivian mestizos in the early twentieth century were bilingual in Spanish and a native language (Quechua or Aymara) and could be considered by foreigners to be “Indian” and many Creole hacienda owners spoke Quechua or Aymara until roughly the 1952 Revolution in order to communicate with their hacienda peons.

Despite the unreliability of Bolivian censuses, the issue of ethnicity and how it is defined and measured is a persisting theme. Even though there had been relatively few changes in the demographics of the nation from 1846 to 1901, the census predicted, echoing the thoughts of most Bolivian intellectuals imbued with the ideas of Positivism and Social Darwinism, that “a phenomenon worth paying attention to is the gradual and slow disappearance of the indigenous race [...] in fact, since 1878 this race has been fatally wounded, during that year drought and famine brought with them a plague which brought havoc within the indigenous race. On the other hand, the fact that Indians are so given to alcoholism has noticeably decimated their ranks, in such a way that their birth rate does not make up for the number of deaths.”⁵

The theme of the decadence of the “indigenous race” was a constant concern of Latin American thought in the nineteenth century. One of its most extreme proponents in Bolivia was the Santa Cruz-born intellectual Nicomédés Antelo, who lived in Buenos Aires from 1860 to 1882. He was influenced by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s ideas and became an openly racist and strong proponent of Social Darwinism when he asked: “Will the poor Indian become extinct before the drive of our race? If the extinction of inferior peoples is one of the conditions to attain universal progress, as our modern

⁵ Bolivia, *Censo general 1901*, 28.

learned men say, and as I believe, the consequences will, therefore be, gentlemen, irrevocable no matter how painful this may be. It is like an amputation, it hurts but it heals gangrene and is life-saving.”⁶ Later intellectuals expressed similar views using a still pessimistic yet not so openly racist perspective following the *indigenista* school of thought. The most important representative of *indigenismo* in Bolivia was Alcides Arguedas (1879-1946) who also used medical terms to refer to the “illnesses” of the Bolivian mestizo and indigenous population.⁷ *Indigenista* intellectuals were the result of the important political and social changes that the 1910 Mexican Revolution brought, but they negated the agency of indigenous peoples and patronizingly thought that indigenous peoples should be “cured” from themselves and should be forced to integrate into the body politic. Implicitly, they advocated for acculturation and did not value indigenous political and cultural institutions. Notwithstanding these predictions, Bolivia continued and continues to be a largely indigenous country.⁸ Independence brought along the

⁶ For an analysis of Social Darwinism in Bolivia, see Marie-Daniele Demelas, "Darwinismo a la criolla: El darwinismo social en Bolivia, 1880-1919," *Historia boliviana* 1 (1981) and Marta Irurozqui, *La armonía de las desigualdades: elites y conflictos de poder en Bolivia, 1880-1920* (Madrid; Cusco: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas; Centro de Estudios Regionales Andinos Bartolomé de las Casas, 1994). Nicomedes Antelo's quote is from Leopoldo Zea, *El Pensamiento latinoamericano* (Mexico: Ariel Seix Barral, 1976), 300.

⁷ See Alcides Arguedas, *Pueblo enfermo; contribución a la psicología de los pueblos hispano-americanos* (Barcelona: Vda. de L. Tasso, 1909); also Michael Aronna, "Pueblos enfermos:" *The Discourse of Illness in the Turn-of-the-century Spanish and Latin American Essay*, (Chapel Hill: U.N.C. Department of Romance Languages, 1999) and Ann Zulawski, *Unequal Cures: Public Health and Political Change in Bolivia, 1900-1950* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁸ According to the 2001 census 61% of Bolivians identified themselves as belonging to an indigenous group. Instituto Nacional de Estadística Bolivia, *Censo de Población y Vivienda, 2001* (La Paz: INE; VAI; UNFPA, 2003). Critiques of late twentieth century censuses have stressed that many indigenous peoples in rural areas have not been included through either physical isolation, refusal to participate or temporary migration. The inaccuracies of these censuses seem to be higher in the Bolivian lowlands due to these factors and to a rapid acculturation of indigenous groups and an unwillingness to be identified as “Indians.” See Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "La noción de 'derecho' o la paradoja de la modernidad postcolonial: indígenas y mujeres en Bolivia," *Aportes Andinos, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar* 11, no. Aportes

abolition of nobility titles, serfdom, slavery, and indigenous tribute. It was supposed to bring equality and liberty to all Bolivians, and abolish the despised colonial system. However, the republican state had to keep many of its colonial trappings to warrant the Creoles' status in the social hierarchy.

In plain contradiction to republican rhetoric, nineteenth century Bolivia continued to be largely dependent on Indian tribute and labor for its survival. Most of its Andean population continued to live in semi-autonomous communities. In 1846, for example, about 51% of Bolivian Andeans continued to live in *ayllus* and, despite epidemics, economic recession and alleged alcoholism, these *ayllus* seemed to prosper.⁹ According to Erwin Grieshaber, from 1838 to 1877 the *ayllu* population increased by 24% whereas the hacienda-based population dwindled by 4%.¹⁰ In addition, by 1877 community Indians contributed 75% of the Bolivian state's head tax revenues.¹¹

Both liberal and conservative governments had attempted to abolish what they considered the backward and colonial *ayllus*, but their attempts were thwarted by the chronic weakness of the Bolivian state to implement its legislation and by indigenous resistance. In 1825, Simón Bolívar himself had legislated but failed to implement private

sobre diversidad, diferencia e identidad (2004): 3-4; Xavier Albó, *Bolivia plurilingüe: guía para planificadores y educadores*, (La Paz: UNICEF; CIPCA, 1995), 69.

⁹ Herbert S. Klein, *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-ethnic Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 124. An ayllu can be defined as "formally an endogamous lineage claiming descent from a common ancestor; in practice, the basic kin unit of Andean native society, which held title to land, organized cooperative labor teams and performed other collective functions." Brooke Larson, *Cochabamba, 1550-1900: Colonialism and Agrarian Transformation in Bolivia*, Expanded ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 401.

¹⁰ Erwin Grieshaber, "Survival of Indian Communities in Nineteenth Century Bolivia. A Regional Comparison," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 12, no. 2 (1980): 223 & 236.

¹¹ Brooke Larson, *Trials of Nation Making: Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810-1910* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 206. The Republic changed the colonial term Indian tribute to the term *contribución indigenal*.

property among the *ayllus*. The epitome of nineteenth century Bolivian *caudillos*, Mariano Melgarejo, who ruled from 1864 to 1871, declared that communal lands belonged to the state and forced their sale to the highest bidder. His successor Agustín Morales (President from 1870 to 1871), through the Constituent Assembly of 1871, annulled his actions and ratified the property rights of indigenous communities.¹² Tristan Platt has shown how indigenous *ayllus* saw their relationship with the Bolivian state. According to Platt, indigenous communities believed that their relationship with the state involved the Andean ideals of reciprocity. They provided tribute and other traditional services (upkeep of roads, postal services, and so forth) in exchange for the state's recognition of the territorial integrity of the *ayllu*.¹³

The difficult relationship between the Bolivian state and the Andean *ayllus* came to a head-on clash with the proclamation, on October 5, 1874, of the *Ley de Exvinculación de Tierras de Comunidad*. In practice, this law meant the extinction of the *ayllu* and other types of indigenous communities as legal entities. The “extinction” of the *ayllus* also implied the legal annihilation of traditional ethnic authorities. Following widespread Latin American liberal tenets, citizenship was related to both literacy and private property and, as a result, indigenous peoples could not represent themselves and were forced to be legally represented by mestizo or Creole *apoderados*.¹⁴ This law was

¹² Alejandro Antezana Salvatierra, *Los Liberales y el Problema Agrario en Bolivia (1899-1920)* (La Paz: Plural Eds., 1996), 15-16. See also his Alejandro Antezana Salvatierra, *Estructura agraria en el siglo XIX: legislación agraria y transformación de la realidad rural de Bolivia* (La Paz: Centro de Información para el Desarrollo, 1992).

¹³ Tristán Platt, *Estado boliviano y ayllu andino: tierra y tributo en el norte de Potosí* (Lima: IEP, 1982).

¹⁴ Incidentally, Andean communities responded to this by appointing ‘caciques apoderados,’ i.e. literate and often property-owning indigenous leaders to represent them thus using legislation meant to exclude them to

very similar to legislation enacted by other Latin American countries with large indigenous populations such as Guatemala and Mexico and, not surprisingly, led to a period of massive confrontations between Andeans and the state. The practical tool of this legislation was the partial resurrection of an old colonial practice, regular *revisitas* or land-assessment inspections. However, the liberal *revisitas* were different from their colonial predecessors. Rather than accepting the collective and inalienable land rights of indigenous communities, they parceled the land out to individual community members who could sell their parcels at will. With the 1881 *Revisita General de Tierras*, the Bolivian state, in a rare moment of strength, unleashed a period of massive confiscation of communal lands throughout the Highlands enforced by the army, police, and mestizo paramilitary or vigilante groups and corrupt lawyers and officials.¹⁵ Indigenous communities responded to this encroachment by a series of time-honored strategies, which ranged from judicial challenges to open rebellion. These confrontations led to a period of intense rural conflicts that spread throughout most highland and valley departments and lasted until the mid-twentieth century. The most immediate effect of the *ayllus'* strategies was the interruption of the 1881 *Revisita* and the subsequent recognition of the land rights of *ayllus* that could prove their ownership of the land through colonial titles. Remarkably, since *hacendados* and politicians were using colonial titles to prove

their advantage. See Erick D. Langer, "El liberalismo y la abolición de la comunidad indígena," *Historia y cultura* 14 (1988); Rivera Cusicanqui, "La noción de 'derecho' o la paradoja de la modernidad postcolonial: indígenas y mujeres en Bolivia," 4; Esteban Ticona Alejo, "Pueblos indígenas y Estado boliviano. La larga historia de conflictos," *Gazeta de Antropología, Universidad de Granada*, n°19 (2003).

¹⁵ According to Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, about one third of the land of Andean *ayllus* was confiscated and sold between 1881 and 1921 In La Paz. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "La expansión del latifundio en el altiplano boliviano."

their rights to “private property” that did not belong to the *ayllus*, the *ayllus’ caciques-apoderados* managed to use the same legal strategy to prove their rights to collective land, issued by the Spanish crown. Thus, despite the modernizing rhetoric of the republican state, the struggles between Andean communities and the government were not using “modern” principle. Instead, they used the colonial system of the Two Republics and both sides of the conflict used colonial land titles to defend their positions.¹⁶

Liberal legislation favored the proliferation of haciendas in the western part of the country. However, there were important regional differences on how this proliferation took place. Hacienda expansion was more successful near traditional urban centers such as La Paz, Oruro or Sucre where Creole elites were able to invest mining capital in rural real estate. Smallholders were common in many valley regions and *ayllus* continued to predominate in isolated areas such as Northern Potosí.¹⁷ Highland Bolivian haciendas were very similar to other Latin American models. Indigenous laborers, called *colonos* in the highlands, were attached to the land in conditions of servitude. Despite this,

¹⁶ There is a growing body of historical literature on the struggles of Andean indigenous peoples for autonomy during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. See, e.g., Roberto Choque Canqui and Esteban Ticona Alejo, *Jesús de Machaca: la marka rebelde*, (La Paz: CEDOIN; CIPCA, 1996); Leandro Condori Chura and Esteban Ticona Alejo, *El escribano de los caciques apoderados= Kasikinakan purirarunakan qillqiripa* (La Paz: Hisbol; THOA, 1992); Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "Pedimos la revisión de límites: un episodio de incomunicación de castas en el movimiento de caciques-apoderados, 1919-1921," in *Reproducción y transformación en las sociedades andinas, siglos XVI-XX*, ed. Frank Salomon and Segundo Moreno (Quito: Abya Yala, 1992); Juan Félix Arias, *Historia de una esperanza: los apoderados espiritualistas de Chuquisaca 1936-1964: un estudio sobre milenarismo, rebelión, resistencia y conciencia campesino-indígena*, (La Paz: Aruwiyiri, 1994).

¹⁷ For an analysis of hacienda expansion in the department of La Paz, see Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "La expansión del latifundio en el altiplano boliviano, Elementos para la caracterización de una oligarquía nacional" *Avances* 2 (1978) and Herbert Klein, *Haciendas and Ayllus: Rural Society in the Bolivian Andes in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), chaps 4 and 5. For hacienda expansion in Chuquisaca, see Langer, *Economic Change*.

indigenous cultural practices and perceptions survived relatively untouched until the 1952 Revolution. During the late nineteenth century, most haciendas were not very productive and were mostly geared towards the production of basic foodstuffs. There were, however, some exceptions, in the Yungas of La Paz, for example, haciendas produced large quantities of coca for urban areas and mines.¹⁸

If the first part of Latin America's nineteenth century can be described as the *caudillo* era, the second part can be described as the era of the relative triumph of liberalism.¹⁹ Although most Latin American countries had a prolonged struggle between Liberal and Conservative parties, the ideologies of these parties were not clearly defined. Very often, their political struggles reflected mostly regional interests or local political cliques. In the case of Bolivia, the main differences were in attitudes towards the Catholic Church and attitudes towards Bolivia's relationship with Chile, especially after the War of the Pacific (1879-1884). Bolivia's Conservatives were based in the colonial cities of Sucre and Potosí and wished to keep the colonial rights of the church intact. The Liberals, on the other hand, championed a complete separation of the church and the state and were generally anticlerical. Conservatives also favored peace with Chile whereas Liberals favored war. Their rhetoric changed after they came to power in 1900. In 1904, they recognized Chile's sovereignty over Bolivia's former Pacific coast and opened up the country to Chilean imports and investment.

¹⁸ For coca production during the tin mining boom, see María Luisa Soux, *La coca liberal: producción y circulación a principios del siglo XX* (La Paz: Misión de Cooperación Técnica Holandesa: Centro de Información para el Desarrollo, 1993).

¹⁹ For a comparative approach to Liberal reforms in Latin America, see Robert H. Jackson, *Liberals, the Church, and Indian Peasants: Corporate Lands and the Challenge of Reform in Nineteenth-Century Spanish America*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

Besides these two major points of conflict, in the Bolivian case the ideological line between both parties was extremely tenuous. Ironically, Conservatives initiated most actions against indigenous communities, which were at the core of Liberal reforms in other Latin American countries. Bolivian liberals campaigned for religious freedom and civil marriage. Despite their anticlericalism, they never had the resources to implement their ideas fully. They did their best to eliminate Catholic missions among unincorporated indigenous peoples and attempted to secularize as many as they could as swiftly as possible but they were not completely successful until the 1920s.²⁰ The main differences were geographical and social. Conservatives represented the traditional silver economy of southern Bolivia (mainly Chuquisaca and Potosí) and held a firm monopoly on power since 1884.²¹ The Liberals represented the emerging economy of the northern cities of La Paz and Oruro, based on tin mining and, eventually, quinine and rubber exports. The latter were also favored by their proximity to the Peruvian and Chilean border, new railroads and free trade policies.

The struggle between La Paz and the south eventually led to a civil war that pitted Sucre centralists against La Paz federalists. The Federalist War was spurred by an 1898 decree that forced the President to remain in Sucre and request permission leave the city. Before that, Bolivia had been governed from different cities. A Bolivian saying stated

²⁰ For an overview of the history of this policy in the Andean countries since Independence, see García Jordán, "Misiones, fronteras y nacionalización." Also, Langer and Jackson, "Liberalism and the Land Question in Bolivia, 1825-1920," in Jackson ed., *Liberals, the Church, and Indian Peasants*.

²¹ For a look at the silver oligarchy, see Antonio Mitre, *Los patriarcas de la plata: estructura socioeconómica de la minería boliviana en el siglo XIX*, (Lima: IEP, 1981); for a look at the rise and fall of the Chuquisaca oligarchy, see Langer, *Economic Change*,

that the capital was wherever the President's horse was at the time.²² Under the leadership of General Juan Manuel Pando, who had been a hero of the War of the Pacific against Chile (1879-84), and an explorer of the Bolivian Amazon, the Liberals defeated the Conservatives with the crucial help of indigenous troops under the leadership of the Aymara caudillo Pablo Zárate Willka.²³ The alliance of convenience with Willka, who had been a leader of the movement to prevent the sale of communal lands, was problematic and eventually, the war became more of a caste war than a political rebellion. Although the liberals used indigenous peoples as allies, they soon realized that Willka had his own agenda and was becoming increasingly problematic. His troops started to kill both liberal and conservative troops indiscriminately. Under the guise of preventing subversion, Pando disarmed Willka's armies, accused him and his followers of treason, and jailed him. After his release, he was eventually murdered "under mysterious circumstances." Upon being proclaimed the first Liberal President of Bolivia, Pando inaugurated a period of even more intense communal land expropriations throughout the Altiplano and valleys of Bolivia and, consequently, of a more intense resistance and organization by Andeans. Paradoxically, through the National Convention of 1899, the issue of Federalism was filed away and Bolivia continued as a highly centralized republic on the French model with the oddity of having two capitals.²⁴ The executive and

²² Many Bolivians believe that La Paz became the *de facto* capital of Bolivia because of the Federalist War. Even though Conservative Presidents (who were members of the Sucre/Potosí silver mining elites) ran their governments from Sucre, many previous presidents and *caudillos* operated out of La Paz's *Palacio Quemado*.

²³ For information on Zárate Willka, see Ramiro Condarco Morales, *Zárate, el temible Willka; historia de la rebelión indígena de 1899* (La Paz: n.p., 1966); Larson, *Trials of nation making*, 231-237.

²⁴ Antezana Salvatierra, *Los liberales*, 23.

legislative branch of government moved to La Paz and the judicial branch stayed in Sucre.

Like most Latin American countries, Bolivia's history during the nineteenth century was marked by domestic wars, coups, *pronunciamentos* and civil strife. As a result, its foreign policy record was indeed a failure, marked by chronic territorial losses to most of its neighbors. Both Bolivian historiography and Bolivian politicians have blamed the Conservative Regime for the loss of Bolivia's Pacific coast to Chile. In reality, from the times of President Melgarejo Bolivia had yielded the exploitation of its Pacific resources (guano and saltpeter) to British/Chilean interests and the Bolivian state's presence in the region was mostly symbolic.²⁵ Although Bolivia lost its access to the Pacific, unlike its ally Peru, it was not subject to a Chilean invasion of its hinterland and capital. The Bolivian armed forces proved no match for the Chilean professional army and its British-equipped navy. Bolivia, for example, did not have a single warship in the Pacific, and its troops of conscripted mestizos led by inept officers required an early withdrawal from the conflict.²⁶

Bolivian historiography on the diplomacy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been dominated by the loss of the country's access to the Pacific coast (and the loss of the Chaco to Paraguay) and politicians of all political shades have blamed all the country's economic problems on this historical fact. The recovery of the Pacific coast

²⁵ For a Bolivian version of the War of the Pacific, see Roberto Querejazu Calvo, *Guano, salitre, sangre: historia de la Guerra del Pacífico* (La Paz: Ed. Los Amigos del Libro, 1979); for the military aspects of the war, see William F. Sater, *Andean Tragedy: Fighting the War of the Pacific, 1879-1884* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

²⁶ Bolivia withdrew from the conflict in 1880 though Peru continued the war until 1884.

has been a very convenient scapegoat to foster nationalism and draw attention away from domestic issues.²⁷ Yet, since independence, Bolivian history has lost territory to all of its neighbors (see Fig. 1), perhaps the only other Latin American countries that had to face a

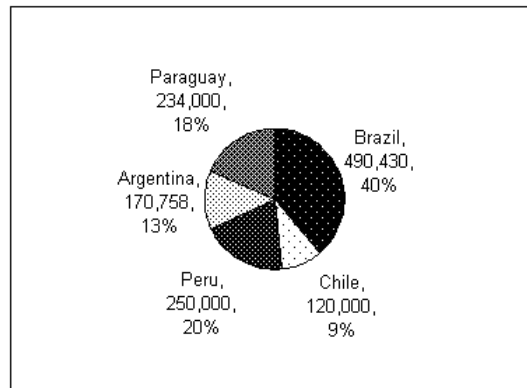


Figure 1. Bolivian Territorial Losses after Independence (in Square km)

Source: Data from Montes de Oca, *Geografía y recursos naturales de Bolivia*, 21.

similar massive loss of territory was Mexico after the Mexican-American War (1846-48) and Paraguay after the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-70). The loss of the arid Pacific Coast and the Atacama Desert to Chile pales, at least in terms of territory, to the losses to Brazil. Not surprisingly, Bolivian historiography blames Melgarejo, among many other ills, for having relinquished to Brazil, through an 1867 treaty, a vast amount of territory in the Mato Grosso and around the Madeira River.²⁸ Although they have been downplayed, these losses were almost as significant as the loss of access to the Pacific. Through them, Bolivia lost potential riverine access to the Atlantic. The Madeira River is the Amazon's longest tributary and is fully navigable from just below its mouth (at the

²⁷ The famous Gas War (2002-2003), which led to the fall of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and to the eventual election of Aymara President Evo Morales Ayma, was mainly triggered by Sánchez de Lozada's proposal to export Bolivian natural gas through Chile.

²⁸ Bolivia. *Tratado de Amistad, Límites, Navegación, Comercio y Extradición celebrado entre la República de Bolivia y el Imperio del Brasil en 1867* (La Paz [de Ayacucho]: Impr. Paceaña, 1867).

junction of the Beni and Mamoré Rivers) to its junction with the Amazon River, thus providing a direct route to the Brazilian port of Pará and the Atlantic Ocean. Conversely, Bolivia also lost direct access to the Paraguay River. The Paraguay River runs very near the border, but its course is actually wholly within Brazilian territory. The Paraguay River, through its Mato Grosso ports, could have provided a direct link, through the Paraná River, to the Río de la Plata and the Atlantic ports of Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Bolivia did not only lose access to the Pacific, it also lost access to the Atlantic.

These losses were due to a general lack of interest and knowledge about the Bolivian lowlands. As stated above, Bolivia continued to concentrate on its western highlands and could not foresee the significance of its losses in its vastly unexplored eastern frontiers. In retrospect, a José Paravincini, a Bolivian civil servant in the Northeast reflected that: “neither Melgarejo nor his ministers, nor the most prominent men of that period had any knowledge about the regions of the Bolivian North West.”²⁹ Although the other significant loss took place because of the Acre War (1899-1901), the sentiments against Brazil have never been as hostile as against Chile.

The Bolivian Lowlands

Most popular perceptions of Bolivia consider it an essentially Andean country and Spanish-speaking news reports (especially in Chile) routinely refer to it as “el país altiplánico.” Yet, even though most of the population and economic activities since Inca

²⁹ José Paravincini, "Conferencias sobre la Amazonia de Bolivia dadas por el socio honorario José Paravincini, ex-Delegado Nacional en los territorios del Acre." *Boletín de la Sociedad Geográfica Sucre* II, no. 16 (1900), 5.

times has been concentrated on the highlands of the country, at present, despite the huge territorial losses of the Madeira River, Mato Grosso (1867), and Acre (1903) to Brazil and most of the Chaco Boreal to Paraguay (1935), most of its territory lies in the lowlands. Although they vary, most estimates consider that about 60% of present Bolivian territory is Amazonian and that it contains about 10% of the Bolivian population.³⁰ If we add the Chaco and Interandean valleys to the “Amazonian” territory, according to *cruceño* nationalists, this estimate changes to 70% of the territory and 30% of the total population of Bolivia.³¹

Until the early twentieth century, the Bolivian state viewed the eastern lowlands with suspicion and ambivalence. If it was at all considered to be part of Bolivia, it was in terms of an exotic, peripheral and marginalized entity far removed from the core of the country. Both Bolivians and foreigners echoed these feelings. The Italian Franciscan missionary Jesualdo Macchetti had written just after the official cession of the Río Madera and Mato Grosso to Brazil: “Bolivia does not know the massive amount of territory it has lost. How little do the representatives of this Republic know their territory! One day they will know it but it will be too late.”³² Even veterans of the Acre conflict, who had spent time in Amazonia, described the descent from the highlands to a

³⁰ Lema, ed., *Pueblos Indígenas*, 7; Montes de Oca, *Geografía y recursos naturales*, 23.

³¹ Cited in <http://www.nacioncamba.net/quienesomos.htm>. The word *cruceño* is used throughout this document to describe a native of the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra or the department of Santa Cruz. During the nineteenth century, it was also used to describe the descendants of “white” settlers throughout the lowlands. The term *beniano* was often used exclusively to describe the various incorporated indigenous groups of the Moxos plains.

³² Jesualdo Macchetti, *Diario del Viaje fluvial del padre Fray Jesualdo Macchetti, misionero del Colegio de La Paz, desde San Buenaventura y Reyes hasta el Atlántico en 1869* (La Paz: Imp. “El Siglo Industrial,” 1869), 25.

terra incognita in Orientalist terms. For instance, Elías Sagárnaga, a Bolivian officer, upon hitting Rurrenabaque, the first Amazonian port he encountered, wrote “because of these people’s attire we seemed to be in ancient Alexandria or another Oriental port.”³³ The loss of Amazonian territories can be attributed to, among other factors, the Bolivian governments’ lack of cartographical and geographical information about these territories, which contrasted with the Brazilian Empire’s efforts to explore and chart its Amazonian hinterland.³⁴

Bolivia is one of the world’s most ecologically diverse countries. Extreme ecological variations exist even within relatively small ecosystems. For example, some of the highland cities such as La Paz or Sucre have different microclimates. In La Paz there is more than a 400 meter variation between its the satellite city of El Alto, at the edge of the Altiplano, and its southern suburbs and it is possible to see palms and deal with frost or even snow by traveling a few miles. Although there are many geographical typologies of Bolivia, most Bolivians identify with the division of the area into three major geographical areas, the highlands (or *Altiplano*), the valleys, and the lowlands (*llanos*). Although each of these macro regions encapsulates a huge variety of micro regions, they generally cross the Bolivian map in an easterly direction (See. Fig. 2).

³³ Elías Sagárnaga, *Recuerdos de la campaña del Acre de 1903. Mis notas de viaje* (La Paz: Talleres gráficos La Prensa de J. L. Calderón, 1909), 36 & 41.

³⁴ For example, see João Martins da Silva Coutinho, *Relatório sobre alguns logares da província do Amazonas: especialmente o rio Madeira*, Ed. fac-similada, 1861. ed. (Manaus: Tip. de Francisco José da Silva Ramos, 1861); Franz Keller, *The Amazon and Madeira Rivers; Sketches and Descriptions from the Note-book of an Explorer*, New ed. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1875); Francisco José de Lacerda e Almeida, "Memoria a respeito dos Rios Baures, Branco, da Conceição de S. Joaquim, Itonamas e Maxupo e das tres missões da Magdalena, da Conceição e de S. Joaquim," *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* 12 (1849).

Historically, despite its harsh environment, most of the population of present-day Bolivia has concentrated around the Altiplano. The Bolivian Altiplano is part of a huge plateau of an average height of 3,300 meters above sea level, which also covers parts of Ecuador, Peru, Chile and Argentina and is second in height and surface to the Tibet high plateau. The Andean Altiplano has been continuously inhabited for five millennia, has been the seat of ancient hydraulic civilizations and has been the source of important historical developments such as the domestication of Andean camelids, cereals and tubers.³⁵ Since colonial times, though, the Altiplano has been important, besides its large indigenous population density, for its mining wealth. The colonial cities of La Paz, Oruro, La Plata (Sucre) and Potosí would not be as important without the colonial silver mining industry. The Bolivian Altiplano lies between two of the highest mountain chains in the world. The Western Cordillera Real boasts, for example, the Sajama volcano (6,453 m.s.l.) and the Huayna Potosí peak (6,088 m.s.l.) and the eastern Cordillera Oriental includes more than ten summits above 6,000 meters, including Illampu (6,369 m.s.l.) and Illimani (6,438 m.s.l.). Besides the Altiplano and the two Andean ranges. The Altiplano also includes unique features such as Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable lake in the world, Uyuni, the largest salt flat in the world, and Atacama, the driest desert in the world. Although the Bolivian Altiplano is usually seen as a barren and arid area, it is also crisscrossed by valleys, such as the Luribay valley south of La Paz, which allow

³⁵ See Alan L. Kolata, *Tiwanaku and its Hinterland: Archaeology and Paleoecology of an Andean Civilization*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 48.

the cultivation of temperate crops such as maize, peaches and grapes.³⁶

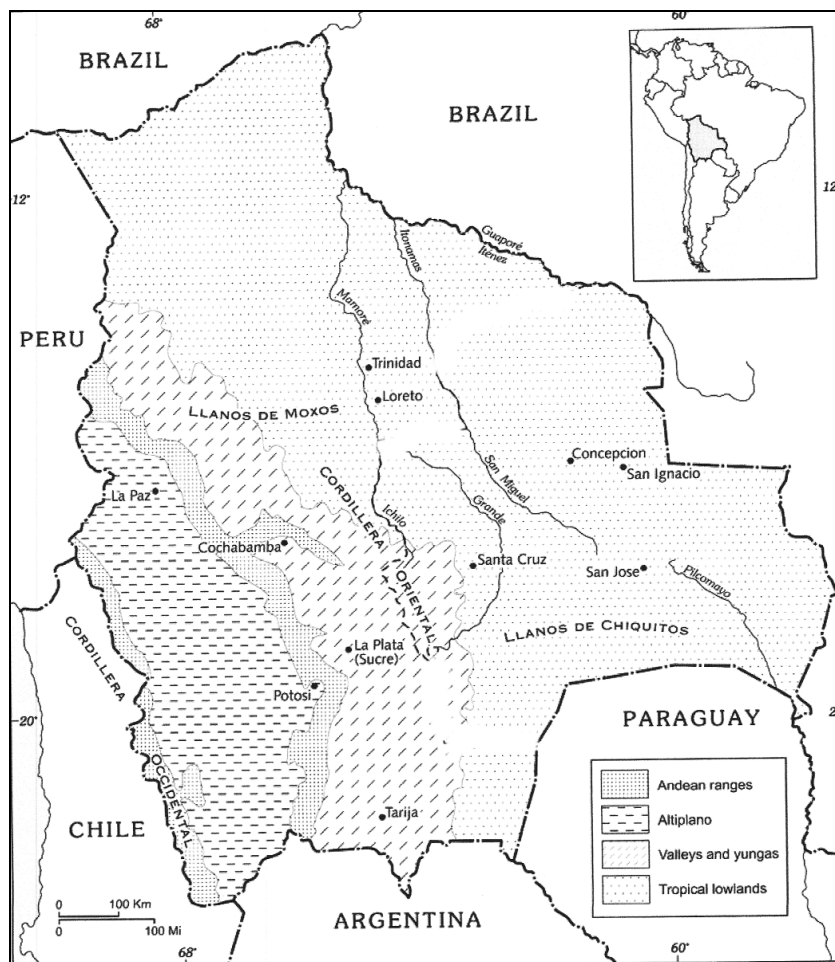


Figure 2. Bolivia's Ecological Areas
 Source: Radding, *Landscapes of Power and Identity*, 36.

The eastern slopes of the Andes contain two types of valleys. The semitropical, humid valleys that descend into the Amazon basin are called Yungas.³⁷ When Bolivians refer to the Yungas, they usually refer to the tropical valleys north and north east of the city of La Paz, but this ecoregion extends North towards Peru and Ecuador, and descends

³⁶ Based on personal information and Montes de Oca, *Geografía y recursos naturales*, 152-57.

³⁷ Incidentally, the western slopes of the Andes towards the Peruvian Pacific have also been called, since Inca times, Yungas.

towards the Bolivian departments of Cochabamba and western Santa Cruz, and even as far as a strip between the arid Gran Chaco and the high-altitude *puna* in Northern Argentina. The Bolivian Yungas have a height ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 meters and have an average annual precipitation of between 4,000 to 600 millimeters, forming extremely deep gorges crowned by the ridges of the Andes. Such a wide range of altitude produces a variety of ecosystems that include cloud forests, humid giant fern forests and other types of evergreen forests.³⁸ Ecologically, the Yungas form a transitional zone between two extremely different environments, the Altiplano and the Amazonian basin. In very few parts of the world can the traveler cross such a wide range of ecosystems as in the descent from the Bolivian highlands to the lowlands. The road from La Paz to Coroico, dubbed the most dangerous road in the world, is a case in point. In a few hours, the traveler moves from the barren Altiplano to the snowcapped Andes with herds of llamas and alpacas, to mist covered cloud forests to finally descend into the Yungas among giant ferns, thundering cascades and coca terraces. Although the descent from Sucre toward the plains of Santa Cruz is not as dramatic, as the traveler approaches the last spurs of the Andes, he is confronted with a green ocean, as the British traveler J.B. Minchin stated: "I seemed indeed to stand on the dividing land between two worlds."³⁹

The second types of valleys are dry Interandean valleys. Their temperate climate and alluvial soils make them suitable for temperate farming of both traditional Andean crops (maize, tubers) and introduced crops such as wheat, barley and grapes. In Bolivia,

³⁸ Montes de Oca, *Geografía y recursos naturales*, 142 & 410.

³⁹ J.B. Minchin, "Eastern Bolivia and the Gran Chaco," *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography, New Monthly Series* 3, no. 7 (1881): 404.

the region of the Valleys includes most of the departments of Cochabamba, Tarija and Chuquisaca, although other departments, such as Santa Cruz, La Paz or even Potosí also have some valley areas. Traditionally these valleys, particularly the Cochabamba valleys, have been considered Bolivia's breadbasket.

The eastern lowlands or *llanos* form most of the Bolivia's territory (see Fig. 2). Like the highlands, this area has a considerable variety of ecosystems that continue into neighboring countries. They form two macro regions, the hot and humid ecosystems of Amazonia and the arid Chaco.

Like elsewhere, there are many interpretations about what part of Bolivia should be considered Amazonian. The most conservative interpretations consider that only the northern department of Pando, Vaca Díez province of the department of Beni region and parts of the northern Iturralde province of the La Paz department are truly Amazonian and consider this region to be Bolivia's Northern Amazonia.⁴⁰ As environmental historian David Cleary remarks, there is not an acceptable taxonomy for one of the world's most extensive regions. If we use physical geographical criteria, he argues that during the rainy season we could claim that Amazonia extends from the Orinoco River to the La Plata and Paraguay Rivers, since theoretically we could cross this region in a canoe. If we use cultural criteria, we could also claim that the Caribbean and most of the Central American Atlantic coast is also part of Amazonia, since both the material culture of many of the indigenous peoples of the area and their original environment are

⁴⁰ Pacheco, *Integración económica*, 9.

Amazonian-like.⁴¹ The most widely used typology of the Amazon has divided Amazonian forests in fertile seasonally flooded *várzea* or and less fertile non-flooded uplands *or terra firme*.⁴² Although this classification can be applied to Bolivia's Northern Amazonian environment, it is too narrow to describe one of the most extensive and complex regions of the world.

The central position of Bolivia within the South American continent means that it is necessarily a point of transition between major geographical and cultural regions. Bolivia is the only country in South America where the Andean Amazonian and Chaco-Pampean macro regions meet and, sadly, the clearly defined lines of political maps do not correspond to geographical or cultural realities. The transition from one region to another is not abrupt, and creates a kaleidoscope of natural regions and cultures. The Yungas are a case in point. From an Andean perspective the lush vegetation and hot climate make them definitely Amazonian, yet to an Amazonian their relative height, as well as their Andean inhabitants, make them Andean, they are a typical region in transition.

If mountains are the most prominent geographical feature of the Andes, the Amazonian region can be defined by its rivers. Compared to the rivers of the Andean and Chaco regions, the tributaries of the Amazon are longer and carry more water. Most of them originate in the eastern slopes of the Andes and descend into the lowlands as extremely rapid and tumultuous streams of difficult navigation. Once they reach the plains, most of them become navigable. As the Bolivian geographer Montes de Oca

⁴¹David Cleary, "Towards an Environmental History of the Amazon: From Prehistory to the Nineteenth Century," *Latin American Research Review* 36, no. 2 (2001): 66.

⁴²See Betty Jane Meggers, *Amazonia: Man and Culture in a Counterfeit Paradise* (Chicago: Aldine, 1971).

notes, the Bolivian Amazonian River system has an extension of 13,000 kilometers and of these about 6,000 kilometers are navigable.⁴³ The Beni (884 km in a straight line) and Mamoré Rivers (900 km.) cross most of the Northern Bolivian plains and converge near the Brazilian border to drain into the Madeira River. The Iténez or Guaporé River (600 km) originates in Mato Grosso and flows west and then northwards from the department of Santa Cruz to form the border with Brazil along the states of Mato Grosso and Rondônia and eventually merges with the Mamoré River. The longest Bolivian Amazonian river is the Madre de Dios River (called Amarumayo in Quechua). Within Bolivia, it has 1,700 kilometers in length. It originates in the Peruvian eastern Andes and empties into the Beni River in Bolivian territory. The Itonamas, San Pablo or San Miguel River (800 km) stems from the extensive wetlands of Northern Santa Cruz and flows northwards into the Iténez River.

Amazonian rivers can be classified into white-water rivers and black-water Rivers. White rivers have a muddy color and are extremely slow. Large amounts of sediment that these rivers gather during their descent from the Andes cause this. A prime example of a white water river is the Mamoré River, which, after its birth in the eastern Andes near Cochabamba crosses the Moxo and Baure plains and becomes extremely meandering and slow. In contrast, black water rivers have a coffee-like color, cross wetlands and jungle areas and, as a result, receive large amounts of tannins from decaying vegetation. They have highly acidic water and minimal sediment and usually carve one deep channel. The Iténez or Guaporé River, which crosses tropical jungle and

⁴³ Montes de Oca, *Geografía y recursos naturales*, 108.

the edges of the Pantanal in the border with Mato Grosso, is Bolivia's largest black water river. Unlike the Mamoré's unstable banks, the Iténez has high banks covered with forest.⁴⁴

Even a short account of Bolivian rivers has exposed one of the historical problems with homonymy. Part of the problem is language. The Madre de Dios River, for example, was baptized as such by Franciscan Missionaries but the local indigenous name for the river is Manutata (Father River) and the Incas called it Amaru Mayu (River of the Snakes). The Iténez River is another example, the Bolivians call it Iténez (after the Iténe or Iténez indigenous group) and the Brazilians call it Guaporé, even though both names are indigenous. The Acre River is an extreme example. In early documents, it was described as Río Magaripran or Enossagua and then it became the Río Acre to Bolivians and, often, the Río Aquiry to Brazilians. Another problem is that the same river may be called differently along its course. For example, the same river is called San Miguel in Chiquitos, and then it becomes San Pablo as it crosses into the Beni department and it becomes the Itonamas as it flows through the territory of the Itonamas ethnic group near its confluence with the Iténez River. Moreover, even important Bolivian rivers such as the Beni and Mamoré, were not accurately surveyed until the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries and, very often explorers such as General Pando renamed rivers after other famous explorers, as evidenced by the Rivers Ortón, Heath or even the

⁴⁴ Ibid. 456-57.

Parisian Seine (Sena River).⁴⁵

Although the navigability of Bolivia's eastern rivers should facilitate communication in a country renowned for the bad quality of its roads, navigability is also problematic. After the loss of the Pacific, there was a movement to link Bolivia with the Atlantic through its Amazonian rivers, and navigation of these rivers was seen, following the example of Brazil's Amazonian policies, as the catalysts for order and progress. The *cruceño* geographer Rafael Peña reflected this link when he stated that "the golden dream of fluvial routes, whose frank opening up smiles upon us in the Oriente, where the shining star of a very prosperous future which is attracting and guiding the progressive march of men of intelligence, industry and commerce, who are the symbolic kings of the regeneration that these hidden and vigorous places are awaiting."⁴⁶ According to a nineteenth century civil servant, Bolivia was "confined by the Mamoré, Sécuré, Itenes [sic], Beni, Madre de Dios, Acre and Purús Rivers and their *cachuelas* and only has a small doorway through Guarayos crossing a vast swampy desert."⁴⁷ The rivers that descend from the Yungas to the Beni savannas cross rocky ravines and have very rapid current and could only be navigated by small and fragile *callapos* or rafts made of balsa wood. Another problem is the meandering nature of white rivers. The large amounts of sediment, the flat landscape and the low banks of rivers have historically caused many problems. During the years that the Swedish ethnologist Erland Nordenskiöld was in

⁴⁵ Bolivia United Nations Development Programme, *Informe de desarrollo humano en el norte amazónico boliviano, 2003* (La Paz: Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, 2003), 29. Based on a manuscript by Cachuela Esperanza teacher José Arteaga Saucedo.

⁴⁶ Rafael Peña, *Flora cruceña* in ANB, *Colección de folletos bolivianos*, M137, III, 1881-87, V.

⁴⁷ Trinidad, 31 Dec. 1888, Prefectura del Beni to Ministerio del Interior. ANB/ MI 1888, no.75.

Bolivia (1908-09), for example, the riverbed of the Mamoré River near Trinidad had shortened its course by several miles.⁴⁸ The Guapay River, which was the main artery from the city of Santa Cruz to the department of Beni, changed its course completely in the 1930s and severed this communication.⁴⁹ This continuous movement also forms sandbars that proved a problem for navigation. Most nineteenth-century accounts were particularly concerned about *palizadas*. *Palizadas* were semi-submerged tree trunks or branches that were glued to the sandy riverbed and jutted out to destroy wooden boats. In his autobiographical historical novel *Siringa*, Juan Coimbra described that one of the most difficult tasks rubber estate crews had to carry out was to locate and clean up *palizadas* around the rivers in each rubber estate.⁵⁰

Many of the rivers are navigable only during the rainy season. For example, navigation of the Piraí River, near the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, was extremely complicated. A Santa Cruz Prefect, Apolinar Arana, observed that during the rainy season the river's current made it extremely dangerous and during the dry season, the river turned into a series of deep and un-passable quagmires. Crews were forced to pull cargo along the beach for four or five days. During the rainy season, the river became unsafe because of its extremely rapid current.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Erland Nordenskiöld, *Indios y Blancos en el Nordeste de Bolivia*, trans. Gudrun Birk & Angel E. García (La Paz: APCOB, 2003), 34.

⁴⁹ Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, 19.

⁵⁰ Juan B. Coimbra, *Siringa, Memorias de un colonizador del Beni* (La Paz: Editorial Juventud, 1998), 52.

⁵¹ Santa Cruz, 31 Jan. 1882 from Apolinar Arana to Supremo Gobierno, AGRM, Prefectura, Correspondencia, Hacienda Pública 1882 3/107, Actos administrativos 1882.



Figure 3. Cachuela on the Mamoré River, near Guajará-Mirim, during the Dry Season
Source: Photographed by the author in 1994.

However, the most formidable obstacle to navigation is the *cachuelas*. Although sources have described them as either cataracts or rapids, the *cachuelas* are part of the rocky Brazilian shield crossing Amazonian rivers. During the dry season these rocky formations form sharp outcrops that prevent navigation and during the rainy season extremely hazardous rapids and whirlpools form around them. The only way to overcome *cachuelas* was to portage all the cargo between them, to row between the deep channels that formed around them or to use a *guía*, a rope tied to a tree or rock on shore to guide the canoe through a channel. In the second situation, wooden boats risked being shattered by submerged rocks in the middle of the channel or by being smashed by the rocks on the side of the channel. The Beni and Mamoré Rivers have the largest number

of *cachuelas* (Cachuela Esperanza, Guajar -Mirim,⁵² Guasu Guajar , Bananeira, Palo Grande and so forth) as they flow near the Brazilian border and a series of *cachuelas* continue along the Madeira River. A rowboat traveling from the present Bolivian city of Guayaramer n to the settlement of Manoa, in the Bolivian side of the confluence of the Mamor  and Madeira Rivers, had to cross eighteen *cachuelas*.⁵³ Near the now-abandoned Brazilian city of Santo Ant nio do Madeira, the Madeira River becomes fully navigable, even by steamships, until it joins the Amazon River. The number of shipwrecks was extremely high and Pastor Baldivieso, a Bolivian civil servant, described the Madeira River route as the “great grave of our travelers.”⁵⁴ Bolivian authorities estimated that five per cent of Bolivian canoes en route to Brazil wrecked in the *cachuelas*. In 1893, for example, there were thirteen wrecks that produced forty-three drowning victims. Besides the human costs, the cost of lost merchandise was also extremely high. In the early years of the rubber boom, insurance companies flatly refused to insure Bolivian cargo that went through the *cachuelas*.⁵⁵ Not surprisingly, the future Liberal President of Bolivia and explorer Jos  Manuel Pando blamed the indigenous crews’ drunkenness for these shipwrecks.⁵⁶ The survivors were routinely interrogated and some shippers or *fleteros* even requested sworn statements before the

⁵² Guajar -Mirim was the terminus of the Madeira Mamor  Railway. It is located in the Brazilian state of Rond nia across the Mamor  River from the Bolivian town of Guayaramer n, part of the Beni Dept.

⁵³ Montes de Oca, *Geograf a y recursos naturales*, 110.

⁵⁴ Pastor Baldivieso, *Informe que presenta al Sr. Ministro de Colonizaci n el Intendente de la Delegaci n Nacional en el NO Tte. Coronel Pastor Baldivieso* (La Paz: Taller Lit. Ayacucho, 1896), 67.

⁵⁵ Ministerio de Instrucci n P blica y Colonizaci n Bolivia, *Apuntes sobre la industria de la goma el stica en los territorios dependientes de la Delegaci n Nacional del Noroeste y el Departamento del Beni*, ed. Manuel Vicente Ballivi n (La Paz: Imp. "El Comercio," 1896), 17.

⁵⁶ *Informe que el jefe de exploraci n de los r os del norte de Bolivia pone al conocimiento del supremo gobierno en cumplimiento del contrato celebrado en mayo de 1892*, (ALP/JMP 1891-92, no 2), 3.

courts to respond about the lost cargo.⁵⁷

In the proper Amazonian region of the Bolivian Northeast, river shores can be classified into three areas: *centro*, *margen* and *tierra firme*. The *centro* is completely flooded during the rainy season and is the main habitat for Amazonian rubber trees. Both rubber *barracas* and indigenous *chacos* were located in the *margen* or riverbank. This area was not fully flooded and, thanks to the presence of a heavy tree cover and swampy areas, was extremely fertile using the slash and burn method of agriculture. The presence of trees, water and human settlement, though, also made it a perfect habitat for the spread of malaria and yellow fever. According to the Argentine engineer and ethnologist Antonio Pauly, initially a hectare of sugar cane could produce 1,500 kilograms of sugar cane juice and 250 pounds of rice per planted pound of seed. The uplands or *tierra firme* were fifty or sixty meters above the level of the riverbed and were reserved for indigenous settlements or *malocas* and eventually rubber *barracas*.⁵⁸

The *llanos* can be divided into the relatively humid savannas of Moxos and the arid Chaco. The Moxos savannas, after the Río de la Plata pampas and the Orinoco llanos, are the third most extensive complex of savannas in South America. They cover most of the Beni department of Bolivia and extend into the northern part of the department of La Paz and Pando, and southwards towards areas of the department of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz and a small portion of the Brazilian state of Rondônia and

⁵⁷ Riberalta, 12 Mar. 1899. *Información solicitada por Rómulo Gómez sobre el naufragio de la carga que conducía para la casa Barber von Bercks compañía de Riberalta*. ACS/AJR, Caja XXX, No. 141.

⁵⁸ Antonio Pauly, *Ensayo de Etnografía Americana, Viajes y exploraciones* (Buenos Aires: Casa Jacobo Prusser Ltda., 1928), 33-34. The *barraca* (hut or cabin) was the main settlement type in the rubber areas. It was the center of operations of a rubber estate. A *maloca* was an Amazonian traditional, collective indigenous settlement.

the Peruvian department of Madre de Dios. Their total surface is 200,009 square kilometers. The Moxos savanna is almost level and is crossed by meandering rivers that drain into the Amazon. During the rainy season, (December to May) the flatness of the landscape, the copious rains, the snow melt from the Andes and the clay and acidic soils cause flooding of from fifty to sixty percent of its area for four to ten months.⁵⁹ According to the Spanish adventurer Ciro Bayo, the area became an “amphibious country” during the rainy season. The only way to communicate is with canoes and inhabitants resorted to riding swimming *bueyes-caballos* or relied on swimming oxen pulled carts made of lightweight balsa wood that could float in the water.⁶⁰

During the dry season, the *llanos* are extremely vulnerable to anthropogenic fire, which is used to revitalize pastures, and in slash and burn agriculture. Since the Spanish conquest, the savanna per se has only been suitable for ranching, but the Moxos plains contain a remarkable mosaic of ecosystems. Human settlement is usually in the *lomas* or man-made mounds, which are immune to flooding or in the fertile *islas*, which are relatively high patches of forest within the savanna. In the alluvial plains of many of the rivers, there are also gallery forests, which are very similar to Northern Amazonian forests.⁶¹ The large numbers of rivers and the abundant rainfall produce a variety of wetlands. The area has a large amount of permanent shallow lakes such as the Lago Rojoaguado, Lago Huaytunas near Santa Ana del Yacuma, Laguna Isireri, near San Ignacio de Moxos and the Lago San Luís. The shallowness of Lago San Luís, for

⁵⁹ Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, 21.

⁶⁰ Ciro Bayo, *Las grandes cacerías americanas* (del Lago Titicaca al Río Madera) (Madrid: R.C. Raggio, 1927), 95.

⁶¹ Jorge Muñoz Reyes, *Geografía de Bolivia*, 3. ed. (La Paz: Librería Ed. "Juventud," 1991), 58.

example, made it an obstacle for navigation from Santa Cruz to Moxos but travelers dug a trench through its shallowest point to allow canoes to cross it in six hours.⁶² Other typical wetlands of the area are the *yomomos*, *curichis* and *bajíos*. *Yomomos* are permanent swampy areas with poor drainage and covered with floating plants. They are usually located in elevated areas and are routinely drained to produce pasture for cattle. *Curichis* are wetlands located in low-lying areas; rainwater is trapped in them during ten months of the year due to the impermeability of their clay soils. They are usually covered with rooted aquatic vegetation and different types of reeds and are also drained to produce pastures. *Bajíos* are low lying areas that are deeply flooded between December and July, during the rest of the year they produce very nutritious grasses.⁶³ In terms of flora and fauna, the llanos of Moxos are a transitional zone between the Amazon and the Chaco and species from both regions exist in the many ecosystems of this area.

As subsequent chapters explain, the llanos de Moxos had very strong links with the rubber boom. Many of the gallery forests that cross the Northern Moxos plains contained rubber trees and, therefore, the indigenous population of the area was familiar with rubber before the European invasion. In addition, Moxos became a supplier of both labor and foodstuffs to the rubber areas. In the 1870s, the *cruceño patrones* of Moxos took indigenous crews as far as the Madeira and Amazon Rivers. Despite loss of cattle and population, Moxos also became an important supplier of sun-dried meat (*charque*) to rubber estates.

⁶² Coimbra, *Siringa*, 52.

⁶³ Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, 428-29

The wet areas of Moxos pale in comparison to another major ecological region, the Pantanal. The Pantanal is the world's largest wet area and it covers most of the Brazilian states of Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul and portions of Bolivia and Paraguay. Eighty per cent of its surface is flooded during the rainy season. Ten per cent of the Pantanal belongs to Bolivia and is located along the border of the department of Santa Cruz, Brazil, the northern section is east of the town of San Matías, and its southern section includes Puerto Suárez, Quijarro and the Otuquis wetlands.⁶⁴ One of the densest wet forest covers in the country flanks the northern portion of the Bolivian Pantanal, between San Ignacio de Velasco and San Matías. In the late nineteenth century, the northern portion of this region became one of Bolivia's rubber producing areas. It also became another route to export rubber. Rather than using the Madeira route, rubber from the southern Beni department and Northern Santa Cruz, was taken by ox cart to San Ignacio de Velasco and to Puerto Suárez and then it was transported to Mato Grosso ports and floated down the Paraguay River into Argentina and to the Atlantic Ocean.

Another Brazilian ecosystem that extends into Bolivia is the *Cerrado*. The *Cerrado*, which covers a large extension of Central Brazil, is a combination of dry forests and savannas located mostly in plateaus of varying elevations. Although the *Cerrado*, like the Moxos plains, receives large quantities of rainfall during the rainy season, it contains deep and well-drained soils, which, along with its relative elevation, minimize

⁶⁴ Carlos Aguirre, "Wetlands in Bolivia, Pantanal Preservation and Sustainable Development," in *The Pantanal of Brazil, Paraguay and Bolivia: Selected Discourses on the World's Largest Remaining Wetland System: Selected Papers and Addresses from the World Conference on Preservation and Sustainable Development in the Pantanal*, ed. Frederick A. Swartz (Gouldsboro, PA: Hudson MacArthur Pub., 2000), chap. 4.

seasonal flooding. In Bolivia, the *Cerrado* is part of the Brazilian shield and is found in the departments in the eastern border of the department of Beni, along the Iténez River, and in some areas of Chiquitos in the department of Santa Cruz. There is also some *Cerrado* in the northernmost part of the La Paz department and in the Chaco Region.⁶⁵ With the exception of the Chaco, there was little interest in the Bolivian Cerrado in the nineteenth century, cattle and agriculture concentrated in the more densely populated areas of Moxos and Chiquitos.

The colonial province of Chiquitos, in the department of Santa Cruz is, according to Cynthia Radding, an ecological and cultural crossroads between major South American regions. Chiquitos was a historical corridor that connected the Amazonian north with the Chaco and Pampas and an east west corridor that connected Mato Grosso and Paraguay with the easternmost Andean areas.⁶⁶ The landscape of its northern part falls into the Amazonian ecoregion and the areas around San Ignacio de Velasco and along the Iténez River were major rubber producers. As we have seen, it also has a Cerrado and Pantanal region and, its proximity to the Brazilian Shield creates relatively high elevations. Most of the region, though, is covered with one of the most endangered forests in Bolivia, the Chiquitano Dry Forest. Relatively dense populations of Chiquitano Indians and the extensive use of burning to clear *chacos* and to create pastures have caused this ecological degradation. The Chiquitano were also an important source of labor for the rubber industry and became the source of constant tensions between labor

⁶⁵ Montes de Oca, *Geografía y recursos naturales*, 443.

⁶⁶ Cynthia Radding, *Landscapes of Power and Identity: Comparative Histories in the Sonoran Desert and the Forests of Amazonia from Colony to Republic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 45.

recruiters based in the Departments of Beni and Santa Cruz, as they competed for workers.⁶⁷

The Chaco Region covers parts of the Departments of Santa Cruz, Tarija, and Chuquisaca and it extends into Northern Argentina, Paraguay and some parts of Mato Grosso. It is a relatively level plain covered with arid scrubland, savannas and forests. Along with the Northern Amazonian region, it was one of the last frontiers to be occupied by the Bolivian State and it continues to be one of South America's less populated regions. The Andes to the west and the Paraguay River to the east border it. Despite its dryness, it is crossed by some of Bolivia's longest rivers, the Pilcomayo, Parapetí and Bermejo Rivers. One of its most remarkable features is the Izozog *Bañados*. They are wetlands formed as the Parapetí River hits the dry Chaco. The river divides itself into many branches and it eventually disappears through evaporation and filtration, some of the underwaters eventually flow into the Amazonian basin. One of the most historically significant regions of eastern Bolivia is Cordillera province, which is a transitional zone, located between the last spurs of the dry Eastern Andes and the proper Chaco plain. Historically, Cordillera has been one of the most contested regions in Bolivia and has been a point of encounter and conflict between Andeans, and later Spaniards and Bolivians and the Ava-Guaraní Chiriguano. Since independence, Bolivia has also lost significant territory to Argentina, Brazil and, after the bloody and prolonged Chaco War (1932-35) to Paraguay (See Fig. 1). Although the Chaco was removed from the rubber

⁶⁷ Much of the information about the ecological regions of the lowlands can be viewed in the map included in P.L. Ibisch et al., eds., *Estrategia Nacional de Biodiversidad de Bolivia. Resumen Ejecutivo*, ed. Ministerio de Desarrollo Sostenible y Planificación Bolivia (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Ed. FAN, 2003).

regions, many of its indigenous inhabitants, especially the Chiriguano, became victims of forced recruitment to work in Bolivia's rubber industry.

The most important city of the lowlands, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, is also in a transitional area. It lies in the Grigotá plains that are very similar to the Moxo plains. Even though the city has historically styled itself as the capital of the Bolivian Amazonia or of the Llanos, it is within one hundred kilometers of the eastern slope of the Andes and the department has both dry Interandean valleys like Vallegrande and more humid Yungas-like the valleys around Buena Vista, Samaipata or Mairana. Despite the fact that the Bolivian lowlands were some of the more isolated frontiers of the Spanish empire, the early foundation of the city (1561) allowed the Spanish empire to make inroads into Chiquitos, the Chaco and Moxos. The city has also benefited from its relative nearness to Cochabamba and to Paraguay, Brazil and northern Argentina. The most prominent rubber barons were from the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra and, since the nineteenth century, *cruceños* have considered the department of Beni and the former *Territorio Nacional de Colonias*, according to the Beni historian José Luís Roca, as part of their *Lebensraum*.⁶⁸ Much of the culture of lowland Bolivia is derived from Santa Cruz. Currently, the departments of Beni, Santa Cruz and Pando are considered *camba* departments pitted against the *colla* departments of the highlands.

In sum, the Bolivian lowlands are as complex as the Bolivian highlands and contain a variety of ecosystems that have shaped their history. These ecosystems operate as a physical and cultural continuum that originates in neighboring countries. Rather than

⁶⁸ Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, chap. 1.

integrating these regions into Bolivia, during the nineteenth century, economic and political forces created a rift between the western and eastern parts of the country that has become increasingly serious. The rubber boom inserted most of the lowlands into the North Atlantic economies and attempted to integrate them into Bolivia's "nation building" project but, as the following chapters explain, was not completely successful. The Bolivian state, whether it was Conservative or Liberal, often saw the lowlands as mere colonies or as exotic "deserts" in the sense of void of people.



Figure 4. Lowland (shaded) vs. Highland Departments

Source: Modified from map based on the Creative Commons Attribution Share/Alike license versions 2.5, 2.0 and 1.0.

Andeans versus Chunchos

Has this historical rift between Bolivia's two major ecological regions always been the same? This section examines the history of the Bolivian lowlands before independence and its relationship with the highlands. As mentioned above, many authors claim that the pre-Inca civilizations of Bolivia had fluid commercial and cultural exchanges with the lowlands, these relationships deteriorated as the result of Inca and Spanish imperialism. During the nineteenth century, these divisions increased. The

western highlands became the major political, cultural and economic centers of Bolivia, favored by the mining economy and advances in transportation infrastructure whereas the eastern lowlands were viewed as distant frontier areas. Despite their rhetoric, neither Conservative nor Liberal governments managed to fully integrate the lowlands into their view of the Bolivian nation. In the long term, Bolivia's efforts at nation-building failed to fully integrate lowlanders and left a long list of grievances against the central government and their *colla* members.

Archaeological evidence and carbon tests have demonstrated that humans have occupied the highlands of Bolivia for five millennia. The first "high" civilization in present-day Bolivia was Tiwanaku, which developed from Lake Titicaca's basin from AD 400-1000. The metropolis of Tiwanaku is located between Lake Titicaca and the present city of La Paz. Its main characteristics were monumental stone architecture and sculpture, polychromatic ceramics and textiles. The estimates of its population at its height range from 20,000 to 40,000 inhabitants.⁶⁹ From its location in the Bolivian Altiplano, Tiwanaku expanded northwards to Chile's north coast and Peru's south coast and eastwards and southwards to most of present day Bolivia and northern Argentina. Tiwanaku was one of the earliest hydraulic civilizations in the Andes. It developed extensive terraces on hilly sides and Raised Field Systems (*suka collos* in Aymara or *camellones* in Spanish) on the plains around Lake Titicaca. According to Alan Kolata,

⁶⁹ Alan A. Kolata, "The Agricultural Foundations of the Tiwanaku State: A View from the Heartland," *Antiquity* 51 (1986).

Tiwanaku expanded into lower valleys to obtain prestige foods rather than staples.⁷⁰ Tiwanaku obtained maize and chili peppers from Interandean valleys such as Cochabamba and Moquegua and coca and feathers from subtropical valleys. There has been considerable debate about the terms of these exchanges and whether trade patterns that have been found during the Inca and Spanish empires can be traced back to Tiwanaku.

There seems to be a consensus that Tiwanaku was the first state that originated in present-day Bolivia. Yet, the nature of this state continues to be debated as archeologists unearth new evidence. Even though Tiwanaku had fluid relations with the lowlands, there has been a debate whether it really was where “civilization” originated. Andeans have tended to exclude lowland indigenous cultures and have assumed that highland civilization was superior and that it dominated its interactions with the civilizations located at lower altitudes. During the twentieth century, the history of Tiwanaku has become, like everything else in Bolivia, heavily politicized. The Inca started this trend by claiming that their mythical ancestors, Mama Ocllo and Huayna Capac, emerged from the Island of the Sun in Lake Titicaca and founded Cuzco and the Inca Empire, which would seem to imply that the Incas were direct descendants of Tiwanaku and were, therefore, of Kolla or Aymara origin. This appropriation of existing culture parallels the Aztecs’ claims to Toltec ancestry and it was used to give legitimacy to the new rulers. During the early twentieth century, Tiwanaku was appropriated by self-taught archeologists imbued

⁷⁰ Kolata, *Tiwanaku and its Hinterland: Archaeology and Paleoecology of an Andean Civilization*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 48.

with *indigenismo* who glorified it as a cradle of human civilization while ignoring its links with their Aymara contemporaries. After the consolidation of the 1952 National Revolution, the Bolivian government sponsored excavation and “restoration” of the metropolis through the *Instituto Nacional de Arqueología de Bolivia*. This restoration was done in an extremely sloppy manner, without consideration to the original layout of the city and it attempted to stress the monumentality of the site for tourists and Bolivians intent on knowing about the glorious past.

Although there is increasing information about Tiwanaku’s expansion into Interandean valleys, there is still a dearth of information about its expansion into the Yungas.⁷¹ Road construction in the 1990s though uncovered the massive complex of Pasto Grande, between the Sud Yungas towns of Chulumani and Irupana contains thousands of hectares of terraces, irrigation channels and roads of Tiwanaku origin. Again, it is assumed that the Tiwanaku metropolis traded subtropical products, above all coca, through its vast llama caravans. Whether this expansion went beyond the Yungas into the Amazon basin is still a matter of speculation. There are several pre-Columbian paved roads that descend from the Altiplano to the lowlands, Takesi and Yunga Cruz communicated La Paz with what is today the province of Sud Yungas, and the Choro trail went all the way to Sud Yungas and the gold-rich lowlands of Caranavi. The so-called Camino del Oro made it possible to travel from Sorata to the Amazonian Mapuri and

⁷¹ For examples of the links between the Yungas and the Alto Beni región, see Juan Faldín, "La arqueología de las provincias de Larecaja y Muñecas y su sistema precolombino," *Arqueología Boliviana* (1985); Max Portugal Ortiz, *La arqueología de la región del Río Beni* (La Paz: Ed. Casa Municipal de la Cultura Franz Tamayo, 1978); Max Portugal Ortiz, "Informe de la prospección arqueológica efectuada en la Provincia Camacho del Departamento de La Paz," *Arqueología Boliviana* 2 (1985).

Tuichi Rivers. Although the Incas used these trails extensively, it is generally agreed that Tiwanaku first developed them. A nineteenth-century source, the Spanish explorer Fray Nicolás Armentia also saw a “calzada,” which could be interpreted as a road or a causeway from Apolo (in the last spurs of the Andes) to the Tacana mission of San José de Uchupiamonas.⁷² The term *calzada*, though, could be interpreted as an Amazonian unpaved causeway, as opposed to an Andean paved road. Thierry Saignes has also pointed out that large numbers of Amazonian animals (snakes, macaws, monkeys, jaguars) appear in both the iconography and the burial grounds of Tiwanaku.⁷³ Yet, as Higuera-Hare points out, the easternmost gorges of some of the Cochabamba valleys have typically Amazonian fauna and flora and the Amazonian ecosystem was probably more widespread before the intensive agriculture, soil erosion and deforestation of the Inca and Spanish expansion into the area.⁷⁴

In sum, in pre-Inca times the Tiwanaku state and its predecessors seem to have had intense cultural and trade exchanges with the lowlands. Although there is still a lively debate about the nature and rationale behind these exchanges and of Tiwanaku’s “imperial” expansion, historical and archeological evidence has conclusively demonstrated the existence of Tiwanaku influence over a wide area that bridges the Andean, Amazonian and Chaco cultural macro-regions. The linguistic and ethnic

⁷² Nicolás Armentia, "Diario del viaje al Madre de Dios en los años 1884-1885 en calidad de comisionado, para explorar el Madre de Dios, y su distancia al Río Acre y para fundar algunas misiones entre las tribus araanas," in *Exploraciones y noticias hidrográficas de los ríos del Norte de Bolivia*, ed. M. Ballivián (La Paz: Imp. de "El Comercio," 1890), 13-14.

⁷³ Saignes, *Los Andes orientales*, 8.

⁷⁴ Alvaro Higuera-Hare, "Prehispanic Settlement and Land-use in Cochabamba, Bolivia" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1996), 72.

makeup of the members of the Tiwanaku polity is also under debate. Although earlier research believed that the main language of the Tiwanaku state was Pukina, recent scholarship has concluded that most of Tiwanaku was indeed Aymara-speaking.⁷⁵ Yet, sculptures and portrait-like ceramic figurines reflect a bewildering variety of human types, costumes and headdresses, which seem to confirm that Tiwanaku was indeed at the center of a complex kaleidoscope of cultures and possibly languages. After Tiwanaku's fall (around 1000 AD), the Southern Andes became organized into smaller polities, which continued, to a certain extent, the Tiwanaku cultural practices. The most known of these cultures is the Mollo culture which occupied a large stretch of the Eastern slope of the Andes from the Peruvian Carabaya range, passing through Apolobamba and the Yungas and ending in Samaipata. The Mollo culture was in a strategic position to harness the different products of the vertical archipelago and constructed impressive irrigation channels, aqueducts and terraces that took advantage of the abrupt descent of the Andes into the lowlands. Its most important site is Iscanwaya, at the edge of the La Paz's Cordillera Real near the Kallahuaya heartland. Unlike Tiwanaku, Iscanwaya and other Mollo sites display extremely sturdy stone military fortifications that indicate the need to protect themselves against the raids of lowland groups.

Until the fifteenth-century Inca conquest, the Andean part of Bolivia was divided into multiple mostly Aymara-speaking chiefdoms that were very culturally similar to

⁷⁵ The main defenders of the Pukina thesis are the Peruvians Alfredo Torero, *El quechua y la historia social andina* (Lima: Universidad Ricardo Palma, Dirección Universitaria de Investigación, 1974) and Waldemar Espinosa Soriano, "Los fundamentos lingüísticos de la etnohistoria andina y comentarios en torno al anónimo de 1604," *Revista Española de Antropología Americana* X (1980). Many Bolivian archeologists and David L. Browman, "Titicaca Basin Archaeolinguistics: Uru, Pukina and Aymara AD 750-1450," *World Archaeology* 26, no. 2 (1994), favor an Aymara thesis.

each other and, according to later sources, were constantly at war among themselves.⁷⁶ Like their Tiwanaku predecessors, they based their wealth on a mixture of high-yielding agriculture and huge herds of Andean camelids. As discussed above, these Kolla or Aymara chiefdoms operated under the vertical archipelago strategy and tended to harness resources from different ecological niches that ranged from the Pacific coast to the Eastern valleys and lowlands. The nature of the vertical archipelago and the *salpicado* or mosaic settlement patterns of Andeans make the idea of a “frontier” problematic. There was indeed highland settlement in the Yungas and in the frontier between the Interandean valleys and the lowlands. According to Allison Spedding, the exact date of Aymara penetration in the Yungas of La Paz is not known but she claims that it probably took place in the twelfth century.⁷⁷ The main reason for this settlement was the cultivation of coca, but we do not know anything about how cultivation was organized before the arrival of the Incas. Although sources refer to the Yungas ethnicity, this is a generic term that refers to inhabitants of the Yungas ecological zone (both in the coast and the Andes) and we do not have much information whether they were Andeans or Amazonian. The Southern Andean frontier presents a similar problem. Recent studies have described the existence of “indios de arco y flecha” in the Southern Andes and we may assume that many members of the Charcas confederation such as the Chuis and Chichas were very

⁷⁶ The most complete study of the Aymara or Kolla chiefdoms (or kingdoms) is Thérèse Bouysse-Cassagne, *La identidad aymara: aproximación histórica (siglo XV, siglo XVI)* (La Paz: HISBOL; IFEA, 1987).

⁷⁷ Alison Spedding, *Wachu wachu: cultivo de coca e identidad en los Yungas de La Paz* (La Paz: Hisbol; CIPCA; Cocayapu, 1994), 12.

influenced by the (Arawak) Chané culture of the lowlands.⁷⁸

The other major hydraulic civilization in present Bolivian territory was in the Llanos de Moxos. Although there were Jesuit and colonial references to the prehistoric earth works of the Moxos region, neither archeologists nor historians paid any attention to them until the twentieth century. In the early twentieth century both Alfred Métraux and Erland Nordenskiöld discussed the prehistory of the Llanos de Moxos.⁷⁹ During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, international teams of archeologists systematically mapped and dated the hydraulic complexes of the Moxos plains using advanced techniques and broadcast their findings. They concluded that Moxos had one of the most developed hydraulic civilizations in the pre-Hispanic world.⁸⁰

To a certain extent, assumptions about Moxos parallel those of Tiwanaku. Scholars long held the view that the Amazonian environment could not sustain advanced

⁷⁸ See, e.g. Rossana Barragán Romano, Ana María Presta, and Tristan Platt, "¿Indios de arco y flecha? Entre la historia y la arqueología de las poblaciones del norte de Chuquisaca, siglos XV-XVI. Espacio, etnias, frontera, atenuaciones políticas en el Sur del Tawantinsuyo," *Histórica* 21, no. 2 (1997).

⁷⁹ Their most significant works in English are Erland Nordenskiöld, *The Ethnography of South-America Seen from Mojos in Bolivia*, [1st AMS] ed. (New York: AMS Press, 1979), and Alfred Métraux, *The Native Tribes of Eastern Bolivia and Western Matto Grosso* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1942).

⁸⁰ See Denevan, *The Aboriginal Cultural Geography of the Llanos de Mojos of Bolivia*; William M. Denevan, *La geografía cultural aborigen de los Llanos de Mojos* (La Paz: "Juventud," 1980); Kenneth Lee, "7.000 años de historia del hombre de Mojos: agricultura en pampas estériles: informe preliminar," *Universidad Beni* (1979); Horacio Adolfo Calandra and Susana Alicia Salceda, "Amazonia Boliviana: Arqueología de los Llanos de Mojos," *Acta Amazónica* 34, no. 2 (2004). For examples of Clark Erickson's voluminous output in English and Spanish, see Erickson, "Applications of Prehistoric Andean Technology: Experiments in Raised Field Agriculture, Huatta, Lake Titicaca 1981-82;" Erickson, "Raised-Field Agriculture in the Lake Titicaca Basin: Putting Ancient Andean Agriculture Back to Work;" Clark Erickson, "Archaeological Methods for the Study of Ancient Landscapes of the Llanos de Mojos in the Bolivian Amazon," in *Archaeology in the American Tropics: Current Analytical Method and Applications*, ed. Peter Stahl (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1995); Clark Erickson, *Lomas de Ocupación en los Llanos de Moxos*, 1996, Comisión Nacional de Arqueología, Montevideo, Uruguay; Erickson, "Los caminos prehispánicos de la Amazonía boliviana;" Clark Erickson, "The Domesticated Landscapes of the Bolivian Amazon," in *Time and Complexity in Historical Ecology, Studies in the Neotropical Lowlands*, ed. William L. Balée and Clark Erickson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

civilizations or large population densities, due to unsuitable soil and climate conditions. The fact that during the nineteenth century unsophisticated hunters and gatherers who were mostly living in the Stone Age inhabited most of the basin seems to support this view. Nineteenth-century explorers also mythologized the “pristine” nature of Amazonia’s rainforest and their inhabitants.⁸¹ Betty Meggers was responsible for advancing the theory that the Amazonian environment was a “counterfeit paradise” and that the lushness of the rain forest hid extremely harsh conditions for agriculture. She also explained that any advancement occurred through the influence of Andean civilizations.⁸² Besides a lack of permanent agriculture, Amazonians seemed to lack two important aspects of civilization, metals and stone architecture. Findings of “terra preta” sites that indicated thousands of years of agriculture throughout Amazonia challenged this view. As Clark Erickson points out, prehistorical mounds have been found in Marajó Island in the mouth of the Amazon, in the Orinoco basin, some areas of Colombia, in the Ecuadorian Amazon, and even in the Pantanal.⁸³ Anne Roosevelt, among others, has also shown that most Amazonians were agriculturalists and that the “primitive’ hunters and gatherers became so in order to survive warfare and invasion. This is particularly evident in Bolivia, where many of the supposedly “stone age” hunters and gatherers (Jora, Sirionó and Yuqui) are of Guaraní stock, are the descendants of very skillful maize

⁸¹ See William M. Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, no. 3 (1992).

⁸² Meggers, *Amazonia: Man and Culture in a Counterfeit Paradise*.

⁸³ Erickson, *Lomas*, 208.

agriculturalists, and are in fact recent refugees of the rain forest.⁸⁴ Antonio Porró has reported a similar “regressive revolt” in the Brazilian Amazon among the Kayapó.⁸⁵ Chapter 6 deals in detail with the ethnic make-up of the Bolivian lowlands in the nineteenth century, but it is important to note that when rubber tappers encountered “savages,” these ethnic groups had been in contact with the colonial world for centuries and had fled to the Amazonian frontier to escape missions and colonization.

The Moxos hydraulic complexes have not been completely quantified, but, according to Roberto Langstroth Porkin, they may well be among the world’s largest prehistoric agricultural complexes.⁸⁶ The *terraplenes* or raised flooded fields are, in principle, very similar to the Tiwanaku *suka kollos*, even though they were constructed in a very different environment. Although the tropical environment makes it difficult to analyze crop remains, researchers have assumed that their builders planted the crops that Spaniards found in the area: bitter manioc, maize, peanuts, sweet potatoes, peanuts and squashes. Besides *terraplenes*, there are extensive *lomas* or mounds, artificial channels, causeways and even fish weirs. Besides controlling the flood and drought patterns of the savanna, these complexes eased transportation both by foot and by canoe and provided food surpluses. According to the Jesuit Eder, in the eighteenth century the Baure were

⁸⁴ See Betty J. Meggers, "Environmental Limitation on the Development of Culture," *American Anthropologist* 56, no. 5 (1954), and Meggers, *Amazonia: Man and Culture in a Counterfeit Paradise*.

⁸⁵ Antônio Porró, "As crônicas do Rio Amazonas. Notas etno-históricas sobre as antigas populações indígenas da Amazônia," in *Amazonian Indians from Pre-History to Present; Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Anna Roosevelt (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994).

⁸⁶ Roberto Langstroth Porkin, "Forest Islands in an Amazonian Savanna in Northeastern Bolivia" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1996), 14.

still using fortified *lomas* and channels as defense from their Guarayú enemies.⁸⁷ In order to support this hydraulic civilization, the savanna must have supported a population greater than anywhere in the Neotropics. One of the classic assumptions of the concept of hydraulic societies is that they automatically lead to imperial states. Yet, there are some disagreements about how to classify the political organization of the ancient Moxos. As Josep Barnadas shows, the Moxos were upgraded from tropical forest tribes (in the 1940s) to theocratic and militaristic chiefdoms in the 1960s. Later, they have been included in the general Amazonian “tropical forest culture.”⁸⁸ At the time of contact, the Moxos and the Baures had chieftains and specialized religious leaders, yet they complemented agriculture with hunting, fishing and gathering. According to Franz Eder, agriculture in the savanna had been abandoned in favor of agriculture in the gallery forests and islands, using the traditional tropical slash and burn system.⁸⁹ It is possible that this was due to a massive population decline that occurred before contact with missionaries or that it was facilitated by the use of metal tools that also accompanied missionization. To a certain extent, the Moxo became increasingly “Amazonian” since contact. The rubber boom accelerated this trend and, as chapter 6 describes, in response to the pressures of the rubber boom, the Moxo and other savanna groups abandoned their mission towns and settled in the Northern Amazonian forests or in the inaccessible areas near the Chapare River. On the other hand, those who became involved in the rubber boom had already adapted to the Amazonian environment and were able to survive the

⁸⁷ Francisco Javier Eder and Josep M. Barnadas, *Breve descripción de las reducciones de Mojos, ca. 1772* (Cochabamba: Historia Boliviana, 1985), 105

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, XXXII.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

harsh Amazonian environment.

To date, there has not been a systematic timeline of Beni archaeology. Carbon readings of the ceramics suggest that construction started 2,700 years ago and continued until two to three hundred years before the arrival of the Spanish. In some areas use and maintenance of both *lomas* and channels continued through the colonial period and, to a certain extent, to this day. However, archaeologists have not been able to establish the identity of the original builders. The first excavations took place in predominantly Arawak areas (Moxos and Baures) but subsequent excavations have found evidence of anthropogenic manipulation in areas that are at present inhabited by Pano, Guaraní, Chapacura and many of the isolated ethnic groups of the area.⁹⁰ According to Donald W. Lathrap, South American agriculture might have originated in central Brazil about 5,000 years ago and it spread from there throughout Amazonia and the Andes. It would seem that Proto-Arawak migrated to the Upper Amazon around 500 AD, which seems to indicate that the Beni earthworks were originally built by non-Arawak indigenous people who might be related to the many isolated language groups of the area such as the Movima, Cayuvava, Canichana and Itonama.⁹¹ Yet, the extent of Arawak presence in Bolivia is impressive. Besides, in the Moxos and Baures savanna, Arawak groups exist as far as present-day northern Argentina and southern Bolivia. The Chané, for example, established extremely productive maize agriculture in these areas. The Arawak-speaking Paiconeca, Saraveca and Paunaca also existed among the Chiquitos until the end of the

⁹⁰ Erickson, *Lomas de Ocupación en los Llanos de Moxos*, 215.

⁹¹ Donald Ward Lathrap, *The Upper Amazon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970), 77.

nineteenth century and it seems like one of the extinct languages of the Andean piedmont, Lapacho or Apolista, was also Arawakan.⁹²

Even if we take into account trade and cultural links between the Andes and Amazonia, there is no evidence of any Tiwanaku “expansion” or “imperialism” in the area. There is overwhelming evidence that the peoples of the Beni were of unmistakable Amazonian origin and that their culture was not imported from a “higher” (in terms of both altitude and cultural development) civilization. Besides the international archaeological wars, this information has also caused tensions within Bolivia. According to Beni author Rodolfo Pinto Parada, the Bolivian state was extremely reluctant to fund, or even acknowledge Beni archeology. Archeological research in the Moxos areas has been carried out by foreign archeologists and has been mostly been funded from outside. The *Instituto Boliviano de Arqueología* even refused to publish the results of carbon tests. The Moxos findings were supposed to be in contradiction to the official policy, in place since the 1952 Revolution, which considered Tiwanaku to be the “cradle of civilization” in the Americas.⁹³ Of course, such neglect has fueled the department’s anti-centralist feelings.

Humans settled in both the high and lowlands for millennia and in both areas, they managed to alter extremely difficult environments. Yet, the history of present-day Bolivia cannot be understood without taking into account three waves of invasions that took place (if we take into account the long view of history) almost simultaneously in the

⁹² Jürgen Riester, *Zúbaka = La chiquitanía: visión antropológica de una región en desarrollo* (Cochabamba: Ed. Los Amigos del Libro, 1986), 31; Willem F.H and Pieter C. Muysken Adelaar, *The Languages of the Andes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 422.

⁹³ Rodolfo Pinto Parada, *Pueblo de leyenda* (Trinidad: Ed. "Tiempo del Beni," 1988), 283.

late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries: The Incas, the Guaraní and the Castilians.

The Inca invasion of the Aymara chiefdoms was initiated under Pachakuti Inca Yupanki (1438-1471), who managed to incorporate the heavily populated and wealthy areas around Lake Titicaca to his empire. Although there was bitter resistance to the northern invaders, Tupa Inca Yupanki (1471-1493) incorporated the province of Qollasuyu to one of its four quarters and continued his conquest of the southern Interandean valleys. He used Aymara troops to carry out his conquest of the northern reaches of the empire (what is today Ecuador and Southern Colombia). His successor Wayna Inca Qhapaq (1464-1527), after facing several rebellions, continued the policy of establishing Quechua-speaking *mitmaquna* or colonizers in the fertile maize-producing valleys of Cochabamba and in frontier areas. Through a “blood pact,” or a tribute of soldiers, the Aymara lords were able to keep, to a certain extent, their culture, language and political organization intact throughout Inca domination.⁹⁴

During the sixteenth century, waves of small groups of Guaraní-speaking warriors invaded the eastern edge of the Inca Empire. There is some debate about the actual chronology, motivation and origin of these warriors. They came following different routes from Southern Brazil and Paraguay, attracted by the myth of *Kandire* (the land without evil).⁹⁵ During these migrations, they became a hybrid culture. In the Bolivian

⁹⁴ Larson, *Colonialism and Agrarian Transformation*, 25-31.

⁹⁵ For a discussion of these invasions, see Erland Nordenskiöld, "The Guaraní Invasion of the Inca Empire in the Sixteenth Century: An Historical Indian Migration," *Geographical Review* 4, no. 2 (1917); for a classic analysis of the land without evil, see H  l  ne Clastres, *La terre sans mal: le proph  tisme Tupi-Guarani* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975); for a recent critique of the concept of *Kandire*, see Catherine Julien, "Kandire in Real Time and Space: Sixteenth Century Expedition from the Pantanal to the Andes," *Ethnohistory* 54, no. 2 (2007).

province of Cordillera, they mixed with the Arawak-speaking Chané and produced a new Chiriguano identity based on the Guaraní war ethos and a highly productive agriculture of their Chané subordinates. Yet, the Chiriguano of the foothills of the Andes were not the only Guaraní migrants. According to Francisco Pifarré, the Spanish conquistador of Santa Cruz Ñuflo Chávez brought with him 3,000 Guaraní from the Itatín region of Paraguay who eventually settled in the rain forests between the departments of Beni and Santa Cruz and be called Guarayú.⁹⁶ Although they share a similar language and history, anthropologists distinguish the Guaraní from Cordillera from the Guaraní who settled in the wetlands of Izozog, near Santa Cruz de la Sierra and from the Tapieté who settled in the Gran Chaco along the Argentine and Paraguayan borders. The Amazonian rainforest have also sheltered many small groups of Guaraní-speakers such as the Jorá (extinct), Sirionó and Yuki in the departments of Santa Cruz, Cochabamba and Beni and the recently extinct Pauserna or Guarasugwé who lived along the Iténez River.⁹⁷ Further north in the former Bolivian territories of the present Brazilian states of Acre and Rondônia lived the Karipuná who did not participate in the above migrations and might have acquired Guaraní through the Amazonian *lingua geral* of the Portuguese Jesuit missions.

The Spanish invasion of what would become Upper Peru was two-pronged. The Spanish entered the Inca province of Qollasuyu through Lake Titicaca and defeated the Aymara subjects of the Incas in 1538. In 1539 the first official Spanish town within the

⁹⁶ Pifarré, *Historia de un pueblo*, 30.

⁹⁷ The sad demise of the Pauserna at the end of the twentieth century is chronicled in Jürgen Riester, *Los Guarasug'wé: crónica de sus últimos días* (La Paz: Ed. Los Amigos del Libro, 1977).

Qollasuyu, was founded as Chuquisaca (later Charcas, La Plata and Sucre) in a strategic location that straddled the Altiplano and the Interandean valleys, by authority of Hernando Pizarro himself. Later, the Spanish founded Potosí (1546), La Paz (1548), Cochabamba (1571), Tarija (1574) and Oruro (1606). Another Spanish wave of invaders came from Paraguay and the Río de la Plata region. This wave founded the only city in the Bolivian lowlands, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, in 1561. The exploration and colonization of the Bolivian lowlands reflected this double-pronged nature. There was almost an instant rivalry between the conquistadors that came from Cuzco and Lima and their counterparts from the Río de la Plata. The Gran Chaco, the Pantanal, and numerous hostile indigenous groups made communications with Asunción extremely difficult and even though communication with the western part of the country was far from satisfactory, Santa Cruz became a *gobernación* of the vast Audiencia de Charcas, under the Viceroyalty of Peru. In 1776, because of the Bourbon Reforms, the *gobernación* of Santa Cruz, along with the rest of Charcas, was incorporated into the newly created Viceroyalty of the Rio de la Plata.

As mentioned above, by the time of the Inca invasion the Aymara had penetrated the Yungas to cultivate coca and had had some links with Amazonian peoples. Yet, the very ecology of the Andes led to a “vertical” worldview. The French ethnohistorian Thérèse Bouysse-Cassagne has analyzed the Aymara worldview in terms of a duality between Urcusuyu and Umasuyu that is the highlands areas versus the lower (watered) areas. The inhabitants of the highlands (Aymara) considered themselves a male and superior half whereas the water inhabitants (Yunga and Pukina) were supposed to be the

feminine and inferior half. On the other hand, the inhabitants of the lowlands or *chinchas* were supposed to be savages or beasts. To the inhabitants of the Altiplano, the lower altitudes were, as Thierry Saignes has said a “despised yet necessary world.”⁹⁸ This vision has continued throughout Bolivian history and although Bolivian indigenous peoples from both the highlands and the lowlands have formed political alliances since the 1980s, they have continued to view each other with suspicion.

What was a *chuncho*? The definition varies historically and geographically. Sometimes it was applied as a generic term referring to different groups who happen to be “savage” according to Andean definitions. In a modern Quechua dictionary the term *chuncho* has two definitions “a bellicose people who inhabited the shores of the Amarumayu (the Madre de Dios River) and was conquered by Túpaj Yupanki Inca and, figuratively, “uncivilized, savage.”⁹⁹ The colonial dictionary by Diego González Holguín was not specific about the geographic location of the *chunchos*, they were “a province of the Andes or the war-like Andes” that means that any group who was at war with the Inca empire and who lived in the eastern slope of the Andes (the Antis or Antisuyu) was a *chuncho*. Furthermore the dictionary defines Ante as “the land of the Andes” and *anteruna* or *anti* as “the Indian man of the Andes.” Finally, to conclude, the Antesuyu is

⁹⁸ See Bouysse-Cassagne, *La identidad aymara: aproximación histórica (siglo XV, siglo XVI)*, and her earlier Thérèse Bouysse-Cassagne, “L'espace aymara: Urco et uma,” *Annales (ESC)* 33, no. 5-6 (1978); Saignes, *Los Andes Orientales*, IX.

⁹⁹ Jesús Lara, *Diccionario Qheshwa-Castellano, Castellano-Qheshwa*, 3rd. ed. (Cochabamba: Los Amigos del Libro, 1991), s.v. “chuncho.”

defined as “one of the four parts or divisions of Peru.”¹⁰⁰ The colonial Aymara dictionary of the Jesuit Ludovico Bertonio does not include the word *chunchu* (which is quite common in modern Aymara) but one of the Aymara equivalents of the Spanish word *salvaje* is *anti* and the equivalent of *rústico* is *coca haque* (in modern Aymara *coca jaqui*, or a man who cultivates coca).¹⁰¹ The word *chuncho* or *chunchu* still appears in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century maps and *chuncho* dances are part of the folklore of many Peruvian and Bolivian Andean communities.

In the world map of the indigenous chronicle Guamán Poma de Ayala, the four corners of the Inca Empire seem to be geometrically perfect. The world was a square with Cusco (the navel) in the exact center. Royal roads emerged from Cusco and divided the empire into four *suyus*: Qollasuyu, Chinchaysuyu, Condesuyu and Antisuyu.¹⁰² It is important to note the real meaning of Tawantinsuyu. Most translations mention *tawa* (four) and *suyu* (parts or corners but forget the important *tin* which, according to Lara means together, joined. The Inca state propagated this idealized political and geographical vision over the many ethnic groups that lived through its territory. Yet, Poma de Ayala’s vision neglects the Antisuyu. Even though he provided an almost anthropological-like account of the cities, costumes, mores and folklore of the three other *suyus*, he did not mention any of the cities of the Antisuyu. The nearest he got was to

¹⁰⁰ Diego González Holguín, *Vocabulario de la Lengua General de todo el Perú llamada qqichua o del Inca* (Lima: Universidad Mayor de San Marcos, 1987/1608), s.v. “chunchus,” “Anti,” “anteruna,” “Antesuyo.”

¹⁰¹ Ludovico Bertonio, *Vocabulario de la Lengua Aymara* (Cochabamba: CERES, 1984 /1612), s.v. “rústico,” “salvaje.”

¹⁰² Guamán Felipe de Poma de Ayala, *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno*, ed. Rolena Adorno John V. Murra, Jorge L. Urioste (Madrid: Historia 16, 1987/1615), 1078-79.

describe the city of Mizque, which is in the Cochabamba valleys and he neglected to acknowledge the Yungas that at the time had relatively important urban centers like Chulumani, Songo or Apolobamba or the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. In his world, the lowlands were not important, since they were not at the core of Andean civilization.

Spanish and mestizo chroniclers have described the expeditions that Inca Yupanki and Wayna Kapak carried out beyond the Andean highlands. According to them, these expeditions were extremely difficult because of the unfamiliarity of the new environments. Even though the Incas managed to incorporate part of the lowlands, both around the Madre de Dios River and around the Bolivian Yungas, the Incas were never able to establish themselves in the Amazonian plains or Chile's Araucanía. On the other hand, they had to deal with an almost simultaneous invasion of their southeastern frontier by the Chiriguano and the Spanish. It seems like ecological factors were more important than military factors in these failures. Poma de Ayala repeatedly mentioned "rattlesnakes that jump, and other snakes, tigers, wolves and alligators." Another chronicler described the leper-like *antiunqoy* or "disease of the Andes" (now called *espundia* or leishmaniasis that "such disease has never been seen that destroys the human body with incurable sores and abominable ugliness" and *chujchu* or malaria (introduced by the Spanish and Portuguese)).¹⁰³ These ecological factors continued to be extremely important during the cinchona and rubber booms.

The main reason behind the colonization of the Yungas was coca production. At present coca is an integral part of Andean culture and its ritual use is widespread

¹⁰³ Pedro de Quiroga, *Coloquios de la Verdad* (Valladolid: ICI; Casa Museo de Colón, 1992/1570?), 137.

throughout most of the Andean countries. Most sources have taken the *oidor* Polo de Ondegardo's claim that the Incas monopolized its cultivation and consumption at face value.¹⁰⁴ Yet, recent research has questioned this claim and has demonstrated that coca consumption went beyond the Andes. In fact, coca is indigenous to the Amazon and Orinoco basins and many indigenous groups used it, even in the Caribbean.¹⁰⁵ As mentioned above, it has also been used by all prehistoric civilizations of the Andes. What is true, though, is that the Incas rationalized its production and organized state-run plantations similar to their irrigated maize lands in the Cochabamba valleys. Instead of *mitmaqkuna*, though they used *yanakuna* who were often sent to the coca plantations against their will or as a judicial punishment. According to Pedro Quiroga after conquering an ethnic group or squashing a rebellion, the Incas "whoever stayed alive was sent to cultivate and harvest this coca as an extremely severe form of banishment and punishment."¹⁰⁶ Again, one of the most important symbols of modern Andean identity (especially in Bolivia), is of Amazonian origin. Despite this, the Inca were willing to invest considerably to obtain it.

Despite Andean hostility toward the lowlands, there was quite a bit of cultural interaction. The use of coca is just one example. Another interesting phenomenon is the "appropriation" of lowland culture by the Incas. For example, Poma de Ayala wrote that the Antisuyu "adored the tiger *otorongo* [Quechua for jaguar]. They say that the Inca had taught that to them and that he himself had become an *otorongo* and in this manner gave

¹⁰⁴ Polo de Ondegardo, *El Mundo de los Incas* (Madrid: Historia 16, 1990/1571), 51.

¹⁰⁵ See Joseph A. Gagliano, "The Coca Debate in Colonial Peru," *The Americas* 20, no. 1 (1963); also Spedding, *Wachu wachu: cultivo de coca e identidad en los Yunkas de La Paz*, 11-12.

¹⁰⁶ Quiroga, *Coloquios de la Verdad*, 138

them the rule and they offered burnt snake fat, maize, feathers from birds and coca, they burn them and adore with them the *otorongos*.”¹⁰⁷ According to Alfred Métraux, the jaguar cult was an important part of Baure and Moxo culture and their chiefs were considered jaguars.¹⁰⁸ This is another example of how, despite their assumed superiority, Andean cultures incorporated aspects of lowland culture.

The Spanish and the Chiriguano stopped the Inca advance into the lowlands. Despite Andean prejudices, these two frontiers became, besides war zones, areas of cultural interaction and acculturation. It is not surprising that Quechua is the predominant language of both the southern half of Bolivia (introduced by *mitmaqkuna*) and the northern half of the department of La Paz around Apolo and the Kallawayá region. There has been quite a bit of literature on the use of Quechua in the Peruvian and Ecuadorian lowlands. The Yumbo of Ecuador, for instance, were intermediaries between the Quito highlands, the Amazonian basin, and the Peruvian Quijos had a similar role.¹⁰⁹ At present, for example, the lowland Tacana who live in the border between La Paz and Beni, are divided into Quechua-speakers and Tacana-speakers. It is not clear whether this is due to the Incas or to the use of Quechua by missionaries, but it is noteworthy that even the most influential books on Amazonian or Andean languages do not mention this. Even though Thierry Saignes did not mention Tacana, he admitted that many of the

¹⁰⁷ Poma de Ayala, *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno*, 260.

¹⁰⁸ Alfred Métraux "The Social Organization and Religion of the Mojo and Manasi," *Primitive Man* 16, no. 1/2 (1943): 13.

¹⁰⁹ See, e.g., Frank Salomon, *Native Lords of Quito in the Age of the Incas: the Political Economy of North-Andean Chiefdoms* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), and Michael A. Uzendoski, "The Horizontal Archipelago: The Quijos/Upper Napo Regional System," *Ethnohistory* 51, no. 2 (2004).

disappeared groups of the Bolivian northern foothills such as the Apolista or Aguachiles could also be considered as Quechua-speaking intermediaries.¹¹⁰ There seems to have been a cultural continuum in the Northern Amazonian Inca frontier, which included aspects of Amazonian and Andean culture. As chapter 6 explains, it was precisely these ethnic groups from the Andean piedmont that became involved in the quinine boom and the early rubber boom. Through their location between the Andes and the Amazon, they were able to operate in both environments. The Tacana, in particular, were used as porters to carry cinchona through the steep Apolobamba range and were also used as rubber tappers in the depths of the Amazonian rubber forests. In this case, the rubber boom also led to a Tacana Diaspora, they left their traditional territory at the foot of the Andes and spread throughout the Amazonian regions of the present departments of Beni, La Paz and Pando.

The southern frontier was much more problematic. Although the Incas were able to penetrate as far as the Guapay River near present-day Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the Chiriguano invaders proved to be militarily formidable. The reasons behind their success were two. First, they were highly decentralized and mobile societies that could be described as classical “sociétés contre l’état,” as described by Pierre Clastres.¹¹¹ The lack of a set hierarchy and of a state apparatus made the Inca conquest tactics of co-opting ethnic leaders extremely difficult. Second, the Chiriguano, thanks to their Chané slaves and extremely fertile alluvial soils in the Cordillera streams, had food self-sufficiency

¹¹⁰ Saignes, *Andes Orientales*, 57.

¹¹¹ Pierre Clastres, *La société contre l'État: recherches d'anthropologie politique* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1974).

almost comparable to the Incas.’ According to Francisco Pifarré, it was not uncommon for a small Chiriguano community to have stored bean and maize supplies to last for two years.¹¹² Like in many other areas of the Americas, eventually the Spanish and the Bolivian state managed to defeat the Chiriguano by attacking their food sources. The Incas attempted to protect themselves from the Chiriguano by having a chain of fortifications along their southern frontier.¹¹³ Despite this, there was also some sort of cultural accommodation. The constant flow of runaways and captives from both sides also created according to Pifarré a large number of Quechua-speaking Chiriguanos.¹¹⁴

Even though many of the Spanish colonizers had first contacted the New World through the Caribbean or Central America, which were very loosely similar to the Amazonian lowlands, they inherited Andean prejudices against the lowlands. The conquistadors who had missed the original bounty from the Incas engaged in a frantic search for the myth of El Paitití or El Dorado, which was supposed to be in the middle of Moxos. From 1542 to 1677, Thierry Saignes lists forty-six chronicles and testimonies of Spanish *entradas* or expeditions into the lowlands originating in different Spanish cities of colonial Peru.¹¹⁵ Although El Dorado was never found in Moxos, many of the streams that led to it contained gold that had been marginally exploited by the Incas. Yet, the major problem was the lack of workers. The Incas, like their Spanish and republican successors, considered the lowlands to be a desert. The Inca Garcilaso de la Vega

¹¹² Pifarré, *Historia de un pueblo*, 42.

¹¹³ For a recent analysis of this frontier, see Alconini, "The Southeastern Inka Frontier against the Chiriguanos: Structure and Dynamics of the Inka Imperial Borderlands."

¹¹⁴ Pifarré, *Historia de un pueblo*, 150.

¹¹⁵ Saignes, *Los Andes orientales*, 37-39.

justified the Incas' failure in the lowlands by stating that the Incas had "wandered for five years in those mountains and they had not seen any Indian to conquer or even land to cultivate and populate, only mountains, rivers and a perpetual rain."¹¹⁶ The Spanish chronicler Cabello Balboa held the opinion that gold is important, but that in order to extract it there was a need for abundant manpower and, therefore, "the true and more lasting wealth [...] is the abundance of many Indians."¹¹⁷

The lowlands never contained as much population as the Andes, but the tropical climate compounded the demographic collapse of the Amazonian Indians. Most research confirms that the Amazonian population was higher than previously thought and that European diseases coming from coastal Brazil and the Andes before human contact with Europeans probably devastated it. Most accounts of epidemics in the Amazon concentrate on the classical diseases of the Columbian exchange, such as smallpox and influenza. These two diseases continued to devastate lowland indigenous peoples throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Discussing Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the Jesuit Francisco de Alfaro complained that in 1604 there were not any Indians within fifty leagues of the city even though before their population had been very high.¹¹⁸ In the early nineteenth century the French traveler Alcides d'Orbigny, for example, witnessed how smallpox had reduced the population of the mission town of San Ramón

¹¹⁶Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *Historia General del Perú* (Lima: Librería Internacional del Perú, 1960/1617), 210.

¹¹⁷ Miguel Cabello de Balboa, *Carta del P. Miguel Cabello de Balboa al Virrey Marqués del Cañete sobre la conversión de los indios chunchos* (Quito: Ed. Ecuatoriana, 1945 [n.d.]), 82.

¹¹⁸ Included in Gabriel Feyles, Marcelo Terceros Banzer, and Hernando Sanabria Fernández, eds., *Actas Capitulares de Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 1634-1640, versión paleográfica del manuscrito original* (La Paz: UAGRM, 1977), Ordinarias de Alfaro, 5-X-1604, 119.

de Moxos by fifty per cent.¹¹⁹

Even though we tend to associate malaria with the Amazon, it looks like malaria became prevalent in the Beni with Creole penetration during the nineteenth century. During the colonial period, it mainly attacked urban settlements in the Interandean valleys, which with their high population densities and irrigation ditches favored its spread. According to the intendant Francisco de Viedma, malaria was not prevalent in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra until merchants from the town of Chillón, near Comarapa, introduced it. He also mentioned that malaria was very common in the relatively and high dry town of Vallegrande. Finally, he lamented how malaria had managed to de-populate the once prosperous town of Mizque in the valleys of Cochabamba and that many of its inhabitants seemed to be born “deaf, mute and dwarves with physical defects who are called dumb because they are not capable of receiving the sacraments”¹²⁰ after generations of endemic malaria. When d’Orbigny visited the missions of northern La Paz, for example, he claimed that malaria had just appeared in 1830 and he claimed it was an effect of deforestation.¹²¹ This was a very accurate observation, since deforestation often leads to an improved habitat for the breeding of the anopheles mosquito.

Although penetration to the lowlands originated in La Paz, and to a lesser extent in Cochabamba, the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra became the spearhead for the

¹¹⁹ Alcide Dessalines d'Orbigny, *Descripción geográfica, histórica y estadística de Bolivia* (Paris: Librería de los Sres. Gide, 1845), 267.

¹²⁰ Francisco de Viedma, *Descripción geográfica y estadística de la provincia de Santa Cruz de la Sierra* (Buenos Aires: Imp. del estado, 1836), 55, 68 & 44, respectively.

¹²¹ Orbigny, *Descripción geográfica*, 43.

exploration of the Amazon and the Chaco. The city of Santa Cruz was the only Spanish city located in the Amazonian basin that was not founded as a mission.. Its main purpose was to serve as a center for exploration and to contain the Chiriguano and Portuguese threats to the empire. Since its early days, it was a frontier outpost unlike any other. The city, for example, was not subject to normal Council of the Indies regulations and according to the Spanish historian José María Recio, it granted *encomiendas* to illegitimate children, mestizos and mulattos alike.¹²² The main activity of its inhabitants was the military. According to Francisco Viedma, *cruceños* “were adept at the martial arts and are faithful and loyal vassals of the king, they obey whatever their superiors command them, there are no better soldiers in Peru. The campaigns against the Portuguese, Chiriguano and the past rebellion attest to this truth.”¹²³

The early disappearance of indigenous groups in the area and the influx of conquistadors from Paraguay also gave Santa Cruz a special identity. According to Viedma, the only language spoken in Santa Cruz was Castilian and he suggested that the natives of other cities of the Sierra might follow its example and use it instead of their original languages. However, the frontier nature of the society also presented some problems. As indicated by Viedma, property rights were non-existent and *cruceños* just occupied land to pasture their cattle or to carry out slash and burn agriculture without taking into account due process. Their property ended when they abandoned the area to

¹²² José María García Recio, *Análisis de una sociedad de frontera: Santa Cruz de la Sierra en los siglos XVI y XVII* (Seville: Excma. Diputación Provincial de Sevilla, 1988), 214-16.

¹²³ Viedma, *Descripción geográfica*, 73.

move elsewhere or when somebody else wanted to occupy the same territory.¹²⁴ Land property issues also became extremely important during the nineteenth century. Despite liberal efforts, neither the Indians nor the “whites” of the department of Beni were particularly interested in acquiring property rights. Low population densities, unexplored expanses of land and an economy based on cattle ranching, itinerant slash and burn agriculture and the extraction of natural products from the forest, explain this lack of interest, which contrasted with the Andes’ struggles over property titles.

Lacking minerals and a numerous indigenous population, Santa Cruz de la Sierra became, in José Luis Roca’s term, a *ciudad capitana* where slave raids and pillaging became a way of life. However, despite its precarious property laws, it eventually became a supplier of hides, sugar cane and cotton to the Andean towns and mines. Yet, the Spanish crown became increasingly interested in the Potosí-based mining economy and it curbed expeditions to look for El Dorado in its Amazonian frontiers and seemed to be content with leaving the remaining indigenous populations of the lowlands in the hands of Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries. Subsequent chapters deal with the history of the famous Franciscan and Jesuit *reducciones* of Moxos, Chiquitos, and the Chaco, as well as the lesser known Missions of Northern La Paz and Guarayos. The constant war against the Chiriguano, which lasted until the end of the nineteenth century, produced a lowland version of the Andean *cholos*, who would become *cambas* in Santa Cruz and

¹²⁴ Ibid., 74 & 67.

Beni and *chapacos* in Tarija.¹²⁵

Among the many Spanish introductions to the Bolivian lowlands, cattle thrived particularly well in Moxos because, according to Porkin, they were originally from the Andalusian wetlands.¹²⁶ Cattle were later introduced into the Chaco and were responsible for the loss of much of the Chané and Chiriguano agriculture. As mentioned before, the Spanish also introduced the cultivation of sugar cane and cacao, which spread prodigiously throughout the rainforest. Spanish hacendados also gradually controlled the Yungas coca production and even introduced it into Apolo and the warmer valleys of Cochabamba. Coca became intimately related with the boom and bust cycles of the Bolivian mining industry and one of Viedma's recommendations was to introduce it to the recently discovered Yuracaré Yungas in what is now the main region for illegal coca production, the Chapare.¹²⁷

In conclusion, during their history, the Bolivian lowlands have interacted with the highlands intensely. This chapter has tried to trace the prehistory and early colonial history of a complex region and to demonstrate that the history of the lowlands is not a "discovery" of the late twentieth century. The Bolivian lowlands are as varied and

¹²⁵ The term *cholo* is used throughout the Andes (especially in Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador) to describe a mestizo (an individual of mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage). In the nineteenth century, it had negative connotations and it stressed the indigenous cultural heritage of these individuals. Originally, the term *camba* was used to describe the mixture of Guarani and Spanish in the Dept. of Santa Cruz. In nineteenth century Santa Cruz and Beni, *camba* was used to describe lowland mestizos or incorporated (or missionized) indigenous groups such as the Moxo or the Chiquitano. Non-incorporated groups were *salvajes* or *bárbaros*. At present, the term *camba* is used to describe people from the Departments of Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando, regardless of ethnicity, and it is often used in a derogatory sense by *collas* from the highlands. *Chapaco* is a similar term but it refers to the Spanish-speaking mestizos of the southern department of Tarija. See Saignes, *Ava y karai*, 80-82 and Peña Hasbún, *La permanente construcción de lo cruceño: un estudio sobre la identidad en Santa Cruz de la Sierra*.

¹²⁶ Langstroth Porkin, "Forest Islands in an Amazonian Savanna in Northeastern Bolivia," 47.

¹²⁷ Viedma, *Descripción geográfica*, 87.

complex as the highlands and have been neglected by most Bolivianists. The following chapter explores the history of the lowlands during the nineteenth century and how it relates to two extremely powerful economic moments, the *cascarilla* boom and the rubber boom that suddenly inserted the region into the international world market and brought about deep and lasting cultural, economic and environmental transformations of one of Latin America's more isolated frontiers. In Bolivia, the highlands and the lowlands have interacted since pre-Columbian times. Yet the fact that the Inca, Spanish and republican states had their centers of power in the western highlands of the country has distorted the real nature of these interactions. The lowlands have been viewed as unknown appendages of the highlands and this view continues to shape Bolivia's political and cultural life.

CHAPTER 3. FROM CASCARILLEROS TO SIRINGUEROS

This chapter discusses the insertion of the Bolivian lowlands into the industrializing Atlantic economies through two tropical commodities: cinchona bark and natural rubber. The former was needed for combating malaria when European (and US) imperialism expanded into the tropics of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The latter fueled the industrial revolution, especially after the unprecedented growth of wheeled transportation (bicycles and automobiles) in the early twentieth century. These two products were produced in different ecological niches of Bolivia. Cinchona was a product of the eastern slope of the Andes or Yungas whereas natural rubber was abundant in the lowland Amazonian forests. Although Bolivia held a short-lived monopoly over cinchona production, neither cinchona nor rubber was specifically Bolivian, other countries shared its production. In the case of cinchona, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador were keen competitors of Bolivia and in the case of natural rubber, Bolivia had to compete with Brazil and other Amazonian countries like Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and even the Guyanas and Venezuela. In both cases, Bolivia produced a high quality product but it was hampered by transportation problems. This was particularly true after the loss of the Pacific coast to Chile in the War of the Pacific (1879-84). Both commodities shared

similar fates, colonial powers managed to transplant the seeds and grow them more efficiently in their tropical colonies, thus collapsing the short-lived booms. This chapter deals with the transition between the cinchona export economy and the early days of the rubber boom. It analyzes the role that explorers (foreign and Bolivian) had in increasing geographical knowledge of one of Latin America's least-known regions and how their explorations dovetailed with the export booms of the lowlands. It then briefly delves into the characteristics of the cinchona boom and ends by explaining how the Bolivian rubber industry developed and how it interacted with the Brazilian rubber industry. Finally, it looks at how some patterns that had been typical of the cinchona industry repeated themselves during the rubber boom. Even though cinchona and rubber were theoretically sustainable, cinchona and rubber fever eventually destroyed resources and labor.

As discussed previously, in Bolivia the early nineteenth century was, to a certain extent, a continuation of the colonial period. The export of silver continued to be the mainstay of the highland economy and the colonial cities of La Plata (now Sucre) and Potosí continued to be the centers of power. Only after the Federal War civil war (1898-99), the economic and political power of Bolivia shifted toward the tin-producing regions of Oruro and La Paz. The triumph of the Liberal party, which, like many of its Latin American counterparts, was a strong proponent of free trade and emphasized progress through the development of export economies, accompanied this shift. During the nineteenth century, the industrial Revolution and the new wave of European imperialism and colonialism brought the Bolivian lowlands into this export market. In the first half of

the century, British, French and Dutch expansion into malaria-infested Southern Asia required a steady supply of quinine, which was, at the time, the only drug capable of combating it. Quinine was extracted from the cinchona bark, which grew naturally in the eastern slopes of the Andes from Colombia to Bolivia. Bolivia's variety of bark, *cinchona calisaya* was of the highest quality and, as a result, Bolivia became a major exporter of the bark and held a virtual monopoly until the 1850s. Transportation problems and political unrest led to a deterioration of this monopoly. When Bolivia proved to be an unreliable supplier other countries, such as Peru and especially Colombia, took over Bolivia's markets abroad. Originally, the collection of *cascarilla* was concentrated on the Yungas of La Paz and the province of Caupolicán but eventually it expanded into the Cochabamba Yungas, the Chapare region and the upper Mamoré and Beni Rivers in Moxos. Its main distribution center was the town of Sonata in the department of La Paz, which was strategically located between the lowlands and the Pacific export routes. For the first time in history, a significant area of the Bolivian lowlands was inserted into the world economy. The quinine boom (1850-1870) led to a renewed interest in the potential of the lowlands and aggravated the debate between protectionism and laissez faire economics. As seen below, it also paved the way for the next Bolivian boom and bust cycle: Bolivia's rubber boom (1880-1920).

Exploration of the Bolivian Lowlands

The Swedish ethnologist Erland Nordenskiöld visited the Bolivian lowlands after the collapse of the Amazonian rubber boom and stated in the Introduction of his book

Explorations and Adventures in South America, that, despite the frenetic activity of the cinchona and rubber booms and the constant flow of a diverse assortment of explorers of all shades and persuasion throughout the nineteenth century, the Bolivian lowlands were better known in the colonial period than in the early twentieth century.¹ The combination of Portuguese threats on the Spanish American colonial frontier and the mushrooming of Jesuit and Franciscan missions in the lowlands had created a remarkably large body of knowledge of the peripheral regions of the Spanish Empire. The Jesuits, for example, had established the missions of San Simón (1744) and San Martín (1717) in the San Martín River and the missions of San Miguel (1725) and Santa Rosa (1743) in the Iténez River,² areas that were considered extremely dangerous and plagued with hostile Indians well into the twentieth century. Also, in their attempts to link their Paraguayan missions with the Chiquitos, Cordillera and Moxos missions they had also established the short-lived mission of San Ignacio de Zamucos (1723) in the heart of the Chaco among the ancestors of the present-day Ayoreo, who have been “incorporated” in the late twentieth century but allegedly have still “uncontacted” groups.³ In the northern Amazonian frontier, it is also remarkable that the Catholic Church established missions among many of today’s list of “uncontacted” groups. For example, by the end of the eighteenth century the Franciscans had established a number of missions in the province of Caupolicán, which incorporated a large number of ethnic groups of the Piedmont and the nearby Amazonian forests, including the Pacaguara, Araona and Toromona. Some of

¹ Nordenskiöld, *Exploraciones y Aventuras*, 4.

² Block, *Mission Culture*, Table 2, 39.

³ Alcides J. Parejas Moreno and Virgilio Suárez Salas, *Chiquitos: historia de una utopía* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Cordecruz; Universidad Privada de Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 1992), 69.

these ethnic groups were among the ethnic groups that were supposedly “discovered” during the rubber boom. These missionary efforts culminated with the creation of the missions of Santiago de Pacaguaras (1771) and Carmen de Toromonas (1804) in the vast unexplored areas between the Tipuani, Madidi and Madre de Dios Rivers, in the northern border of the present department of La Paz and Peru.⁴ Chapter 6 describes with these indigenous groups in detail and it deals with the mission experience and its links with the rubber boom.

By the end of the colonial period, the colonial government did not have the resources or the economic incentives to advance the secular colonization of the lowlands and they were mostly left to missionaries. Until the cinchona and rubber booms, most towns and villages of the lowlands, with the exception of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, started as missions. The second “conquest” of the lowlands took place throughout the nineteenth century and there were several reasons behind it. Besides the renewed demand for tropical products in a rapidly industrializing and expanding Europe and North America, the War of the Pacific (1879-1884) had had a huge impact on the Bolivian collective psyche (or at least on its rulers’ psyches). The sudden loss of its Pacific coast led to a renewed interest in finding routes to the Atlantic and, therefore, on exploring the huge tracks of land that routinely appeared on maps as “unexplored areas inhabited by savages.”⁵ There was also a renewed interest on preserving and populating the frontiers

⁴ See, e.g., ANB/MYCH, v.15-III Gobierno de Zamora (1795-1892), X (1793-1798), (139), 112 & “Expediente de la reducción de la nación pacaguara.” ANB/MYCH, v. 15-XVIII (1875-1880).

⁵ For a discussion of Bolivian cartography in the early republican period, see Jean-Claude Roux, “El mapa de 1859 y sus significados geográficos,” *Hombre-Sociedad-Espacio* 2 (1993).

to avoid foreign encroachment.⁶

In the nineteenth century, the Bolivian lowlands were one of South America's least known frontiers. Cinchona and rubber fever created the need to attain more geographical knowledge to both harness resources and to avoid foreign control over these resources. Exploration was viewed as an integral part of "nation building" and all Latin American governments offered tacit or tangible support to exploration efforts. In Bolivia, the advance of the internal frontier and exploration went hand in hand. At times explorers opened up new areas to be exploited and at times exploitation preceded official "exploration." The term explorer is very ambivalent. It usually means that the explorer in question has been able to publish or to communicate his findings to a cultured audience or to an institution. Very often, these findings were not necessarily new to the population to be explored. In the case of the Bolivian lowlands, we see a variety of explorers. Many were scientists financed by either the Bolivian or foreign governments. Even though their primary motivation was to expand scientific knowledge, they often presented their findings in a very practical way.

A case in point is the most well known explorer of the Bolivian lowlands, the French anthropologist, botanist, geologist, zoologist and paleontologist Alcide Dessalines d'Orbigny. Paris's *Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle* sent d'Orbigny on an eight-year research trip to South America. In Bolivia, he traveled throughout most of the known lowlands including the Yungas, Chapare, Caupolicán, Santa Cruz, Chiquitos and Moxos.

⁶ For a thorough analysis of the colonial background, see García Jordán, *Cruz y arado*, chap. 8 will deal with republican legislation concerning lands and the frontier. See also Langer, *Economic Change*, 21-22.

His South American findings were published in a monumental series of volumes with the title *Voyage dans l'Amérique Méridionale*. Later, he decided to publish another book in Spanish dedicated to President José Ballivián Segurola (who was President from 1841 to 1847), in which he described the Bolivian lowlands and ended with a series of recommendations for the future development of the area.⁷ Alcide d'Orbigny's combination of science and sound practical advice was remarkable and he continues to be extensively cited in Bolivia. Another French scientific expedition took place under the leadership of the British-born French aristocrat François Louis de la Porte, Comte de Castelnau. In 1843, with the support of aristocratic patrons, Castelanu and a group of scientists sailed from France to Rio de Janeiro and spent four years studying the Amazon and Río de la Plata basins. He was the first European to travel from the Atlantic to Peru and back to the Atlantic.⁸ President Ballivián had demonstrated an interest in Bolivia's eastern territories. He commissioned the Bolivian civil servants Bernardino Vargas, Manuel Higuero and José Manuel Baca to undertake a survey of Bolivia's navigation routes. During the same period the Franco-Argentinean military engineer Felipe Bertrés, who had settled in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, published some materials about the geography of Bolivia.⁹

After creating the new department of Beni by supreme decree on November 18,

⁷ Alcide Dessalines d'Orbigny et al., *Voyage dans l'Amérique Méridionale (le Brésil, la République orientale de l'Uruguay, la république argentine, la Patagonie, la république du Chili, la république de Bolivie, la république du Pérou)*, exécuté pendant les années 1826, 1827, 1828, 1829, 1830, 1831, 1832, et 1833 (Paris; Strasbourg: P. Bertrand; Vè. Levrault, 1835); Orbigny, *Descripción geográfica*.

⁸ Francis Castelnau et al., *Expédition dans les parties centrales de l'Amérique du Sud : de Río de Janeiro à Lima, et de Lima au Para* (Paris: P. Bertrand, 1850).

⁹ See García Jordán, *Cruz y arado*, 258.

1842, Ballivián commissioned its first prefect, José Agustín Palacios to undertake a reconnaissance tour of the new department. Agustín Palacios departed from Cochabamba and explored the Chapare River and its links with Moxos. In another voyage, he navigated the Beni River up to its confluence with the Mamoré in what later was to become Cachuela Esperanza and gathered information about the many *cachuelas* between the Beni and the Madeira.¹⁰ During the same period, Brazilian interest in its borders with Bolivia was also increasing and from 1850 to 1862 the Amazonian *caboclo* Manuel Urbano da Encarnaçãõ who traded with Bolivia and Peru, explored the connections between the Madeira and Purús Rivers, as well as the links between the Madeira and Mato Grosso. His explorations opened up a massive immigration of Brazilian *Nordestinos* to the Acre and Purús regions.¹¹ In 1851 another expedition originated in Brazil. The United States Navy lieutenants Lardner Gibbon and William Lewis Herndon, who under the direction of the United States' Navy entered South America from Lima and, after crossing the Andes, were able to navigate the Iténez and Mamoré Rivers and continued through the Madeira to the Amazon. Their purpose was to explore the navigability of the Amazon and its tributaries in order to further US commercial interests in the region.¹² The well-known Secretary (1863-1888) and, later,

¹⁰ For an account of his travels, see José Agustín Palacios, *Exploraciones realizadas en los ríos Beni, Mamoré y Madera y el Lago Rojo-Aguado durante los años 1844 al 47; Descripción de la Provincia de Moxos* (La Paz: Imp. "El Comercio," 1893).

¹¹ Antonio Quijarro, *Conferencia pronunciada...en el Salón universitario el día 3 de Agosto sobre exploraciones efectuadas en el Río Madre de Dios y sus afluentes* (La Paz: Imp. de "El Comercio," 1890), 4.

¹² William Lewis Herndon, Lardner Gibbon, and United States. Navy Dept., *Exploration of the Valley of the Amazon, Made under Direction of the Navy Department* (Washington: R. Armstrong [etc.] public printer, 1853).

President of the Royal Geographical Society (1893-1905), Sir Clements Markham typifies the links between scientific pursuits and commercial gain. Although he published an astonishing number of books and articles on the history of the Andes or the Amazon, he is best known for having facilitated the smuggling of cinchona seeds out of South America to be planted in the British East Indies. Among his many travels, he is known for having explored the Madre de Dios and Beni Rivers in 1853.¹³ One of Castelnau's companions, the British-born yet French-educated botanist Hughes Algenon Weddell, returned to South America and became a renowned expert on the many varieties of cinchona. He visited the Yungas and Caupolicán and became interested in the properties of coca, quinine and *ipécacuanha*. He was also one of the first Europeans to comment on the rich gold deposits of the Caupolicán rivers.¹⁴

One of the most unexplored routes of the Amazon basin was the links between the Peruvian hinterland and the Amazon basin. Between 1860 and 1862, the Peruvian officer Faustino Maldonado led an epic voyage from Cuzco down the Madre de Dios and Madeira Rivers. Unfortunately, he drowned at the Calderão do Diabolo Cachuela on the

¹³ Among his copious output see, e.g., Clements R. Markham, *Travels in Peru and India while Superintending the Collection of Chinchona Plants and Seeds in South America, and their Introduction into India* (London: J. Murray, 1862); Clements R. Markham, *Peruvian Bark. A Popular Account of the Introduction of Chinchona Cultivation into British India* (London: J. Murray, 1880); Clements R. Markham and Peter Blanchard, *Markham in Peru: the Travels of Clements R. Markham, 1852-1853*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), and Clements R. Markham, "A List of Tribes of the Valley of the Amazons, Including Those on the Main Banks of the Main Stream and All of the Tributaries," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 40 (1910).

¹⁴ See Hugues Algenon Weddell, *Voyage dans le Nord de la Bolivie et dans les parties voisines du Pérou ou visite au district aurifère de Tipuani* (Paris: Chez P. Bertrand, 1853). The rhizomes and roots of the Amazonian bush *ipécacuanha* (*psychotria ipécacuanha*) were used to make syrup of *ipécac*, a powerful emetic to counteract poisoning. There were attempts to introduce it to India but they failed.

Madeira, yet his expedition proceeded to the Amazon and eventually reached Manaus.¹⁵ The same year one of the many victims of José María Linares' dictatorship, the Bolivian Colonel Quintín Quevedo, decided to end the monotony of his ten-year exile in the Brazilian frontier by travelling in a small canoe and documenting the Madeira *cachuelas* and reaching Pará.¹⁶ Brazilian interest in its western frontier prompted the Brazilian Ministry of Public Works to finance an expedition by the German-born engineer Franz Keller and his son Joseph Keller to open a navigation route through the Madeira and Mamoré *cachuelas*. From 1867 to 1868, the expedition traveled from the Amazon River to the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra following the Madeira and Mamoré route, crossed Moxos and produced a profusely illustrated report of the region. One of their conclusions was that a railway would be an easier and cheaper way to by-pass the *cachuelas* than a river canal.¹⁷ Another American, Azanel D. Piper, explored the Purús and Acre Rivers and, through a contract with the Bolivian government, attempted to bring U.S. settlers to the area.¹⁸

In 1868, the Bolivian government invited Colonel George Earl Church, who was at the time in Porfirio Díaz's Mexico, to open up a navigation route to the Atlantic. Church also obtained permission from the Brazilian government to construct a railway and, with the aid of Keller's work, proceeded to explore large tracts of the Upper

¹⁵ Quijarro, *Conferencia pronunciada*, 5.

¹⁶ Juan Francisco Velarde, *Rasgos biográficos del Coronel Quintín Quevedo* (Buenos Aires: Imp. de Mayo, 1868), 21. For an account of his voyage, see Quintín Quevedo, *El Madera y sus cabeceras* (Cochabamba: Tip. de Quevedo, 1861).

¹⁷ Keller, *Amazon and Madeira Rivers*.

¹⁸ Mentioned in George Earl Church, *The Route to Bolivia via the River Amazon. A Report to the Government of Bolivia and Brazil* (London: Waterlow & Sons Ltd., 1877), 14-15.

Amazon. He spent the next thirty years trying to convince investors about the feasibility of his project and eventually retired to London to pursue his literary and scientific pursuits.¹⁹ As mentioned earlier, after a lull in the early republican government, during the late nineteenth century there was a renewed interest in using missions to subdue unincorporated indigenous peoples. There was a whole generation of mostly Franciscans intent on contacting and reducing the last “savages” of Bolivia. In 1857, the French-Catalan missionary Joseph Ciuret attempted to re-found missions among the Araona around the Manuripi River. Later, the Italian Samuel Mancini founded the short-lived mission of El Carmen among the Toromona.²⁰ Another Italian Franciscan, Jesualdo Macchetti, left the Caupolicán missions and attempted to reach Europe through the Mamoré-Madeira route, and wrote a detailed itinerary of his journey.²¹ Following Keller and Church’s footsteps, the British engineer Edward Davis Mathews traveled from the Pacific to the Madeira-Mamoré to report on the possibilities of establishing a railway.²²

The U.S. scientist James Orton organized several scientific expeditions to South

¹⁹ In his struggle to convince investors about the feasibility of his plan, Church left a large amount of material. His private library and many of his writings are kept at Brown University. An example of his first period is *Ibid.*, examples of his later geographical writings are George Earl Church, "Northern Bolivia and President Pando's New Map," *The Geographical Journal* 18, no. 2 (1901), George Earl Church, "The Acre Territory and the Caoutchouc Region of South-Western Amazonia," *The Geographical Journal* 23, no. 5 (1904).

²⁰ See Nicolás Armentia, *Descripción del territorio de las misiones franciscanas de Apolobamba*, oficial. ed. (La Paz: Tip. artística, 1905), and Rafael Sans and Carlos Bravo, *Memoria histórica del Colegio de misiones de San José de la Paz* (La Paz: Impr. de La Paz, 1888).

²¹ Macchetti, *Diario del viaje fluvial*.

²² See Edward Davis Mathews, *Report to the Directors of the Madeira and Mamore Railway Company, Ltd. by Edward D. Mathews, Resident Engineer, upon his Return from Brazil and Bolivia in 1875* (London: Waterlow & Sons, Printers, 1875); Edward Davis Mathews, *Up the Amazon and Madeira Rivers, through Bolivia and Peru* (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1879).

America.²³ In 1876, he explored the upper reaches of the Beni River and the Tahuamanu River and died in Puno because of wounds that he sustained in a crew mutiny.²⁴ During the same period, the British physician Dr. William Evans started his explorations of Caupolicán. A British consortium interested in investing in the region financed him.²⁵ Another member of the Royal Geographical Society, Lord William Chandless, organized several expeditions to the Acre and the Purús with the aid of the Brazilian government.²⁶ The brother of the U.S. explorer Edwin Heath had participated in James Orton's expeditions. Edwin Heath became the official surgeon of George Earl Church's National Bolivian Navigation Company. In 1880, he explored the Beni River and its confluence with the Mamoré and Madre de Dios and became the official discoverer of Cachuela Esperanza. His explorations had a huge impact on the Bolivian rubber industry because he found a direct navigation route from the Upper Beni to the Madeira-Mamoré, thus avoiding the previously used route through the Yacuma River. In spite of that, the main benefactor of Heath's expedition, Nicolás Suárez, dismissed Heath's expedition. In a Riberalta newspaper's interview he explained that Heath's expedition was "incidental," he had just chanced upon Antonio Vaca Díez, Antonio Vásquez and a group of Caripuna Indians who had encouraged him to explore the Beni River. Suárez seemed to imply that

²³ The Ortón River and Barraca Ortón were named after him. In Bolivia, they are usually spelled with an accent. For the purposes of this dissertation, Orton it will be spelled without an accent to refer to the explorer or to the London-based rubber company, and with an accent to refer to the river and settlement. In addition, the spelling *Orthon* often appears in Bolivian documents.

²⁴ For an account of his earlier expeditions, see James Orton, *The Andes and the Amazon; or, Across the Continent of South America* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1871).

²⁵ For a report of his last expedition, see John William Evans, "Expedition to Caupolicán Bolivia, 1901-1902," *The Geographical Journal* 22, no. 6 (1903).

²⁶ William Chandless, "Notes of the River Aquiry: The Principal Affluent of the River Purus," *The Journal of the Royal Geographic Society* 36 (1869).

the Bolivians and the Caripuna already knew about the route, or would have eventually found it.²⁷

The Basque Franciscan Fray Nicolás Armentia combined missionary zeal with a scientific foundation. In 1881, he explored the Madre de Dios and Beni basins and collected invaluable ethnographic and linguistic information that documented, for example, many little-known Amazonian languages. He eventually became bishop of La Paz and a consultant for the Bolivian government.²⁸ After Armentia's expedition, most expeditions were carried out with the intent to facilitate rubber extraction or export. One of Bolivia's rubber industry pioneers, Antonio Vaca Díez, who had helped Edwin Heath, financed expeditions around the Ortón and Madre de Dios Rivers and, upon his return from Europe, lost his life with Peruvian rubber baron Fermin Fitzcarrald who had explored a route between Iquitos and the Purús and Madre de Dios Rivers.²⁹ Fitzcarrald envisaged a railway that would unite Iquitos with the Madre de Dios River. This route was extremely attractive to Bolivian rubber barons, since it would mean that they could export their rubber directly to Iquitos, and thus avoid the Madeira *cachuelas*.³⁰ Arnous H. de Rivière attempted to direct U.S. investment, to the Mapiri gold fields and, later, in

²⁷ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 11 Aug. 1922, n°23.

²⁸ See Nicolás Armentia, *Fray Nicolás Armentia: Diario de sus viajes a las tribus comprendidas entre el Beni y Madre de Dios y en el arroyo de Ivón en los años de 1881 y 1882* (La Paz: Tip. Religiosa, 1883); Armentia, "Diario del viaje al Madre de Dios," Armentia, *Descripción de las misiones franciscanas*.

²⁹ See Antonio Vaca Díez, *Intereses de la Industria, Memorial que presenta al delegado nacional en el Madre de Dios, Acre y Purús el ciudadano Antonio Vaca Díez* (La Paz: Imp. "El Nacional," 1894).

³⁰ Both Nicolás Suárez and Antonio Vaca Díez became Fitzcarrald's business partners. Even though Fitzcarrald's death interrupted this project, there was quite a debate in Bolivia about the viability of this project. The Bolivian government recommended it and suggested the creation of a customs house in the Madre de Dios River; however, the local press dismissed it, claiming that the trip from Riberalta to Iquitos would take seventy days (including the gathering of timber for the steamers). *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 26 Aug. 1897, n°3.

the Upper Beni rubber industry.³¹ In 1887 the Brazilian Antonio Labre, with the aid of the Bolivian *siringuero* Victor Mercier, continued to explore the Madre de Dios basin and established a link between the Madre de Dios and Purús Rivers.³² The German ethnologist Paul Max Von Ehrenreich explored the flora, fauna and peoples of the Purús River in 1888, as part of an expedition that included Goiás and Mato Grosso and Amazonas.³³ From 1890 to 1892 the young Italian scientist Luigi Balzan, member of the Società Geografica Italiana, traveled from Asunción (Paraguay) to the rubber regions of the Mamoré and Beni Rivers and sent a series of detailed articles to his sponsors.³⁴ Like many of his predecessors, José Manuel Pando, who would become Bolivia's first Liberal president and was a hero of the War of the Pacific, spent most of his exile exploring Bolivia's Amazonian territories (1890-92 and 1897-89). President Melgarejo had originally exiled him to Caupolicán and, from there, he explored the Madre de Dios,

³¹ Arnous de H. Rivière, *Exploración de los ríos Mapiri, Challana, Tipuani y Coroico, afluentes del Beni verificada y escrita en el año 1886 por el Barón Arnous de Rivière para la Sociedad Geográfica "Tacna"* (Tacna: Diario "El Tacora," 1887); Arnous de H. Rivière, "Explorations in the Rubber Districts of Bolivia," *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York* 32, no. 5 (1900).

³² See Antônio Rodrigues Pereira Labre, "Exploraciones del Coronel Labre entre las regiones comprendidas entre el Beni y los ríos Madre de Dios y Purús," in *Exploraciones y noticias hidrográficas de los ríos del Norte de Bolivia: Traducciones, reproducciones y documentos inéditos*, ed. Manuel Vicente Ballivián (La Paz: Imprenta "El Comercio," 1890); Antônio Rodrigues Pereira Labre, "Colonel Labre's Explorations in the Region between the Beni and Madre de Dios Rivers and the Purus," *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Recording of Geography* 11, no. 8 (1889), and Víctor Mercier, *Diario de una expedición del Madre de Dios al Acre* (La Paz: Imp. Tribuna, 1894).

³³ Paul Max Alexander Ehrenreich, *Beitrage zur Volkerkunde Brasiliens von Dr. P. Ehrenreich mit 15 Lichtrucktafeln und einer farbenskizze* (Berlin: W. Spemann, 1891).

³⁴ See Luigi Balzan, "Da Asunción a La Paz," *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* 28, no. 1 (1891); Luigi Balzan, "Da Irupana a Covendo," *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* 28, no. 3 (1891); Luigi Balzan, "Da La Paz a Irupana," *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* 28, no. 2 (1891); Luigi Balzan, "Da Covendo a Reyes," *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* 29, no. 4 (1892); Luigi Balzan, "Da Reyes a Villa Bella," *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* 29, no. 5 (1892); Luigi Balzan, "Da Trinidad a Santa Cruz de la Sierra e Corumbá," *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* 31, no. 7 (1894); Luigi Balzan, "Da Villa Bella a Trinidad," *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* 31, no. 6 (1894).

Inambary, and Beni Rivers and eventually navigated the Madeira and Mamoré to reach Pará. He published several accounts of his expeditions.³⁵

The role of the Bolivian state in stimulating exploration was rather limited. In 1886, even the Bolivian Congress acknowledged, “to this point our administration of this area [Exploration] has not followed any plan or system. It has given way to ventures that, due to their magnitude or lack of feasibility studies, have proved to be unattainable.”³⁶ As discussed above, the aid that the Bolivian government gave to national and foreign explorers varied greatly. By the end of the nineteenth century, though, it decided to stimulate exploration. In 1878, for example, the National Constituent Assembly issued a decree ordering that would grant a square league to the first explorers or “capitalists” who had taken possession in places occupied by “barbarians” around the Beni, Purús or Madre de Dios Rivers (in the Amazon basin) or the Bermejo or Pilcomayo Rivers (in the Chaco). Article 2 specifically encouraged the establishment of plantations or rubber export enterprises in the Amazon basin.³⁷ Another law, issued on March 14, 1889, ordered that Scientific Commissions should survey and map the northern and eastern

³⁵ José Manuel Pando, *Viaje a la Región de la goma elástica (N.O. de Bolivia)*, 2nd. ed. (Cochabamba: El Comercio, 1897); José Manuel Pando, *Expedición del Coronel Don José Manuel Pando al Inambary, circular e informe de la comisión* (La Paz: Sociedad Geográfica de La Paz, Imp. "El Telégrafo," 1898). For an official report of his expeditions, see *Informe sobre la expedición Pando por Augusto Roca, Comandante Militar del Río Beni, Riberalta*, 21 Jan. 1893. (ANB/MI 1893 t.268, n°17). For his biography, see Luis S Crespo, *Rasgos biográficos del Presidente de Bolivia, General José Manuel Pando* (La Paz: Imp. de "Los debates," 1899).

³⁶ Juan C. Carrillo, Secretary of the National Congress, to National Congress. Sucre, 7 Aug. 1886. ANB/PL 1887, n°287.

³⁷ Bolivia, Asamblea Nacional Constituyente, *Decreto Supremo*, Signed H. Daza, La Paz, 23 Feb. 1878. ANB/PO (P) Beni 1883.

areas of the Republic.³⁸ In fact, General Pando had taken advantage of this legislation to obtain 400 square leagues (716,844 hectares) of land from the Bolivian government, as a reward for his explorations in the Amazonian frontier. He immediately sold his concessions to his partners Augusto Roca and Antonio Vaca Díez, who became Bolivia's first rubber barons.³⁹

During the next decades, the Bolivian state supported Father Armentia and General Pando's expeditions. It also organized its own expeditions. One of its most remarkable expeditions took place in 1893. An expedition of 150 people, including members of the military, administrators and surveying crews and 350 *arrobas* (4,025 kg) of food and supplies, traveled from La Paz to Riberalta to establish the new National Delegations in the Madre de Dios and Purús and "founded" the city of Riberalta.⁴⁰ As well as establishing the presence of the national government, the expedition carried topographic instruments (which unfortunately were shipwrecked) and its military commander Colonel Andrés S. Muñoz added to the "humanitarian and scientific goals of the expedition a raid against the *guarayo* Indians," who had attacked several rubber settlements.⁴¹

³⁸ Ministerio de Gobierno Bolivia, *Memoria que presenta el Ministro de Gobierno ante las cámaras legislativas* (La Paz: Imp. de "La Tribuna," 1889), ANB (PO) MI 1889.

³⁹ Oswaldo Vaca Díez, *Datos para la historia de la industria de la goma en Bolivia* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: n.p., 1904), 47.

⁴⁰ Although there are regional variations, a Bolivian *arroba* is usually considered to be 11.5 kg William Van Bravant, *La Bolivie* (Paris: J. Lebègue et Cie., [1908]), 161. For an overview of Bolivian pre-metric measures, see Ministerio de Agricultura Bolivia, Ganadería y Colonización. Dirección General de Economía Rural, *Resúmen general de medidas típicas de la República de Bolivia* (La Paz: Departamento de Muestreos y Padrones, 1956).

⁴¹ There will be more details about this expedition later. See Comisión Expedicionaria del Oriente, Juan Luís Muñoz to Despacho del Ministro de Gobierno y Colonización. Guanay, 5 June 1893. ANB/MI 1893,

As the rubber boom progressed, there was an increased need to find new rubber strands. Many of the rubber barons established enterprises to explore. A case in point is the 1885 contract signed between the *cruceño* rubber baron Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra and two *paceño* former *cascañeros*, Manuel Cárdenas and Timoteo Mariaca, to explore the rich rubber forests of the Acre River. Nicanor Salvatierra, a wealthy rubber baron, was supposed to contribute 200 bolivianos in cash and 1,000 bolivianos as a loan, Mariaca and his partner Víctor Mercier 100 bolivianos in cash and 10 peons, Manuel Cárdenas 100 bolivianos in cash and 4 peons. The Society collapsed after disastrous floods but it did manage to explore the Acre.⁴²

The process of exploring Bolivia's Amazonian frontiers was an arduous endeavor, which involved a remarkable assortment of players that ranged from ruthless entrepreneurs to missionaries and scientists. By the end of the nineteenth century, knowledge of the region had greatly increased, yet it continued to be one of the remotest areas of Latin America. World demand for rubber, though, proved to be the main driving force for exploring, colonizing and "conquering" the region. The Amazonian rubber boom immersed all Latin American countries with Amazonian territories in an unprecedented boom and bust cycle. Yet, Bolivia's rubber boom cannot be understood

t.268, n°16 and Manuel Vicente Ballivián to Sr. Ministro de Gobierno y Colonización, Riberalta, 29 Sept. 1893. ANB/MI 1893 t.269, n°47.

⁴² Reproduced in Timoteo Mariaca, ed., *Exploración del Río Acre*, 1894, ed. Machicado Julio, *Colección de artículos escritos en Sorata y publicados en "El Comercio" de Bolivia (1900-1901)*, vol. 1 (La Paz: Imp. Velarde, 1901), 17.

Table 1. Main Explorers of Bolivian Amazonia in the 19th Century^a

Years	Name	Profession and nationality
1830-32	Alcides d'Orbigny	French Scientist
1840s	Bernardino Vargas Manuel Helguero José Manuel Baca	Bolivian civil servants
1840s	Felipe Bertrés	French/Argentine military engineer
1843-47	Francis de Castelnau	French Naturalist
1844-47	José Agustín Palacios	Bolivian prefect
1850-62	Manuel Urbano	Brazilian Explorer
1851	L.Gibbon & W.L. Herndon	U.S. Navy Officers
1853	Clements Markham	British explorer
1860	Hugues A.Weddell	British botanist and physician
1861	Faustino Maldonado	Peruvian Colonel
1861	Quintín Quevedo	Bolivian Colonel
1867-68	Joseph & F. Keller	Brazilian/German engineers
1867, 73,74	Azanel D. Piper	U.S. Entrepreneur
1868	George E. Church	U.S. Colonel and engineer
1869	Samuel Mancini	Italian Missionary
1869	Jesualdo Macchetti	Italian Missionary
1875	Edward Davis Mathews	British Engineer
1876-77	James Orton	U.S. Physician
1877	John William Evans	British Physician
1864, 65,77	William Chandless	British Explorer
1880-81	Edwin Heath	U.S. Physician
1881-82	Nicolás Armentia	Spanish Missionary
1881	Antonio Vaca Diez	Bolivian entrepreneur
1886	Arnous H. de Rivière	French/US entrepreneur
1887	Antonio Labre	Brazilian Colonel
1887	Victor Mercier	Bolivian Entrepreneur
1888	Paul Max Von Ehrenreich	German Ethnologist
1890-92	Luigi Balzan	Italian Scientist
1890-92,97-98	José Manuel Pando	Bolivian politician and general
1893-96	Carlos Fitzcarrald	Peruvian entrepreneur

Sources: Derived from López Beltrán, *Exploración y ocupación del Acre*; PNUD, *Informe de Desarrollo humano en el Norte Amazónico*, 25; Roux *La Bolivie Orientale*, 111-115; Quijarro, *Conferencia pronunciada*, passim and García Jordán, *Cruz y arado*.

^a It includes Amazonian territories later claimed by Brazil, such as the Acre and Purús.

without analyzing the cinchona boom. Many of the main players of the Bolivian rubber boom and many of its characteristics started with the cinchona boom and, for a few decades, cinchona and rubber co-existed as the main economic activities of the Bolivian Amazon

The Cinchona Boom

One of the Jesuits' most well-known exports from the New World was the so-called Jesuit's bark. This bark was used to prevent and treat malaria throughout the colonial period and was exported in small quantities from mostly Peru and Ecuador. Although it was known since the early colonial period, it was not until the 1640s that the remedy reached Europe. In 1753, Carolus Linnaeus named the bark *cinchona* after the Countess of Chinchón, the wife of a Viceroy of Peru.⁴³ During the eighteenth century, the bark was used to cure members of the European nobility of malaria. The French scientist Charles Marie de la Condamine—who had taken part in the first scientific expedition allowed to travel from the Pacific coast to the mouth of the Amazon—published the first important work on the botanical characteristics and varieties of the plant in 1738 that he had encountered in the jungles of Loja, in present-day Ecuador.⁴⁴ The different varieties of cinchona grow on top reaches of the eastern slopes of the

⁴³ Bolivian literature rarely uses the term *cinchona*. The bark is usually called *quina* or *quina quina* (Quechua) or *casarilla*.

⁴⁴ See Charles Marie de La Condamine, *Sur l'arbre de quinquina* (Paris: Académie Royale des Sciences, 1738); for an account of his voyage, see Charles Marie de La Condamine, *Relation abrégée d'un voyage fait dans l'intérieur de l'Amérique Méridionale. Depuis la côte de la Mer du Sud, jusqu'aux côtes du Brésil & de la Guiane, en descendant la rivière des Amazones* (Paris: Veuve Pissot, 1745).

Andes. It occurs naturally from Northern Venezuela to the Bolivian Yungas. The first exports of cinchona originated in Peru and Ecuador but, as the British expanded into India and Africa, there was the need for a reliable and cheap source of cinchona. The trade gradually moved north towards Colombia and south towards Bolivia.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Bolivian cinchona exports rivaled its silver exports and became a significant source of revenue for the cash-strapped governments of Bolivia's infamous "Age of *Caudillos*."⁴⁵ Cinchona collection started in the Yungas region of La Paz, but as supply decreased and demand increased, it moved to Caupolicán and to the Chapare region of Cochabamba. As outlined in the previous chapter, one of Bolivia's most important cleavages during the nineteenth century was the division between free trade and protectionism. Policies on the cinchona trade are a clear example on the struggle between these two points of view. During the cinchona boom, according to the historian Carlos Pérez, the Bolivian state attempted to control and to intervene in this export sector. In 1845, in the spirit of colonial royal monopolies, it awarded a cinchona export monopoly to the Argentine José Tezanos Pinto and company for five years and, then to the Aramayo Brothers in 1850.⁴⁶ In 1850, it also created a National Quina Bank, which was supposed to control both the price and production of cinchona.⁴⁷

The Bolivian cinchona industry, however, was in the hands of thousands of highly

⁴⁵ For an analysis of the links between the cinchona trade and Bolivian caudillos, see Carlos Pérez, "Quinine and Caudillos: Manuel Isidoro Belzu and the Cinchona Bark Trade in Bolivia, 1848-1855" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1997).

⁴⁶ Markham, *Peruvian Bark*, 60.

⁴⁷ Pérez, "Quinine and Caudillos," chap. V.

mobile petty merchants and producers and they were very difficult to control. Moreover, relations between Bolivia and Peru had been seriously strained since the Battle of Ingavi (1841) and Peru refused to cooperate in controlling illegal exports of cinchona. Since most *cascarilla* production areas were near the Peruvian border, Bolivian *cascarilleros* preferred to sell their product for cash to Peruvian merchants than to the cumbersome Bolivian bureaucracy.

Thus, despite its protectionist measures, Bolivia's bark industry was vulnerable to both contraband and competition from other bark producers, especially Colombia.⁴⁸ In Colombia, the cinchona boom centered in the middle of the relatively dense Paéz territory and, according to the anthropologist Joanne Rappaport, "it moved like a wave across the cinchona forests, leaving behind a wake of destroyed and dead plants. Besides Páez involvement it attracted an unprecedented flow of mestizos and whites to the eastern slope of the Andes, which stayed to continue to exploit cattle, coffee, rubber and other tropical products after the collapse of the quinine market."⁴⁹ Despite government intervention, Bolivia could not compete with Colombia, which had a higher population density in cinchona areas and was nearer world markets. Further imperialist wars in Africa and South East Asia and a series of disastrous civil wars in Colombia created a second boom between 1877 and 1885, this time without government intervention. This

⁴⁸ U.S. navy lieutenants Herndon and Gibbon reported that there was a brisk contraband with both Brazil and Peru as a result of the Bolivian government's policy of fixing cinchona prices. Herndon, Gibbon, and Dept., *Exploration*, 158.

⁴⁹ Joanne Rappaport, *Cumbe Reborn: An Andean Ethnography of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 97. For an overview of Colombia in the 19th Century, see Larson, *Trials of nation making*, chap 2. For a look at extractive industries in the Colombian tropics, see Camilo A. Domínguez and Augusto Gómez, *La economía extractiva en la Amazonia colombiana, 1850-1930* (Araracuara, Colombia: TROPENBOS; Corporación Colombiana para la Amazonia, 1990).

second cinchona boom merged with the outset of Bolivia's rubber boom for a few decades. Bolivia's National Quina Bank had closed its operations in 1859 and Bolivia gradually became more receptive to the doctrines of free trade.

Unlike coca, the Yungas' and Caupolicán's other traditional product, cinchona was gathered in the wild and there were no efforts to establish plantations in Bolivia until the end of the boom. Bolivia's variety of cinchona, *cinchona calisaya*, was deemed to have the highest concentration of alkaloids. It grew at an altitude of from 400 to 1,800 meters above sea level and the cinchona of the steepest slopes was of the highest quality.⁵⁰ The extraction process involved felling the tree and stripping it of its bark with no regard for the sustainability of the product. Then the bark had to be dragged down to level areas and dried to ensure its long voyage to Western markets. According to Alcide d'Orbigny, very often *cascarilleros* dried the bark improperly and, as a result, a great amount of it rotted or fermented in transit to international markets.⁵¹ Besides this waste, the felling of the trees was not followed by replanting, as the Jesuits had allegedly practiced. The Bolivian government repeatedly attempted to impose conservation measures to no avail.

The gangs of *cascarilleros*, according to Machetti, were highly mobile groups of six or more members who entered the bush and traveled a distance of five or six days carrying a load of food, bedding, shotguns and ammunition weighting three to five *arrobas* (345 to 575 kg). The dried bark was then either towed upstream through

⁵⁰ Minchin, "Eastern Bolivia and the Gran Chaco," 413.

⁵¹ Orbigny, *Descripción geográfica*, 66.

callapos (balsawood rafts) or carried on the back of local Indian porters. Most *cascarilleros* were mestizos from the Yungas, Caupolicán or Cochabamba. The Indian porters were recruited in the Franciscan missions of Caupolicán and included members of the Mosestén, Leco and Tacana ethnic groups. Since the overland routes from the cinchona areas to the highlands were so steep as to be impassable by mules, indigenous porters became particularly important. The Tacana, for example were paid three bolivianos to carry sixty pounds of bark on their backs from the Franciscan missions of Ixiamas and Tumupasa (near the Upper Beni River) to the highlands of Apolo and, then, six bolivianos to carry fifty pounds to Pelechuco (3,596 meters above sea level), near the Peruvian border.⁵²

Originally, cinchona was shipped to the town of Sorata, then to the city of La Paz and from La Paz, from where it reached the Pacific coast and was shipped from the Peruvian ports of Tacna or Arica or the Bolivian port of Cobija. Some, of it was transported directly to Pelechuco and Peru and, from there, it crossed Lake Titicaca to Puno and then it was transported to Arequipa and the Peruvian port of Mollendo (See Fig. 5). The section from Pelechuco to the shores of Lake Titicaca was only possible during five months of the year since the passes of the Apolobamba range were prone to very hazardous snowstorms during the rainy season. The War of the Pacific and the increased vigilance of both the Bolivian and Peruvian governments, though, disturbed these traditional circuits and *cascarilleros* had to search for alternative routes.

⁵² Armentia, "Diario del viaje al Madre de Dios," 10.

Most sources credit the German Otto Richter, who had established a cinchona export house in Sorata in 1860, as the precursor of the Atlantic export route (through the Mamoré and Madeira Rivers). In 1882, the explorer Edwin Heath found him at the confluence of the Mapiri and Tipuani Rivers (in the province of Caupolicán) claiming to be harvesting one million cinchona trees that he had planted. Otto Richter's plantations were remarkable within South America and were perhaps the only instance of cinchona plantations in the Americas.⁵³ Richtler's competitor, the Paris-based Maison Brailard, also established in Sorata since 1875, and *cascarilleros* from the Yungas and Caupolicán founded the port of Rurrenabaque in the eastern bank of the Upper Beni River across the mission of San Buenaventura and started to export bark through the Beni towns of Reyes, Santa Rosa and Santa Ana del Yacuma. As David Block suggests, this initiated the involvement of the indigenous people from the Moxos savanna in export-oriented activities.⁵⁴ Once cinchona reached Rurrenabaque through *callapos* operated by Leco or Mosestén Indians or mestizos from Yungas, particularly from the town of Irupana, according to Nicolás Armentia (See Fig. 6).⁵⁵ Since the link between the Upper Beni and the Mamoré had not yet been discovered, the bark was taken from Rurrenabaque to Santa

⁵³ Edwin Heath, *Informe sobre los estudios hechos en el Departamento del Beni en los años 1879,1880,1881 a los que está agregado como apéndice un resumen entablado de las observaciones metereológicas de Reyes comparando con las de San Antonio, Río Madera Brasil por el Dr. Eduardo Heath*. (La Paz: Imp. "La Libertad," 1882), 396.

⁵⁴ Block, *Mission Culture*, 37.

⁵⁵ Armentia, *Descripción de las misiones franciscanas*, 84.

Ana de Yacuma in ox-carts and then shipped from Santa Ana del Yacuma to the Mamoré River.⁵⁶

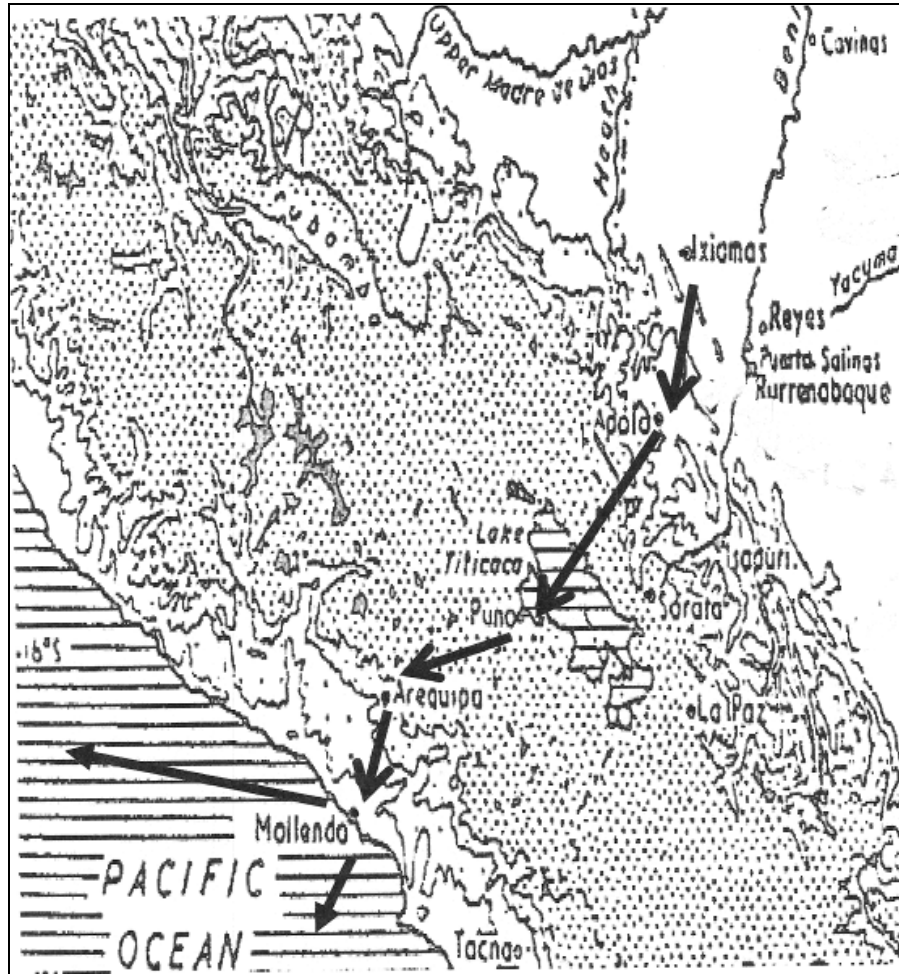


Figure 5. Map of the Route from Apolo to the Peruvian Port of Mollendo

Source: Adapted from Fifer, "The Empire Builders," 116.

⁵⁶ For a histories of Sorata and the *cascarilla* and rubber booms, see Juan Heriberto Jáuregui C, *Sorata: historia de una región, 1870-1930* ([La Paz]: Prefectura del Departamento de La Paz; UMSA; Instituto de Estudios Andinos y Amazónicos, 1991); César Augusto Machicao Gamez, *Historia de los pueblos del norte paceño* (La Paz: s.n., 2000); María Luisa Soux, *Apolobamba, Caupolicán, Franz Tamayo: historia de una región paceña* (La Paz: Prefectura del Departamento de La Paz; UMSA, 1991).



Figure 6. Leco Indians operating a callapo down to the Beni River

Source: Evans, "Expedition to Caupolicán," 617.

Although this journey was arduous, it had the advantage of avoiding Bolivian and Peruvian customhouses. The Brazilian-Bolivian frontier was at the time extremely uncontrolled and the Brazilian government seemed to welcome some commercial activity in its remote hinterland. Moreover, Melgarejo's 1867 *Treaty of Amity, Limits, Navigation and Commerce with Brazil* (also known as the Treaty of Ayacucho) opened Brazilian waterways and ports to Bolivians. Ironically, it was cheaper and more comfortable to go from Caupolicán to La Paz following the Madeira-Mamoré route than going through near-by Apolo. According to Armentia, the Franciscan Father Joseph María Ciuret left the mission of Cavinás on March 1885 and arrived in La Paz on November 1866 following the Madeira-Mamoré route, crossing the Magellan Straits and arriving at the Peruvian port of Mollendo. The advantage of this route was that travel was mostly by boat and rail.⁵⁷ The US navy officers Gibbon and Herndon also endorsed the route and

⁵⁷ Armentia, "Diario del viaje al Madre de Dios," 74.

claimed that, instead of using the Madeira, people “go back upstairs and pass their goods and chattels over the roof, down through the chimney, to the Pacific, stemming the current and struggling against the difficulties among the clouds through storms and dangers passing through cold, frozen regions on the way to the market.⁵⁸ The main reason behind the use of this route was familiarity. The inhabitants of the department of La Paz were more familiar with the geography of the Andes than with the Amazonian environment. To them, the Amazonian plains were, at least initially, a mysterious and forbearing place, full of disease, wild animals and “savages.”

Surprisingly, none of the sources indicates how long it took to take the Apolo route. This is probably due to its unpredictability and because none of the explorers or bureaucrats mentioned above took it. By the end of the nineteenth century, relations with Peru had normalized and infrastructure advances made this route more suitable. For example, in 1874, a railway from La Paz to Lake Titicaca had been completed and it connected with a Peruvian railway that linked Puno, Arequipa and the Pacific port of Mollendo. In Lake Titicaca, the Peruvian government had purchased two steamers, the Yaravi and the Yapura and launched in them in 1871 and 1872. With these improvements, it was possible to travel from La Paz to Mollendo in three days. Some rubber from Caupolicán continued to reach Apolo and Pelechuco on the backs of Indian porters (after all, they were a cheap source of transportation). From Pelechuco, the merchandise descended to the shores of Lake Titicaca in the Bolivian port of Puerto Pérez, travel across the lake by steamer to Puno and then traveled by train from Puno to

⁵⁸ Herndon, Gibbon, and Dept., *Exploration*, 232.

Mollendo.⁵⁹

As chapter 4 explains, the rubber boom moved eastwards from Caupolicán and most rubber production eventually concentrated in the Northeastern areas of Bolivia. On the other hand, according to the French traveler Auguste Plane, the route from the Beni to Europe, via the Madeira and Amazon Rivers took 80 days downriver and 230 days upriver. It had the advantage that, once rubber had overcome the *cachuelas*, it could travel completely by ship from the Madeira River to European markets.⁶⁰ Bolivian boats also dominated most of the trade from the Beni to the Madeira and their indigenous crews were much cheaper than Peruvian steamers and railways.

Despite its best intentions and its protectionist past, the Bolivian state's attempts to regulate the cinchona that left through its eastern frontier were not successful. Among many other factors, the crash of the quinine boom can also be attributed to its lack of conservation practices. By the end of the quinine boom Bolivia's civil servant Pantaleón Dalence had already warned the National Congress that, unless it enacted a law protecting Bolivia's cinchona forests, they would soon all be destroyed.⁶¹ As the boom progressed, large trees disappeared and *cascarilleros* collected the bark from young saplings, the small size of the trees and the fact that the last strands of cinchona were located in steep slopes, prevented sustainable bark collection. *Cascarilleros* simply cut trees down and they stripped all the available bark from them.

⁵⁹ Isaiah Bowman, "Trade Routes in the Economic Geography of Bolivia, Part I," *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 42, no. 1 (1910):27-29.

⁶⁰ Auguste Plane, *À travers l'Amérique Équatoriale; l'Amazonie* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit Cie., 1903), 208.

⁶¹ *Bolivia, Informe del Ministro de Hacienda e Industria a la Asamblea Ordinaria de 1874* by Pantaleón Dalence, Sucre, 6 Aug. 1874. ANB/PL 52, Mensajes y memorias autógrafos.

The collection of duties in the Amazon also proved to be nearly impossible. For example, the Bolivian government felt it necessary to remind the prefect of the Beni that *cascarilla* exports through the Madeira were not exempt from duties. It instructed the prefect to send the *corregidor* of the town of Exaltación (in the Upper Mamoré River) to collect five bolivianos per *quintal* (46 kg).⁶² In 1860, the prefect had been successful in confiscating a cargo of illegal cinchona that was passing through Trinidad. He organized a public auction to sell it and, to his surprise, nobody was interested. He attributed this to the region's lack of capitalists who were interested in "such a useful and interesting plant" he added that perhaps "the great city of La Paz, where there is intelligence and power would like to include within its speculations the great mountains of the Beni."⁶³

The export of cinchona followed typical patterns of Latin America's extractive industries, which the Amazonian rubber boom would subsequently mimic. Bolivians never attempted to process the bark to obtain quinine sulfate and were very dependent on quinine imports! A leading cinchona expert, Arnous H. de la Rivière wrote, "It seems strange that no effort has ever been made to extract the sulfate in the country where it is produced thus avoiding payment of heavy freight of 92 per cent of dead weight besides damaging the quality by fermentation on the sea. This is more remarkable when it is known that a great deal of sulfate is shipped from Europe to South America where it

⁶²The use of colonial authorities in the republican period was ambivalent and varied both geographically and chronologically. In general terms, a *corregidor* was a rural civil servant directly appointed by the Central government, usually through the department's prefect who had jurisdiction over a *cantón*. ANB/MH 1871, Prefectura del Beni, t.182, n°31, 31 June 1874.

⁶³Jefatura política del Departamento del Beni. Matías Carrasco, Trinidad, 27 May 1860. ANB/MH t.155, n°27.

commands a heavy price, Bolivia being the main producing country.”⁶⁴ Throughout the rubber boom, Bolivians imported large amounts of quinine pills manufactured abroad. According to the Bolivian writer Toribio Gutiérrez, most lowland Bolivians refused to take natural quinine claiming that it had harmful effects (probably caused by quinine overdoses) and swore by Liverpool-made “Dr. Capper” pills.⁶⁵ An official guide also recommended a daily dose of the quinine extract made in France by Pierre-Joseph Pelletier and Joseph Bienaimé Caventou.⁶⁶ In contrast, according to the English rubber entrepreneur Cecil Herbert Prodders, Caupolicán Indians were happy to “trot with a bottle of water with 2 or 3 bits of cinchona bark in it” to prevent malaria.⁶⁷

In conclusion, the quinine boom was the first Bolivian export cycle that was not based on minerals and that took place beyond the highlands. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Bolivian state attempted to enact protectionist measures to regulate its export. By 1855, the trade was in decline due to both contraband and an oversupply of the product. As Europe’s imperial expansion into Africa and Asia continued in the second half of the century, there was a second quinine boom. In this case, the Bolivian cinchona industry operated in a *laissez faire* environment. The industry found new routes through the Amazon and attracted foreign investors. It also involved various indigenous groups from the Andean piedmont and even the Moxos savanna. By the end of the century European powers, partly because of an increase in

⁶⁴ Rivière, "Exploration in the Rubber Districts," 433.

⁶⁵ Toribio Gutiérrez, *Recuerdos del Oriente* (Sucre: Tip. "El Cruzado," 1888), 19.

⁶⁶ Ministerio de Colonización y Agricultura Bolivia, *Breves indicaciones para los empleados de la Delegación Nacional en el Territorio de Colonias* (La Paz: Tip. Comercial de Ismael Argote, 1905), 6.

⁶⁷ Cecil Herbert Prodders, *Adventures in Bolivia* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1922).

demand for the product and partly because South American cinchona had become both too expensive and too unreliable, started to consider cinchona plantations in Asia. Both the French botanist Hugh Algernon Weddell and Sir Clements Markham had been able to smuggle cinchona seeds out of South America and to acclimatize them in Europe and Asia. In 1865 the British trader Charles Ledger, though, was able to collect seeds from the Bolivian high-yielding *cinchona calisaya* and to sell them to the Dutch. Eventually cinchona plantations were established in the Dutch East Indies, French Indochina, and British India and Ceylon and the South American cinchona boom crashed.⁶⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, another boom briefly overlapped with the cinchona boom. *Cascarilleros* used their trade routes and took advantage of the accumulated geographical knowledge of the nineteenth century to engage in a new boom, the Amazonian rubber boom. In 1883, for example, even though silver was still Bolivia's main export, there were still substantial cinchona exports and the beginning of rubber exports. By 1890, this was no longer true. An official report declared the demise of the cinchona boom. It claimed, "The *cascarilla* industry has declined so much that it is difficult or perhaps impossible that it will ever return to its former prosperity, due to the advantageous competence, in the European markets, from *quinas* of lower quality whose transportation is much cheaper and easier."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ For a non-academic history of cinchona, see Fiammetta Rocco, *The Miraculous Fever Tree: Malaria and the Quest for a Cure that Changed the World*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

⁶⁹ Ministerio de Hacienda e Industria Bolivia, *Informe del Ministro de Hacienda e Industria de la República de Bolivia al Congreso ordinario de 1890* (La Paz: Imp. de "La Tribuna," 1890), 110 in ANB/PL, 1890, v. 294.

Table 2. Value and Weight of Bolivian Exports in 1883

Commodity	Kg	Bs.
Silver	200,000	8,400,000
Cascarilla	690,000	1,380,000
Rubber	N.A.	17,800

Source: ANB/ Rück, n°401, Bolivia, Exportaciones e Importaciones 1883.

The Bolivian Rubber Boom

As with cinchona, the indigenous peoples of the Latin America were quite familiar with natural rubber. Christopher Columbus allegedly found it in the Caribbean and was surprised by its bounciness. Later, Spanish conquistadors described it in Mesoamerica. At the time of the conquest the Aztecs, the Mayas and many Caribbean groups used natural rubber to play the Mesoamerican ballgame. Mesoamerican rubber was mostly taken from the tropical *Castilloa* genus, which is found in the wild throughout southern Mexico, Central America and South America. Farther north, rubber has also been historically extracted from the *guayule* bush (*Parthenium argentatum*). These plants gave origin to some popular Spanish names for rubber, *hule* and *caucho* (which later led to the use of the French *cautchouc*). In the Amazonian basin, rubber was also present from the Guyanas to Bolivia. Besides the *Castilloa* and *Sapium* genera, which usually grow in the uplands, and are therefore more common in the Colombian, Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon, indigenous peoples used members of the *hevea* genus, particularly the *hevea brasiliensis*, which would form the basis for the Bolivian rubber boom. One of the most desirable characteristics of *hevea* is that it responds to bleeding by producing more sap.

The most productive *hevea* trees were found in the low flood forests of the Brazilian and Bolivian Amazon, since they require both high temperatures and a large amount of water. The common English word for *hevea brasiliensis* is Pará rubber tree, in Portuguese it is generally called *seringa* or *seringueira* which led to its common name in Bolivia, *siringa*. Another latex-producing plant commonly called *peloto*, (*Jatropha elastica*) which produced low quality rubber was found in the department of Santa Cruz and in the Moxos gallery forests. The latex from these trees has also had many names. Peruvians and Ecuadorians prefer the term *jebe* or *caucho*, whereas Bolivians tend to use *goma elástica* and Brazilians use the term *borracha*. English names for the latex were India rubber or India gum and the French used the term *caoutchouc* to describe natural rubber in general.⁷⁰

The German/Hungarian/ Czech Jesuit Francis Xavier Eder, who was a missionary among the Baure of the Northern Moxos savanna from 1751 to 1769, provided one of the earliest descriptions of the use of rubber tree in present-day Bolivia. He described how different ethnic groups of the Moxos savannas incised the rubber tree with a machete, collected the sap and coagulated the latex by drying it in the sun to make rubber balls, which were used in interethnic ballgames.⁷¹ Ball games of this type have been documented in many areas of Amazonia, especially in the Guyanas and Venezuela. It is not surprising to find them in Moxos since both the Baure and the Moxos are of the Arawak linguistic stock. Another traditional use of natural rubber was to take advantage

⁷⁰ See the introductory chapters of Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber*, and Weinstein, *Amazon Rubber Boom*. For a discussion of rubber tree varieties in Peru, see Stanfield, *Red Rubber, Bleeding Trees*, 23, in Brazil, see Dean, *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷¹ Eder and Barnadas, *Breve descripción*, 298.

of its slow burning properties to use it as a lantern.⁷²

Early Production of Rubber

Up to the 1870s, there was a limited domestic market for rubber products. Rubber was mostly processed and marketed by mission Indians or by unincorporated Amazonian groups. Unincorporated Indians and *siringueros* continued to use lanterns made of rubber throughout the boom. The production of rubber balls to sell to the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra also continued. Another traditional craft was to cover textiles and shoes with rubber to make them waterproof. In this case, the rubber was hardened by exposing it to smoke over a fire. For example, José Paravicini, the former government representative in the Acre, explained that the “savages” of the Acre manufactured shoes and ponchos to be traded to *siringueros*. The Beni historian Rogers Becerra also stated that during the 1870s the Indians of the Mission of Cavinás and the Madidi River, manufactured and sold rubber shoes and textiles in Caupolicán and the town of Reyes.⁷³ Until the Amazonian rubber boom was unleashed, there is no evidence of Bolivian rubber exports, unlike Brazil’s rubber exports to both Portugal and New England throughout the early nineteenth century.⁷⁴

The use of rubber outside of the Neotropics came relatively late. Although there was a limited interest in rubber during the colonial period, it was not until Charles Marie de Condamine’s expedition to South America (1735-44) that the European scientific

⁷² Ibid., 145 & 147.

⁷³ Paravicini, “Conferencia,” 18; Rogers Becerra Casanovas, *El imperio del caucho: perfil del noroeste boliviano*, (Trinidad: s.n., 1984), 27.

⁷⁴ See Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber*, chap. 1.

community learned about its origins and properties.⁷⁵ There were several attempts to manufacture products out of rubber, but rubber's elasticity and sensitivity to temperature fluctuations created some problems. Several scientists attempted to deal with this problem by adding a variety of solvents to natural rubber. In 1839, the American manufacturer Charles Goodyear, who had also experimented with different solvents, discovered the vulcanization process. By exposing natural rubber to high temperature, rubber hardened, without completely losing its elasticity. Goodyear's discovery led the way for an unprecedented growth in natural rubber's industrial applications.⁷⁶

Rubber became an indispensable partner of the industrial revolution, it was as important as steel or coal. As the industrial revolution progressed in the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, there was an increased demand for natural rubber products. In 1900, the Bolivian civil servant José Paravicini outlined the most common uses of Bolivian rubber: "bicycle and car tires, hoses, tubes, surgical instruments."⁷⁷ It also became essential in the construction of engines. Rubber was used for belts, tubes and gaskets, and it became essential to ease friction between railway carriages.

The Amazonian rubber boom started in Brazil at the mouth of the Amazon. Belem do Pará was the main point for shipping rubber to external markets until Manaus (at the confluence of the Amazon and Negro Rivers) became its rival around the 1880s. From 1880 to 1912 Manaus became the center of the rubber boom and one of Brazil's

⁷⁵ See La Condamine, *Relation abrégée d'un voyage*.

⁷⁶ See Charles Goodyear, *Gum-elastic and its Varieties, with a Detailed Account of its Applications and Uses, and of the Discovery of Vulcanization* (New Haven: Pub. for the author, 1853).

⁷⁷ Paravicini, "Conferencia," 60.

wealthiest and most sophisticated cities.⁷⁸ As rubber demand increased, available rubber diminished in the Amazon River and the boom moved westward to the Amazon River's tributaries. Bolivia's rubber industry was closely linked to the fortunes of the Brazilian rubber boom and its methods and terminology closely mimicked its Brazilian origins. The Bolivian rubber authority Manuel Vicente Ballivián clearly admitted that the Bolivian rubber industry had been "transplanted from Brazil" and he added "to the detriment of our language."⁷⁹

The extraction of rubber was indeed copied from Brazil and it used Bolivianized Portuguese vocabulary. Although *caucho* trees (*castilloa ulei* and *castilloa elastica*) were present in some areas of Bolivia and sometimes grew near *hevea* (*hevea brasiliensis*) trees, they were rarely exploited.⁸⁰ *Hevea* rubber fetched higher prices and their rubber was placed in the market as high quality fine Pará rubber. *Hevea* trees could also be harvested for several years and, if they were properly bled, they were relatively sustainable. On the other hand, *caucho* trees were bled until they were destroyed. In addition, the chronic labor shortages of Bolivia's rubber industry prevented concentrating on a harder-to-harvest product that required a highly mobile labor force. *Cauchero* gangs were small and itinerant groups of Peruvian mestizos and their Indian charges and,

⁷⁸ For a vivid portrait of Manaus at its height, see Burns, "Manaus, 1910: Portrait of a Boom Town," Barbara Weinstein analyzes the political and commercial rivalry between Manaus and Belem in Weinstein, *Amazon Rubber Boom*.

⁷⁹ Bolivia, *Apuntes goma elástica Noroeste*, 2.

⁸⁰ According to one source, *Castilloas* could be found at higher altitudes in Coroico, Zongo, Irupana, Conzata (Yungas), Chapare and Ayopaya (Cochabamba), Velasco and Chiquitos (Santa Cruz) and even in some areas of Tarija and Chuquisaca whereas *Heveas* could be found in the Challana and Mapiri Rivers (La Paz), Caupolicán the Upper and Lower Beni River, the Madidi River and the Madre de Dios River. Of course, later on *hevea* was also found in the Purús, Acre and Abuná Rivers. Nicanor Jordán S., *Manual para la extracción y beneficio de la goma elástica* (La Paz: Taller Tip. Lit., 1900), 2-4.

therefore, could not be easily controlled.⁸¹ To a certain extent, they were similar to the *cascarilleros* and soon established a reputation for fierce independence and violent demeanor, especially during the exploration of the Putumayo basin.

Bolivian rubber barons preferred to have a relatively settled labor force under the complete control of the *patrones*. Bolivian *siringueros* lived in *barracas* and, as the following chapters explain, had little independence or mobility.⁸² Once *hevea* trees depleted, *patrones* simply opened up new *barracas* in another area. Eventually, *Castilloa* trees became scarcer in Peru and *caucheros* attempted to exploit Bolivian trees. For example, the manager of a *barraca* on the Tahuamanu River wrote to the headquarters of the Casa Suárez “we have lots of proposals from Peruvian workers to lease *cauchales* but we have refused to initiate any dealings without consulting with you first. Generally, they sign contracts specifying high rental fees but generally they do not pay them and, therefore, the contract is completely imaginary. Moreover, they cause lots of damage: they destroy rubber trees, cover up paths, and kill all the game animals, causing a great deal of harm to our *siringueros*.”⁸³ Despite these incursions, the Bolivian government did not discard the possibility of exploiting *caucho* in Bolivia whenever *hevea* trees

⁸¹ For a description of Peruvian *caucheros*, see Fernando Santos-Granero and Frederica Barclay, *Tamed Frontiers: Economy, Society, and Civil rights in Upper Amazonia* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000), chap 1. For differences between *caucheros* and *siringueros*, see Stanfield, *Red Rubber, Bleeding Trees*, 23-24.

⁸² A *barraca* is a shed or hut (both in Spanish and Portuguese). In the rubber boom context a *barraca* was the dwelling of a patron and *siringueros*, surrounded by *estradas*. In Bolivia, larger supply centers, with docking facilities and warehouses were often called *barracones*. Smaller rubber operations that depended on a *barraca* were called *centros gomeros*.

⁸³ ACS/Correspondencia, Barraca Porvenir, from Juan Lugones to Casa Matriz, 14 Oct. 1909. Earlier, an article in Riberalta’s press had also warned about Peruvian incursions in the area. *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 26 Aug. 1897, n°37.

became extinct or there was an increase of available labor.⁸⁴

According to contemporary documents, the *hevea* tree had a height of eighteen to twenty-three meters and a diameter of thirty to sixty centimeters. Like the cinchona tree, it grows isolated in the forest and does not form groves. The density per hectare varied according to location, but they were rarely close to each other and lianas and thick vegetation hampered access to them. *Hevea* trees shed leaves from July to August and bloom between November and December.

Unlike *caucho*, the tapping of *hevea* can only take place in the dry season (from April to October) because they usually grow in flood plains. The tapping season was called a *fábrica* and, in Bolivia, the main measuring unit was an *estrada* of 150 trees. This ideal number was rarely achieved and *estradas* varied according to the tree density in a particular area. Although the term *estrada* (street in Portuguese) conveys an orderly line of trees, in practice this was rare. *Estradas* could be *de mancha* (patch) or *de surco* (furrow). They could also be *de vuelta entera* (full turn), where the tapper finished where he had started or *de carrera* (run), where he finished in the opposite side of where he had started. According to Armentia, most *estradas* were a labyrinth.⁸⁵ Since rubber trees were isolated from each other, tappers had considerable latitude on how they accessed the next tree. The most important thing was to clear a wide circle around each tree to facilitate tapping and transporting the sap. The *estradas*, though, were barely visible to the untrained eye. According to the US rubber expert Henry C. Pearson, “the rubber

⁸⁴ Bolivia, *Apuntes goma elástica Noroeste*, 31.

⁸⁵ Armentia, *Diario de sus viajes*, 118.

gatherers do not waste effort and if the reader has pictured a sylvan pathway, broad and smooth and easy to traverse he is going too far. A stranger unused to a forest could never suspect the existence of these paths and once he was on one, he would have difficulty following it.”⁸⁶

It seems that *estradas* were deliberately made difficult to follow. Indigenous workers were responsible for the job of locating rubber trees and clearing *estradas* from tree to tree. *Rumbeadores* or pathfinders were familiar with the local terrain and they climbed on the highest trees or looked at other signs like the presence of certain birds that fed on *hevea* seeds (the *siringueritos*). For instance, an article in a Cobija (in present-day department of Pando), newspaper complained that Tacana and Araona *rumbeadores* from the early days of the rubber industry “always attempted to position *estradas* in such a way that each *siringuero* has as much independence as possible, not only as far as work, but also as housing is concerned, always with the intention of getting around the *mayordomos* who are in charge of policing the workers of the rubber forests.”⁸⁷ The almost invisible *estradas* and their intricate patterns prevented supervisors from locating their workers within the jungle. The knowledge of the jungle indigenous peoples possessed was invaluable to the rubber industry. Indigenous workers were able to use their knowledge not only to ingratiate themselves with the *patrones* locating new rubber sources, but also to also obtain a certain degree of autonomy and to gain respite from the

⁸⁶ Henry C. Pearson, *The Rubber Country of the Amazon: a Detailed Description of the Great Rubber Industry of the Amazon Valley, which Comprises the Brazilian States of Pará, Amazonas and Matto Grosso, the Territory of the Acre, the Montana of Peru and Bolivia, and the Southern Portions of Colombia and Venezuela* (New York: India rubber world, 1911), 65-66.

⁸⁷ “Informe sobre los trabajos gomeros instalados en las *barracas* de los Sres. Seiler y Compañía” in *El Noroeste* (Cobija), 11 May 1927, n°412.

constraints of the rubber industry's coercive labor practices.

If the rainy season had stopped on time, the *fábrico* started in April. During the first week trees were tapped “to call in the milk” of the tree, but no latex was collected. After this week, the tapper had to start at dawn and went to his *estradas* with a metal bucket or a large gourd, five or six pounds of clay, and the necessary zinc *tichelas* (small buckets). (See Fig. 7). The tappers also used containers made of the large *Tacuara* bamboo (*Guadua macrospiculata*). The *tichelas* held from one fourth to one eighth of a liter and a tree could support from four to five *tichelas* depending on its width. The tapper made an incision with his *machadiño* (small hatchet) and attached the *tichelas* to the tree using the clay, and then proceeded to make upward to downward incisions parallel to the tree trunk. As rubber flowed, it collected in the *tichelas* (See Fig. 7). Before the noon heat threatened to coagulate the rubber, the tapper had to collect all the *tichelas* and pour the rubber into the gourd or bucket.

The next step was the *fumigación*, or smoking. The liquid rubber was taken to a small hut or tent where the tapper had a clay stove (*buyón*) with a chimney-like opening on top and another opening in the bottom to allow airflow. The tapper proceeded to make a fire with the seeds of Brazil nuts, *motacú* (an Amazonian oil palm), or the trunk of other



Figure 7. Making the First Incision and Placing the Tichelas

Source: Photograph by Carl Blattmann, reproduced from Centeno et al., *Imágenes auge de la goma*, 35-36.

oily palms (to produce a large amount of smoke) and poured the latex on a paddle and slowly rotated it over the smoke. As he poured more latex and rotated and smoked the paddle, the tapper produced a *bolacha* or *plancha* of fine Pará rubber. After the many layers of rubber that formed a *bolacha* were completed, tappers left them to dry outdoors. The rubber that had accidentally coagulated in the *tichelas* or in the buckets, or which had an excessive amount of impurities or water was marketed as a lower-priced, unsmoked product called *sernambí*. The *bolachas* were spherical and had an average weight of fifty pounds. After they made the long journey to the head of the Amazon, *bolachas* were packed in wooden crates of twelve *arrobas* (138 kg) labeled as Fine Pará rubber and

shipped to Europe or North America. As is often the case with Bolivian exports, they were considered as originating in another country, in this case Brazil.⁸⁸

The productivity of a tapper depended on many factors. It was limited by the number of trees per *estrada*, by the number of *estradas* per hectare, by the age of the rubber trees, by the skill of the tapper and, of course, by the accessibility of the rubber trees. Rain, for example, made tapping impossible and disease (both of the trees and of the tappers) was a very important factor. Estimates of the output of one tapper are consistent. The Baron Arnous de Rivière, who was trying to attract U.S. investment to Caupolicán, estimated that a tapper (male or female) could produce 150 pounds of rubber per month, whereas Luigi Balzan estimated that one tapper could produce 340 to 450 kilograms each *fábrico*. If we consider that a *fábrico* lasted six months, de Rivière's calculation would yield 900 pounds or 408.23 kilograms. Of course, Arnous de Rivière was dealing with Caupolicán, which yielded less rubber than the Northeast.⁸⁹

Such a time-consuming method limited the possibilities of increasing production. Throughout the Amazonian rubber boom, collection methods remained static and there were few technological innovations. It is remarkable that the *siringueros* who provided raw material to fuel the industrial revolution were still using the same methods that their indigenous ancestors had used before European colonization. Simple technologies such as coagulating rubber through acids or using machinery to harden it were ignored. There

⁸⁸ Based on Armentia, *Diario de sus viajes*, 118-20, and Bolivia, *Apuntes goma elástica Noroeste*, 24-31. Bolivian cascarilla, coca and alpaca wool were often considered to be Peruvian, since they were exported through Peruvian ports and were very often illegally smuggled out of the country. At present, most of Bolivia's quinoa is also exported illegally to Peru. In the eastern lowlands, coffee from Chiquitos is sold to Brazil and Bolivian gold, timber, cattle and palm hearts are also often sold illegally to Brazil.

⁸⁹ Rivière, "Exploration in the Rubber Districts," 437 and Balzan, "Da Reyes a Villa Bella," 587.

was also little interest in using hatchets that would minimize harm to the tree trunk. During the rubber boom, production could only be increased through the discovery of virgin forests or through an increase of tappers. According to the Bolivian rubber pioneer Antonio Vaca Díez, every *siringuero* was assigned two *estradas* per *fábrico*. If tapped properly, these *estradas* should have lasted two or three years and, after that, the *patrón* allowed them to rest and tried to tap other trees that had been resting.⁹⁰ However, in practice this was rare. Brazilian travelers blamed Bolivians for destroying the rubber forests of the Madeira. For example, Bernardo da Costa e Silva complained that Bolivian tappers were destroying *siringales* due to “a lack of necessary training or excessive ambition.”⁹¹ The Bolivian General José Manuel Pando also accused rubber barons of being unpatriotic and remarked that they destroyed rubber forests in the Beni River after fifteen years of harvesting.⁹²

After the successful transfer of cinchona seeds to Asia, Sir Clements R. Markham, who was at the time employed at the India Office, sponsored a similar theft with rubber seeds. After several trials and errors, Sir Henry Alexander Wickham succeeded in smuggling 70,000 *hevea brasiliensis* seeds out of the Brazilian Amazonian port of Santarém. Wickham and his seeds arrived at London’s Royal Botanical gardens in 1876 and eventually *hevea brasiliensis* followed the fate of cinchona and was successful in

⁹⁰ Vaca Díez, *Intereses de la industria*, 64.

⁹¹ Bernardo da Costa e Silva, *Viagens no sertão do Amazonas: do Pará á costa do Mar Pacífico pelo Amazonas, Bolivia e Perú* (Porto: Typ. de A.J. de Sousa & Irmão, 1891), 209.

⁹² *Informe que el jefe de la exploración de los ríos del Norte de Bolivia eleva al conocimiento del Supremo Gobierno en cumplimiento del contrato celebrado en mayo del 1892* (Rurrenabaque, Aug. 12 1893), ALP/JMP, 1891-92, n° 2, 6.

plantations in British Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, French Indochina and West Africa.⁹³ The Bolivian rubber industry was keenly aware that Asian plantations would eventually destroy the gathering of wild Amazonian *hevea brasiliensis*. After all, Wickham's transfer took place at the beginning of rubber exploitation of Bolivia. They were also aware of the threat of synthetic rubber. As early as 1894, Antonio Vaca Díez recommended that Bolivian *siringueros* should follow the example of their counterparts in Brazil, who were getting ready for the impact of synthetic rubber. He wrote, "Predicting this phenomenon, the great industrialists who own lands in the Lower Madeira River are now eagerly engaged in agricultural work, they have started large-scale plantations of coffee, tobacco, cacao, vanilla and cotton."⁹⁴

Environmental Impact

Few people heard these warnings.⁹⁵ Despite them or perhaps because of them, Bolivians replayed the cinchona history with rubber. Since the boom would be short-lived, they engaged in extracting as much latex as fast as possible. Several scholars have analyzed this phenomenon. The Panamanian Guillermo Castro Herrera, for example, has described how Iberians introduced a "pillage economy" to Latin America. The Catalan anthropologist Andreu Viola Recasens has also analyzed the "frontier mentality" that permeated the cinchona and rubber booms. Even though these analyses are correct, the rubber boom should be examined in the context of limited economic opportunities in a

⁹³ See Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber*, 14-22.

⁹⁴ Vaca Díez, *Intereses de la industria*, 64.

⁹⁵ Ironically, during the 1970s and 1980s under the leadership of Chico Mendes, the *siringueiros* of the Acre, became Amazonia's vanguard of conservationism and sustainability.

very isolated region and of a knowledge that resources were finite.⁹⁶ Santa Cruz's *Sociedad Impulsora del Oriente* also expressed another dimension of this issue. In a letter to the central government it argued that one of the problems that prevented the conservation of *hevea* trees was that, unlike Brazil, the Bolivian government did not allow the ownership of *hevea* forests. If *siringueros* had property rights over the territories they occupied, they would be more interested in conserving *hevea* trees.⁹⁷ On the other hand, conservation has never been on the agenda of most boom and bust cycles, whether they take place in the so-called third world or in developed economies.⁹⁸ Bolivia's rubber barons acted rationally, following the tenets of capitalism. Since southeastern Asian plantation rubber was gradually eroding their rubber's market share, they responded by maximizing profits while this share was still possible.

The rubber boom did not only affect rubber trees. The sudden influx of large numbers of *siringueros* in sparsely populated areas also affected the fauna. In the Madeira River, the large demand for Amazonian river turtles (*Podocnemis unifilis*), locally called *taratuga*, and *Podocnemis expansa*, (locally called *peta*) for their flesh, eggs and oil, led to their near-extinction. According to Bernardo da Costa e Silva, large

⁹⁶ Guillermo Castro Herrera, "Environmental Crisis and the Tasks of History in Latin America," *Environment and History* 3 (1997); Recasens, "Tierra de nadie: representaciones del espacio y cultura de frontera de los territorios caucheros bolivianos, 1880-1930."

⁹⁷ Sociedad Impulsora del Oriente, Santa Cruz, to Ministro de Gobierno y Colonización, 26 Feb. 1892, signed by L. Flores. (ANB/MI 1894, t. 277, n°54).

⁹⁸ The exploitation of the Athabasca oil sands in the Canadian province of Alberta is a case in point. They were left alone while oil prices were relatively low, but as oil prices increased, they unleashed a boom cycle characterized by little regard for the local or global environment. See Barry Glen Ferguson, Alberta. Alberta Culture. and University of Regina. Canadian Plains Research Centre, *Athabasca Oil Sands: Northern Resource Exploration, 1875-1951* ([Edmonton, Alta.]; [Regina, Sask.]: Alberta Culture; Canadian Plains Research Center, 1985).

numbers of turtles were placed in pools and were taken to Manaus and Pará.⁹⁹ Franz Keller also observed that the “stags, the deer and troops of long-necked emus that once lived in the *campos* in the immediate vicinity of the *pueblos* of the Beni had also vanished.¹⁰⁰ In his trip from La Paz to the last rubber frontier, the Acre, José Manuel Aponte also wrote that he had not seen any four-footed animals. Again, Armentia also described how, after the establishment of *barracas* in the shore of the Ivón River, fish and alligators had gradually diminished.¹⁰¹ As Bernardo da Costa e Silva lamented, “It is not about exploring, or planting, not even conserving!”¹⁰² This diminishment of local fauna had a direct effect on rubber workers. As game became scarcer and was located farther from *barracas*, *siringueros* increasingly depended on the rubber barons for their food supplies. The same scarcity also affected uncontacted groups, who were also forced to deal with *barraca* owners to obtain food.

After the collapse of the rubber boom, there were some attempts to regulate rubber production. In 1927, a Cobija-based newspaper demanded that *siringueros* should be forced to plant twenty trees for each damaged tree.¹⁰³ There was also some concern about the time-honored use of the *machadiño*. Asian plantations used a small knife that was less harmful to the tree and did not need the rotation of tapped trees. Suárez Hermanos introduced this method in its Barraca Puerto Rico (at the confluence of the

⁹⁹ Silva, *Viagens*, 161.

¹⁰⁰ Keller, *Amazon and Madeira Rivers*, 154.

¹⁰¹ José Manuel Aponte, *Bolivia, La Revolución del Acre en 1902-1903, Datos para la historia* (La Paz: Imp. "El Comercio," 1903), 30; Armentia, *Diario de sus viajes*, 96-98.

¹⁰² Silva, *Viagens*, 91.

¹⁰³ “Informe sobre los trabajos gomeros instalados en las *barracas* de los Sres. Seiler y Compañía” in *El Noroeste* (Cobija), 11 May 1927, n°412.

Tahuamanu and Manuripi Rivers) and Barraca Porvenir (on the Tahuamanu River) as early as 1925.¹⁰⁴ In 1929, the Bolivian government issued a decree forbidding the use of the *machadiño*.¹⁰⁵ Another time-honored practice, the laborious and harmful *desfume* or fumigación, was also challenged. As early as 1900, the Bolivian government was recommending that tappers should use acetic acid to coagulate rubber. However, there is no evidence that Bolivia produced or imported acetic acid.¹⁰⁶

As indicated above, the Bolivian rubber industry started at the beginning of the collapse of the *cascarilla* market. As cinchona prices dropped, many *cascarilleros* started to look for alternative sources of income. The foreign *cascarilla* houses that had been established in Sorata and, later, in Rurrenabaque and Reyes furnished the capital needed to tap and export rubber resources. They had already established a trade network from the Bolivian lowlands to Brazil and Europe and were able to obtain foreign capital. Bolivian *cascarilleros*, on the other hand, went suddenly bankrupt and were eager to engage in the new rubber trade. Timoteo Mariaca, for example, recalled that he was residing in South Yungas engaged in extracting cinchona bark when Otto Richter offered him capital and supplies in exchange for rubber deliveries. In 1881, he left the town of Irupana with sixteen *mozos*, and traveled to San Buenaventura, across Rurrenabaque, to look for *siringales*.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ *El Noroeste* (Cobija), 16 June 1925, n°392.

¹⁰⁵ “Decreto supremo que prohíbe el uso del machadiño en la explotación del látex” in *La Gaceta del Norte* (Ribalta), 30 Aug. 1929, n°115.

¹⁰⁶ “Informe administrativo de la Delegación Nacional al 31 de Julio de 1915. por el Delegado Nacional Carlos Gutiérrez,” *El Noroeste* (Cobija), 8 Dec. 1915, n°200.

¹⁰⁷ In the Bolivian Andes, a *mozo* can be described as a mestizo agricultural worker, or at least as an agricultural worker dressed in mestizo clothing. During the rubber boom, *mozos* were basically indentured

During the cinchona boom, many Bolivians (mostly from Moxos and Santa Cruz) had established themselves along the upper Mamoré and Madeira Rivers. In 1864, for instance, the *cruceño* Santos Mercado had already established a company for the tapping and transportation of rubber in the Yata River (near the confluence of the Beni with the Mamoré Rivers) and Antonio Franco in the Cachoeira Bananeira (on the Mamoré River).¹⁰⁸

According to British geographer Valerie Fifer, because of the 1867 Treaty with Brazil, Bolivians abandoned the Madeira and established themselves in recognized Bolivian territory.¹⁰⁹ This is certainly true, but the influence of either the Bolivian or Brazilian state in such a remote area should not be overestimated. Throughout most of the rubber boom (and up to the present), the Bolivian/Brazilian rubber border was extremely porous. Travelers continued to find Bolivian *barracas* with indigenous Bolivian tappers in the Madeira and Amazon Rivers throughout the nineteenth century. Bernardo da Costa e Silva, for example, described how he found thousands of Bolivian *siringueros*, both Indian and White, from Manaus to the Upper Madeira.¹¹⁰ Even after the Acre War and conflicts with Peru, (1899-1903) the manager of one of Nicolás Suárez's *barracas* recommended that they should fix boundaries with *barracas* on the Brazilian side informally "because if we follow legal channels by the time this issue is solved, there

laborers, usually recruited in the towns of Moxos or Santa Cruz. Mariaca, ed., *Exploración del Río Acre*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Bolivia, *Apuntes goma elástica Noroeste*, 9-10.

¹⁰⁹ Valerie J. Fifer, "The Empire Builders: A History of the Bolivian Rubber Boom and the Rise of the House of Suarez," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 2, no. 2 (1970): 177.

¹¹⁰ Silva, *Viagens*, 455. Examples are the Barraca Paraíso, belonging to the Bolivian Santos Mercado and the Barraca San Roque de Calama belonging to Ramón Roca, *Ibid.*, 195.

will not be any *siringales* left.”¹¹¹ According to Antonio Vaca Díez, the main reason behind the abandonment of the Madeira *barracas* was another. In 1894, he wrote that rubber had been depleted in the Madeira River and that “it is a fact beyond any doubt that we Bolivians have destroyed these *siringales*.”¹¹²

Many of the *siringueros* who abandoned the Madeira established themselves near the confluence of the Mamoré and Iténez Rivers. Farther south, though, the old cinchona entrepôts of Reyes and Rurrenabaque became the base for rubber extraction along the Beni River. The strategic location of these ports had turned them into a meeting point between *cascarilleros* from Caupolicán and Yungas and *cascarilleros* and *fleteros* from the Beni and Santa Cruz.¹¹³ The pioneers of rubber of the Beni River were Francisco Cárdenas and Pablo Salinas who, in 1869, tapped rubber in Santa Rosa del Yacuma and took samples to Reyes.¹¹⁴ Many of Bolivia’s rubber barons started their trajectories in Reyes. Bolivia’s three most important rubber barons, Nicolás Suárez Callaú, Antonio Vaca Díez and Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra, started their trajectories in the Reyes area. By 1876, Nicolás’s older brother, Pedro, was trading in Reyes and eventually called Nicolás to help him. Antonio Vaca Díez’s father, Colonel José Manuel Vaca Guzmán and Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra were part of a group of bankrupt *cascarilleros* who were looking for new ventures. A group of former *cascarilleros* from Yungas and Caupolicán, Antenor Vásquez, Félix and Angel Arteaga and Claudio Farfán, also played a significant role in Bolivia’s rubber boom. The two most important foreign cinchona

¹¹¹ From Juan Lugones to Casa Matriz, 14 Oct. 1909. ACS/Correspondencia, Barraca Porvenir.

¹¹² Vaca Díez, *Intereses de la industria*, 49.

¹¹³ A *fletero* was an operator of a transportation company, either land-based or river-based.

¹¹⁴ Nicolás Armentia, *Diario de sus viajes, 1881-1882* (La Paz: IBC, 1976), 11.

companies belonged to the German Otto Richter and the multinational French Compagnie Braillard.¹¹⁵

After Heath's discovery of the Beni River shortcut, *siringueros* moved closer to the Brazilian border. Antonio Vaca Díez established his *barracas* in the Ortón River in 1882. Just after the discovery Heath's new route. In 1883, Nicolás Suárez established himself in Cachuela Esperanza in the Beni River, just before its confluence with the Mamoré River. In 1884, the Compagnie Braillard established its offices in what would eventually become the commercial and administrative capital of Bolivia's rubber regions, Riberalta, at the confluence of the Beni and Madre de Dios Rivers. The Bolivian government officially re-founded Riberalta in 1894. Finally, in 1882, the Bolivian government established a customs house in Villa Bella (below the confluence of the Mamoré and Madeira). Most of these settlements were strategically located at the confluence of rivers or near *cachuelas* in order to control river traffic.

The Economics of Rubber and the Habilito System

Although Bolivian rubber had to face many challenges to reach European markets, it was profitable because it fetched high prices in the international market and because it faced low overhead costs. In 1886, for example, rubber shipped from Pará cost 2.8 shillings per pound in the London market. This contrasted with rubber shipped from Ceará (1.6 shillings), Cartagena (1.8 s.), Guayaquil, Peru, Rio de Janeiro and the West

¹¹⁵ Paravicini, "Conferencia," 61-62.

Indies (1.9 s.).¹¹⁶ In 1900, in his attempts to attract investment to the province of Caupolicán (Dept. of La Paz), Arnous de Rivière estimated that, considering that a man or a woman could tap 150 pounds of rubber per month, each tapper's product could fetch 150 USD per month, at the local price. Of this 28 USD would be wages and expenses, so that the total net profit per tapper per month would be 107 USD. He optimistically concluded that one thousand immigrants could generate more than 100,000 USD per month.¹¹⁷ Of course, he did not factor in transportation costs or how to attract one thousand immigrants to the area. On the other hand, he was willing to provide high wages, which, as the next chapter shows, was rare among Bolivian rubber barons.

One of the most criticized features of the Amazonian rubber boom was the *aviamento* system. In Brazil, an *aviador* was a provider of credit (in the form of supplies) in exchange for future deliveries of rubber. Barbara Weinstein has analyzed the *aviamento* system in Pará and Manaus and it seems that this system prevailed throughout Amazonia during the rubber boom. She has claimed that the *aviador* house was the most important link in the Amazon's commercial chain.¹¹⁸ In Bolivia, the system was called *habilito*. The lender was the *habilitador* and the receiver was a *contratista* or *habilitado*. It seems the first Bolivian *habilitadores* started with the cinchona boom. Most *cascarilleros* lacked capital and the commercial houses of Sorata outfitted them in order

¹¹⁶ Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Colonización Bolivia, "El Siglo Industrial (conferencia dada en el salón del Sr. Tomás A Saucedo el 31 de octubre de 1886 por el Sr. Saac)," *Boletín del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Colonización* 1, no. 2 (1887): 9.

¹¹⁷ Rivière, "Exploration in the Rubber Districts," 437.

¹¹⁸ Weinstein, *Amazon Rubber Boom*, 18.

to have ready access to cinchona.¹¹⁹ Since *cascarillero* crews were small and highly mobile and only spent a few weeks extracting bark, it was a relatively cheap way to ensure a steady supply of cinchona. The nature of *hevea* harvesting required a greater outlet of capital. *Hevea* trees demanded a permanent labor force on site and *siringueros* did not have any liquidity until the end of the *fábrica*. It seems that the networks of Manaus' *aviadores* extended into Bolivian territory. In 1887, for example, the municipal government of Magdalena (on the Iténez River) complained that many of the *contratistas* of Brazilian commercial houses had migrated to the Iténez, Madeira, Blanco and San Martín rivers and refused to pay Bolivian taxes.¹²⁰

According to the U.S. rubber experts Joseph Woodroffe and Harold Hamel Smith, the *aviador* system was one of the most onerous traits of the Amazonian rubber boom. A rate of interest of ten to twenty per cent was charged from the date of the invoice of merchandise to be delivered until the date of the delivery of rubber. If the amount of rubber was not sufficient to cover the debt, the contract could be extended for many years.¹²¹ As Vicente Ballivián noted, Bolivian *contratistas* had their own work force and their own *siringales*, and they only used the *habilito* to cover day-to-day expenses.¹²² In practice, exploited *estradas* and labor were almost as important as future rubber deliveries to serve as collateral for the *habilito*. In this case, the *habilito* system was not a labor system and should not be confused with advances given to peons through the

¹¹⁹ Roux, *La Bolivie orientale*, 66.

¹²⁰ Bolivia, Junta Municipal de la Provincia de Magdalena, 8 Sept. 1887. (ANB/MI 1887, t. 237, n°63).

¹²¹ Joseph F. Woodroffe and Harold Hamel Smith, eds., *The Rubber Industry of the Amazon and How its Supremacy can be Maintained* (London: John Bale Sons & Danielson Ltd., 1915), 50.

¹²² Bolivia, *Apuntes goma elástica Noroeste*, 32.

enganche system, a form of classically Latin American debt-peonage. To contemporaries, an *habilito* was a business contract, not a labor contract. As chapter 7 explains, *habilitados* or *contratistas* were considered almost like business partners and only trusted veterans of the rubber industry were offered *habilito* contracts. The *enganche* system or simple coercion was reserved for the bulk of the workforce. On the other hand, many contemporaries, such as Edward Davis Mathews did not distinguish between *habilito* and debt peonage and considered them synonymous.¹²³ In fact, there was a credit hierarchy where Indians, who kept work going, were at the bottom of the scale.

Although the negative aspects of *habilito* should not be ignored, its prevalence throughout Amazonia from the early days of extractive industries and its survival into the twenty-first century prove that, to a certain extent, it was unavoidable.¹²⁴ The Bolivian lowlands had traditionally lacked any financial institutions. Banks, for example did not exist in the area until the late twentieth century and other traditional sources of credit (like the colonial church) were chronically dependent on outside subsidies. Again, the presence of the Bolivian state was also problematic—it did not have the resources or the will to get involved in the local economy. As discussed above, the first rubber gatherers in the Beni River were in bankruptcy because of the collapse of the cinchona bark trade.

The economy of Beni and Santa Cruz was also in complete disarray. The introduction of free trade had destroyed Santa Cruz's traditional commercial links with

¹²³ See Mathews, *Up the Amazon and Madeira Rivers*, 135.

¹²⁴ For a look at the survival of the system in present-day Bolivia, see Alan J. Bojanic Helbingen, "Balance is Beautiful: Assessing Sustainable Development in the Rain Forests of the Bolivian Amazonia" (Ph.D. diss., Universiteit Utrecht, 2001).

the highlands. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was easier and cheaper to introduce Peruvian and Chilean imports to the highlands via railways than to rely on the tortuous mule trains that communicated Santa Cruz with Cochabamba and Chuquisaca. As stated by a 1886 report, railways had been responsible for the introduction of Peru's surplus production and had ruined the production of Bolivian sugar, cotton, rice and alcohol.¹²⁵ The department of Beni did not fare better. Since the 1860s, there had been a massive migration of Moxos indigenous workers from Beni to the Madeira and Amazon Rivers. The lack of workers crippled the local economy. By 1873, the prefect of Beni gloomily reported, "total bankruptcy is becoming increasingly evident due to the migration of natives to the Madeira, there is no more *contribución indigenal*, sales of cattle and public lands have been suspended."¹²⁶ Moxos' traditional exports, cotton, textiles, tobacco and cattle were gradually abandoned in favor of rubber extraction in the Amazonian forests.

The *patrones* of the Moxos area were mostly of *cruceño* background that had been gradually migrating to the area since the expulsion of the Jesuits (1767).¹²⁷ This migration had been the result of decreased opportunities in Santa Cruz and the availability of former mission land and indigenous workforce in the former missions of Moxos. Nicolás Suárez Callaú's family, for example had left Santa Cruz and established

¹²⁵ *Informe de Hacienda e Industria* (ANB/PL 1886, n° 302).

¹²⁶ After independence, the *contribución indigenal* replaced colonial Indian tribute and became the Bolivian State's most important sources of revenue. See chap. 2. Prefectura del Beni, Trinidad, 8 Jan. 1873, signed by Domingo Ardaya (ANB/MH 1873, t. 186, n°46).

¹²⁷ See Block, *Mission Culture*, 154-56.

a cattle *estancia* near Trinidad.¹²⁸ Antonio Vaca Díez was also the son of a *cruceño* immigrant, José Manuel Vaca Guzmán, who had established himself first in Trinidad and was then involved in the cinchona boom in Reyes. Finally, Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra was also born in Santa Cruz and had been present in both Reyes and the Madeira region. By 1866, the Suárez clan had become among the most important landowners in Trinidad. The 1866 cadaster of Trinidad, for example, listed that his older brother Francisco had 1,000 heads of cattle and six horses totaling a property tax of 3,384 bolivianos. His other brother Rómulo had five *estancias* with 3,500 heads of cattle, 120 horses and even 30 goats and sheep and paid a tax of 17,544 bolivianos whereas the youngest, Nicolás, had 640 heads of cattle, 300 horses and was liable for 3,560 bolivianos.¹²⁹ Until the full development of the rubber boom, though, cattle provided little profits. According to Franz Keller, in the 1870s, the value of a head was of “one *peso*” and its main use was for tallow and hides.¹³⁰ An acute shortage of horses and mules further complicated ranching in the Moxos savannas. Since the 1840s there had been an epidemic of so-called *mal de caderas* (hip disease) introduced from Brazil. It was the New World version of surra, a trypanosomiasis spread by the abundant vampire bats and biting flies of the savanna.¹³¹ Horses had to be imported from Argentina via Santa Cruz at great expense and they had a

¹²⁸ In the Bolivian Oriente, like in the Rio de la Plata, an *estancia* describes a cattle ranch. Another term is *centro ganadero*.

¹²⁹ “Catastro de la capital Trinidad,” signed by Miguel López in San Javier [de Moxos], 27 Aug. 1866. (ALP/SGL c.3, d. 67).

¹³⁰ Keller, *Amazon and Madeira Rivers*, 153 & 158.

¹³¹ Van Valen, “The Ventriloquist Messiah,” 41.

life expectancy of one year in the Bolivian tropics.¹³² Eventually *siringueros* realized that mules from Brazil's Ceará were more suitable to the tropical environment.¹³³

Even though the *patrones* of the Beni could not compete with foreign companies in terms of capital, they had other extremely important assets: access to indigenous labor through traditional patron/client relationships. The different ethnic groups of the Moxos savanna (Moxo, Cayuvava, Movima, Canichana, and Baure) had been plying the Amazonian rivers since Jesuit times and were trained as rowers since early childhood. During the last days of the cinchona boom, before the full development of the *habilito* system and its demand for foreign goods, canoes bound for the Amazon did not have any return cargo and, therefore, *patrones* retained their crews for one year.¹³⁴ During this year, besides rowing, *patrones* employed them as agricultural hands, or porters as far as Manaus.

As discussed above, this led to the presence of thousands of Beni Indians in the Amazon and Madeira Rivers. According to Elías Sagárnaga, who participated in the Acre campaign, a typical rower paddled forty-six strokes per minute and a crew of ten rowers could move a canoe ten meters each movement of the paddle, for twelve hours downstream.¹³⁵ Besides, rowing, crews were responsible for cooking, carrying cargo through portages, setting up bedding for their *patrones* and so forth. At the outset of the rubber boom, outfitting canoes became an extremely profitable enterprise. According to

¹³² In 1898, the value of an Argentinian horse in Riberalta was worth 300 Bs. (the equivalent of 300 heads of cattle in Moxos). *La Gaceta del Norte* (Ortón), 16 Mar. 1898, n°47.

¹³³ Iván Lugones to Casa Matriz, 2 July 1909. ACS/Correspondencia, Barraca Porvenir.

¹³⁴ Bolivia, *Apuntes goma elástica Noroeste*, 5.

¹³⁵ Sagárnaga, *Recuerdos*, 126.

Antonio Vaca Díez, there was an exodus of *patrones* from the towns of Loreto, San Ignacio de Moxos, Exaltación and Santa Ana del Yacuma (in the Moxos savanna), who abandoned their cattle and their haciendas to engage in the transportation of rubber from Riberalta to Santo Antônio (on the Brazilian side of the Madeira River). He calculated that a crew of eleven rowers could generate an income of 12 to 13,000 bolivianos per year. He did not indicate whether the crew's wages were included in this figure.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, this was an extremely high figure compared to the yield of a typical Moxos cattle *estancia*. The cost of constructing river craft was substantial and it was a specialty of the indigenous population of Baures and San Joaquín in the northern Moxos plains. For example, as late as 1907, the town of Baures constructed four *batelotes* at a total value of 4,000 bolivianos (1,000 Bs. each) and six *monterías* at 1,200 bolivianos. (200 Bs. each).¹³⁷ This was after the massive introduction of steam engines in the Bolivian rivers. Rowing boats continued to be used in secondary routes and by traders and rubber barons who could not afford the expense of an imported steam launch. The *montería*, in particular, continued to be the preferred craft for "personal" transportation to and from *barracas* well into the twentieth century.

Typical canoes were dug out (using fire) from a single trunk of the Palo María

¹³⁶ Vaca Díez, *Intereses de la industria*, 40. According to Gary Van Valen, rowers' wages increased as they became scarcer. In 1874, e.g. they received 10 Bs. to go from Trinidad to the Chapare and back. In 1889 they received 28 Bs. Van Valen, "The Ventriloquist Messiah," 73. When we consider the fact that rowers had often to provide for their own food (through fishing and hunting) and that most of their wages were given to their *enganchadores* or caciques or were already part of their permanent debt, they were definitely not adequate.

¹³⁷ "Cuadro que manifiesta la producción anual de la Provincia Iténez en el Departamento del Beni," Magdalena 20 Mar. 1907, in Departamento del Beni Bolivia and Carmelo López, *Informe que eleva el Sr. Carmelo López, Subprefecto de la Provincia del Iténez al Sr. Prefecto del Departamento del Beni sobre la segunda visita oficial a los cantones de la provincia a su mando* (Magdalena, Beni: "El Iténez," 1907).

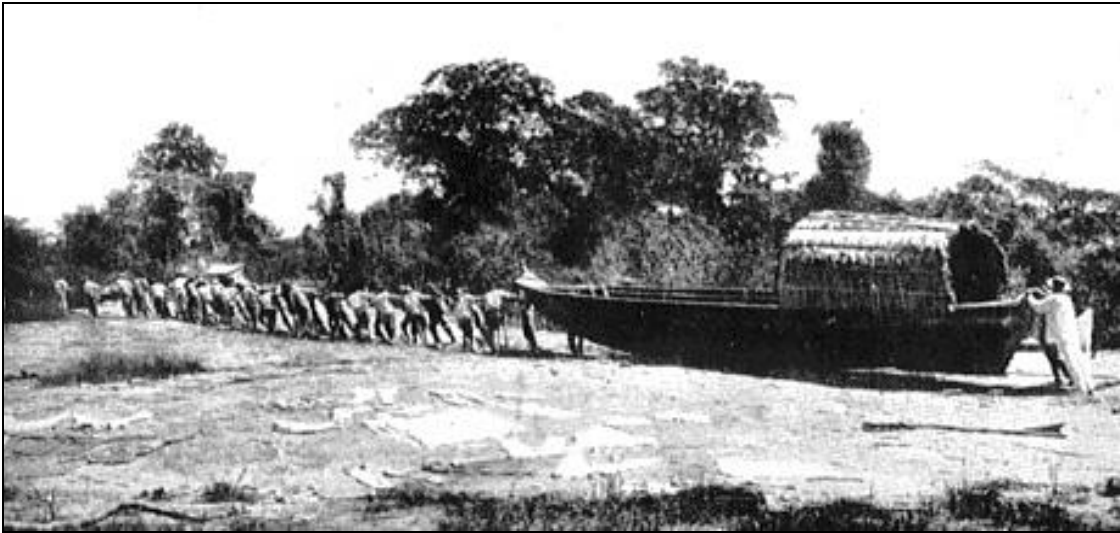


Figure 8. Portaging a Batelote around the Cachuelas
Source: Pearson, *The Rubber Country of the Amazon*, 121.

(*Calophyllum brasiliense Cambess*), an Amazonian hardwood that can reach a height of 100 to 150 meters, or mahogany. The dugout trunk was fitted with boards to sit the rowers and, in the larger canoes, a sort of wooden cabin covered with palm leaves was constructed to accommodate the *patrón*. The larger canoes were called *batelotes* (from Port. *batelão*) (See Fig. 8). They had a length of up to fourteen meters and were capable of carrying a crew of twelve rowers, six to eight passengers and 400 to 500 *arrobas* (4,600 to 5,750 kg) of cargo. Each canoe had a pilot aft who directed the canoe with a long paddle which served as a rudder and a *puntero* fore ship, who was responsible for scanning possible obstacles. Since *batelotes* traveled in convoys, there was a *capataz* in charge of controlling the crew of every two canoes and a general crew captain. Smaller craft were called *gariteas* (length of six to seven meters) and *monterías* (uncovered canoes of six and a half to eight meters in length). According to José Aguirre Achá, another veteran of the Acre conflict, at the beginning of the twentieth century a *batelote*

coming from Santo Antônio could bring back merchandise worth up to 20,000 bolivianos. The *cachuelas*, though, took their toll and the lifespan of a *batelote* was of only four trips.¹³⁸

As the rubber boom developed, there was an increase in the return cargo from Brazil. Part of the profits made from rubber was invested in merchandise to be distributed throughout the Bolivian lowlands. These goods became an integral part of the *habilito* system. They were purchased in Pará or Manaus with rubber or directly abroad. It was quite possible that the sale of rubber abroad and the subsequent purchase of merchandises was the only transaction where actual cash was involved. Like in the rest of Amazonia, currency was rare. According to general Pando, the rubber areas did not accept Bolivian paper currency. Most transactions were carried out in rubber or, rarely, in Bolivian silver pesos or British gold sovereigns and, later on, US silver dollars. Larger transactions involved bank drafts drawn from accounts in La Paz, Santa Cruz, Pará and London. The exchange rates were also arbitrary and did not take into account the market value of a currency. According to General Pando, since Bolivian coins had to be shipped large distances, they carried a fifteen per cent surcharge; therefore, a boliviano was worth twenty pence in Santa Cruz, Cochabamba and La Paz and worth twenty-four pence in the Beni. The most powerful rubber barons also issued promissory notes and vouchers. José Luís Roca, for example, mentions that both Antonio Vaca Díez and Suárez Hermanos issued tokens that could be exchanged for merchandise and that it seems like the Suárez

¹³⁸ Based on Bolivia and Manuel Aguirre, *La Delegación del Gobierno en el Oriente. Exposición, informes y documentos por Manuel Aguirre, Comisario Nacional* (Sucre: Imp. de "La industria," 1885), 23; Armentia, "Diario del viaje al Madre de Dios," 122; Armentia, *Descripción de las misiones franciscanas*, 89-91.

tokens could be used as currency throughout the Beni department.¹³⁹

Fleteros were vital to ensure the survival of the rubber market. By 1896 there were twelve transportation firms established around Villa Bella (the last Bolivian settlement and customhouse at the confluence of the Beni and Mamoré Rivers). Table 3

Table 3. Fleteros on the Beni River (1896)

Location	Company	No. of canoes
Villa Bella	Lucio Pérez Velasco	5
Villa Bella	Becerra y Cía	4
Villa Bella	Rodolfo Aráuz	2
Villa Bella	Maciel y Cía	6
Villa Bella	Enrique Iriarte	2
Villa Bella	Manuel Montenegro	2
Cachuela Esperanza	Nicolás Suárez	6
Cachuela Esperanza	Suárez & Leigue	2
Cachuela Esperanza	Suárez & Mansilla	2
Riberalta	Saravia Hnos.	5
Buen Retiro	Becerra & Montero	4

Source: Baldivieso, *Informe*, 53.

shows the most important *fleteros* of the Beni River. Not surprisingly, most were concentrated on Villa Bella, at the confluence of the Mamoré and Beni Rivers, and across Brazil. Nicolás Suárez had six canoes under his name and had partnerships with Leigue and Mansilla based on his headquarters at Cachuela Esperanza (on the Beni River before its confluence with the Madre de Dios River). This arrangement was quite common because very often partners had more access to Moxo rowing crews. Saravia Hermanos also had five canoes in Riberalta, which was emerging as Bolivia's rubber capital and was strategically located at the confluence of the Madre de Dios and Beni Rivers. Finally,

¹³⁹ Pando, *Viaje a la región de la goma elástica*, 116-17; Ministerio de Colonización Bolivia, *Informe y anexos a la rendición de cuentas que presenta el Delegado del Gobierno en el Territorio Nacional de Colonias del Noroeste de la República Dr. Andrés S. Muñoz, sept. de 1899 a mayo de 1901* (La Paz: Imp. Artística de Castillo y Cía., 1907), 37; Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, 295.

Becerra & Montero had four canoes on the Barraca Buen Retiro, near the confluence of the Beni and Ortón Rivers. Most of these *fleteros* came from Moxos and established partnerships to ensure a constant supply of crews and cargo.

Nicolás Suárez started as a *fletero* and he used the capital that he accumulated to get involved in the *habilito* system. He started to advance supplies in Reyes in 1876 and became involved in the sale of rubber but according to his own declaration never contemplated getting involved in rubber extraction since he knew that rubber would end and he did not want “to abandon or sell any properties.”¹⁴⁰ Even though he became the most successful *fletero* and managed to establish a rubber empire, his situation was not unique. Most of the names in Table 3 became important players in Bolivia’s rubber industry. The *paceño* member of the Liberal Party Lucio Pérez Velasco, for example, was a founder of Riberalta, a partner in one of Riberalta’s most successful rubber enterprises (Velasco & Henicke), and eventually became a National Delegate. Rodolfo Aráuz also became a National Delegate, a prefect of the Beni department, and Liberal politician. Maciel y Compañía also became a successful *casa comercial* and owner of rubber *estradas*, Founded by Cornelia Saravia, the wife of Nicolás Suárez’s older brother Pedro, Saravia Hermanos also became one of Riberalta’s most important exporters of rubber.

The trajectory of these *fleteros* cannot be understood without considering the fever for rubber in the 1880s. Like many such rushes, the sudden realization of the potential for profit brought an assortment of characters to Bolivia’s frontier. They ranged

¹⁴⁰ “Entrevista con Don Nicolás Suárez” in *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta). 11 Aug. 1922, n°23.

from veteran *cascarilleros* from Caupolicán and Yungas, to seasoned *fleteros* of the Madeira route, to Moxos cattlemen and opportunistic Liberal politicians, willing to risk everything to quickly enrich themselves.

Yet, the early days of the Bolivian rubber industry were very risky. Despite high international prices, without capital and a mastery of the complex links that led from a *barraca* in the middle of a jungle to markets abroad, a large number of companies failed. The Riberalta press was full of cases of public auctions of *barracas*. In 1901, for example, Barraca Illampu (on the Manuripi River) was auctioned to cover its debts. Its total value was listed at 308,697.28 bolivianos. As Table 4 shows, it is remarkable that most of its assets were not merchandise or rubber. Rubber was a mere 3% and merchandise (and tools) was 11% of the total value. Since rubber was prone to wild price fluctuations, and its transportation was risky and expensive, it seems like its value was not important until it actually was sold to foreign markets. Merchandise was also closely linked to rubber through the *habilito* system, so it was accounted for in a similar fashion. Bolivian *barraca* administrators seemed to think that the value of rubber or merchandise seating in a *barraca* was not very high and that, perhaps, it was rather theoretical. Rubber had to go a long way to reach European markets and merchandise had to wait for a long time to be given to *habilitadores* in exchange for rubber. *Estradas* (which the *barraca* did not own) were twenty per cent of the *barraca*'s value but accounts owed to the *barraca* by its employees (*mozos*, *fregueses* and women) were a staggering thirty-two per cent of the *barraca*'s deemed value. Chapter 8 discusses the intricacies of this sort of debt peonage, but it is important to note that these debts, which were used to attract labor

and were usually written off, were considered very valuable. Current accounts, on the other hand, referred to accounts that the *barraca* had with other sub-contractors or *habilitados*, which obtained supplies for them in exchange for rubber deliveries. Even though the liquidation of Barraca Illampu's assets is informative, it should also be noted that it took place in 1901, which initiated a three-year trend of low rubber prices, fueled by the Acre crisis, which could potentially threaten transportation of rubber through Brazil (see Fig. 9). On the other hand, the newspaper did not mention the reasons behind Barraca Illampu's failure or the nature of its debts, but it was most probably due, like most *barracas* in the area, to a failure to pay *habilitador* advances.

Bolivian *habilitadores* were ruthless in recovering their debt and were the main beneficiaries of *barraca* failures. Through this system, Suárez Hermanos made the transition from *habilitadores* and *fleteros* to rubber producers, without having to pay for

Table 4. Value of Barraca Illampu (in Bs.)

Item	Value (in Bs.)	Percentage of total
Merchandise and tools	33,022.18	11%
Furniture	3,394.50	1%
Animals	11,500.00	4%
Buildings	37,517.00	12%
<i>Estradas</i>	60,000.00	20%
<i>Chacos</i> (staple plantations)	22,050.00	7%
<i>Fregueses'</i> accounts ^a	40,603.50	13%
Current accounts	30,284.49	10%
Mozos' accounts ^b	54,412.61	18%
Women's accounts	3,350.00	1%
Rubber	10,459.00	3%

Source: *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 2 Oct. 1901, nº 97.

^a A *fregués* was a sort of a sharecropper, see chap. 7.

^b A *mozo* was basically a peon, victim of debt peonage, see chap. 7.

the complications of setting up a *barraca*. In 1901, Suárez Hermanos sued Jesús Roca and Buoncompagni, Lugones and Company for having failed to pay interest of 90,000

bolivianos. The Bolivian historian Pilar Gamarra Téllez has estimated that Suárez Hermanos acquired 10,750 *estradas* between 1895 and 1912 as a result of debts or missed payments.¹⁴¹

Of course, the other aspect of *habilitadores* and *fleteros* was the importation of manufactured goods. European and North American goods passed through Brazil in transit and were exempt from duties. Once they arrived at Villa Bella, they were supposed to pay Bolivian import duties. Collection of duties was extremely irregular. Corruption and contraband were rampant, at least initially. The Brazilian Bernardo da Costa e Silva commented on how the Bolivian sub-delegate in Villa Bella was also living on credit from *habilitadores* and, was, therefore, prone to corruption. In 1891, a Bolivian civil servant reported that many of the customs house's documents had been lost or were unrecognizable because the office did not have any iron safes and they were exposed to "winds, rain and insects in the site that is supposed to be an office and that is nothing else than a thatched corridor walled with palm twigs."¹⁴²

The list of goods that *habilitadores* imported was impressive. They included items for daily use and luxury items coming from North America and Europe. In 1881 and 1882, the Casa Suárez imported items of daily use such as hammers, zinc *tichelas* and buckets, scissors, locks, matches, spurs, iron rings to attach canoes, files, hoes etc. But it also imported luxury items such as silk handkerchiefs, china, cologne, "false" jewelry and pearls, six armchairs, fine beaver hats, harmonicas, fine cognac, "one piano

¹⁴¹ Gamarra Téllez, "Haciendas y peones," 69.

¹⁴² Silva, *Viagens*, 199 and Francisco Landívar to Ministro de Hacienda, Villa Bella, 10 Feb. 1892. (ANB/MH, Villa Bella, t.212, n°14).

in four boxes,”(300 Bs.) mirrors and sardine tins. Its most treasured imports were probably 539 kilograms of munitions and lead (at 75.46 Bs.), 3 boxes of shotguns (at 500 Bs.) and 100,000 percussion caps (25 Bs.). Another document specifies the point of origin of some of the imports. For example, Le Havre provided fine textiles, china, felt hats, bottled sugar cane liquor, champagne and furniture. Liverpool provided powder barrels and, surprisingly, sugar, rice, chocolate, salt, lard, condensed milk, tinned sardines, salt, butter and bottled cognac. New York supplied copper padlocks, cartridges, wheat flour, unspecified tinned fish, and bottled Angostura bitters. Hamburg provided bottled beer and other alcoholic beverages. All of the above provided “unspecified bottled wine.”¹⁴³

One remarkable aspect of the above list is the fact that many of the items that were imported (sugar, chocolate, salt, rice), were readily available in Beni and Santa Cruz. Other items, such as flour, could have been imported from the highlands or Chile. Yet, it was cheaper and more convenient to have them shipped by steamer to Brazil’s Amazonian ports than to import them through the hazardous canoe routes in the Beni and Santa Cruz. Another remarkable aspect is the fact that these items had to be portaged through fourteen *cachuelas* and loaded in canoes. The fact that pianos and mirrors survived this journey attests to the skill of the Moxo crews.

The massive import of foreign goods had a detrimental effect on the economics of Bolivia’s other regions. The rubber boom indeed benefitted other nations and produced

¹⁴³ “Cargo que se abre a la Casa Suárez por el impuesto de las mercaderías importadas a este departamento por la vía del Amazonas y el Madera.” Trinidad, Dec. 14, 1881. Signed Villavicencio (ANB/MH 1881, t.206, nº22) and “Cargo que se abre a la Casa Suárez Hnos., por las mercaderías que ha importado por la vía del Madera.” Trinidad, 13 Oct. 1883. Signed by Tomás M. Villavicencio (ANB/MH 1882, t.197, nº3).

little economic spinoff effects for the rest of the nation. In addition, rubber barons invested most of their capital in acquiring foreign goods and exporting rubber with the least amount of investment and produced little economic development at the local level. In Bolivia, the rubber boom produced a typical example of Dutch Disease, the abundance of a natural resource (rubber), had a detrimental effect on the economic development of the area.¹⁴⁴ Close links with Brazil and European suppliers also were detrimental to national integration. Many contemporaries commented that people in the Beni and the Northeast did not feel particularly Bolivian. Considering that their transportation and economic links with the rest of the Republic were extremely tenuous, this is not surprising. Later chapters analyze how the Bolivian state failed in providing the basic infrastructure that might have decreased this state of mind.

Table 5 outlines the origin and value of imported goods in Villa Bella in December 1891. The origins of the imports indicate where rubber was shipped. Not surprisingly, the United Kingdom led in terms of both value and bulk. France and Germany followed in terms of value and the United States was the very last. The value of Germany's imports was much higher than the United States because its exports were mostly high-value alcoholic beverages, whereas the United States provided cheap agricultural and industrial commodities.

Even though the import of merchandise from abroad was highly profitable, as the Rubber industry demanded more food staples, many of the *patrones* started to import

¹⁴⁴ For a discussion of Dutch disease in the Amazonian rubber boom, see Barham, Bradford L. Barham and Oliver T. Coomes, "Reinterpreting the Amazon Rubber Boom: Investment, the State and Dutch Disease." *Latin American Research Review* 29, no. 2 (1994). In Bolivia, investment, whether by the state or the private sector was minimal.

local products from Moxos. The most important item for the survival of the *siringueros* was beef *charque*, (salted and sun-dried beef) which, theoretically could be preserved for several months. Antonio Vaca Díez was the first *siringuero* to start importing charque from Moxos after his first *barracas* almost starved during the rainy season.¹⁴⁵ The lack

Table 5. Origin, Weight and Value of Imports in Villa Bella (Dec. 1891)

Origin	Weight (kg)	Value (Bs.)
USA	2,235	2,241,249
France	2,144	3,402,979
UK	138,351	21,513,511
Germany	980	2,558,233
Total	143,710	29,715,972

Source: *Especificación de mercaderías importadas a Bolivia por la aduana de Villa Bella en el mes de Diciembre del 1891 con referencia a la nación importadora*. Consulado de Bolivia en el Amazonas, Villa de Humaytá, 22 Jan., 1892 (ANB/MH, 1892, Villa Bella t. 212, n° 14).

of a steady supply of salt in Moxos and the general humidity of the lowlands created problems. Percy Anderson Fawcett complained, “*Charque* crawled with maggots, it had to be boiled three times and eaten with large draughts of *cachaça*.”¹⁴⁶ Although some rubber barons encouraged growing basic foods such as maize, rice and yuca on *barracas*, they found it more profitable to import tinned food from abroad or staples from Santa Cruz and Moxos that could be charged to the debts of both *contratistas* and peons¹⁴⁷. Moreover, agriculture required extra hands that would had taken labor away from *estradas*. Hunting and fishing were also discouraged. Iván Lugones, for example, wrote

¹⁴⁵ In a 1893 letter, Santos Mercado happily announced that Moxos canoes filled with *charque* had reached as far as the Barraca Florida. Santos Mercado to Antonio Vaca Díez, Florida, 11 Dec.1893. ACS/ Varias cartas 1892-1901.

¹⁴⁶ Percy Harrison Fawcett, *Exploration Fawcett; Arranged from his Manuscripts, Letters, Log-books, and Records* (London: Hutchinson, 1953), 55.

¹⁴⁷ Bolivians use the term *yuca* to describe bitter and sweet varieties of *mamihot esculenta* (also called manioc or cassava elsewhere). It is a staple throughout the Bolivian lowlands.

to the Casa Suárez requesting that they should send *charque* so that “our personnel do not uselessly waste their time looking for game in the bush.”¹⁴⁸ Historically, other booms have followed the same practices. For example, during sugar booms in the Caribbean planters relied on imports of salted pork, beans and salted fish to feed the slave population and discouraged local agricultural development. This often led to periods of famine among the general population.¹⁴⁹

As the following chapters show, the Bolivian rubber boom culminated with the virtual monopoly of Casa Suárez over all aspects of the rubber industry and beyond in a rare case of complete vertical integration. Yet, at the beginning of the rubber boom, the rubber industry co-existed with other commercial pursuits. Despite strong rubber companies that had the resources to dominate the local economy, traditional traders continued to operate in the rubber areas. Fermín Merisalde, a former prefect of the Beni department wrote in 1882 that the government should also try to protect the interests of traders who were not involved in rubber. According to him, most of them were *cruceño*, but there were also some traders from Cochabamba who exported charque and tallow to Brazil and produced sugar and sugar cane alcohol to be consumed within the Beni department. They also exported traditional Moxos textiles, tobacco and cacao to Santa Cruz and Cochabamba and *guaraná* to Brazil.¹⁵⁰ Eventually, rubber barons took over

¹⁴⁸ From Juan Lugones to Casa Matriz, 19 June, 1909. ACS/Correspondencia, Barraca Porvenir.

¹⁴⁹ See David Watts, "The Cycles of Famine in Islands of Plenty; The Case of the Colonial West Indies in the Pre-emancipation Period," in *Famine as a Geographical Phenomenon*, ed. Bruce Currey and Graeme Hugo (Dordrecht; Hingham, MA: D. Reidel Pub. Co.; Kluwer Academic Pubs., 1984), 49-70.

¹⁵⁰ "Informe que el Ex-Prefecto del Beni Fermin Merisalde presenta al Sr. Ministro de Hacienda e Industria con motivo de la propuesta sobre “mensajerías fluviales” que hace D. Lucio P. Velasco in Ministerio de

this trade. As early as 1895, Pastor Valdivieso, the central government's intendant in the rubber frontier, accused "the main houses" of restricting trade within their possessions and, thus going, against the Republic's interests.¹⁵¹

One of the significant aspects of the *habilito* system was that it insulated the Bolivian rubber industry from world markets. Since both debts and the price (and even weight) of rubber deliveries were to a certain extent fictitious, the Bolivian rubber industry did not immediately respond to market fluctuations. Figure 9 shows the production and value of Bolivian rubber during the Amazonian rubber boom. Some of the plunges were the result of external factors such as the Acre War or World War I, but many fluctuations were due to local conditions such as floods, lack of labor and transportation bottlenecks. For example, in 1901 the Bolivian press reported that the Casa Suárez had an inventory of 20,000 *arrobos* (230,000 kg) of rubber that it could not export via the Madeira because there was a shortage of available *fleteros*.¹⁵²

As late as 1923, the Bolivian press was stressing that the collapse of the

Hacienda e Industria Bolivia, *Informes y documentos referentes al Departamento del Beni* (La Paz: Imp. "La Libertad," 1882), 2.

¹⁵¹ "Informe que presenta al Sr. Ministro del Gobierno Nacional el Intendente de la Delegación Nacional en el Noroeste, Teniente Coronel Pastor Valdivieso [*sic.*] Riberalta, 1895 (ANB/MI Delegación Nacional en el Noroeste t.284, n°15), 27. Like many republican offices, the office of *intendente* had colonial origins. At present, an *intendente* is a municipal officer in charge, among other things, of regulating markets, prices and measures. During the nineteenth century, there were several types of *intendentes*. In this case, Col. Pastor Valdivieso was the second-in-command of the *Delegation Nacional*, and substituted the *National* delegate during his absences. His office had been provided by a decree creating the *Delegaciones Nacionales* of the Madre de Dios and Purús Rivers ratified by the Bolivian Congress on 2 Oct. 1890. Congreso Nacional de Bolivia and Aniceto Arce, *Ley de Delegaciones Nacionales* (Gaceta Bolivia v4 Beta, 1890, accessed 17 Sept. 2009).

¹⁵² *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 26 Oct. 1901, n°98.

Amazonian rubber boom in Brazil had resulted in an exodus of Nordestinos from the Brazilian Amazon to São Paulo. In Bolivia, most of the population stayed in the rubber

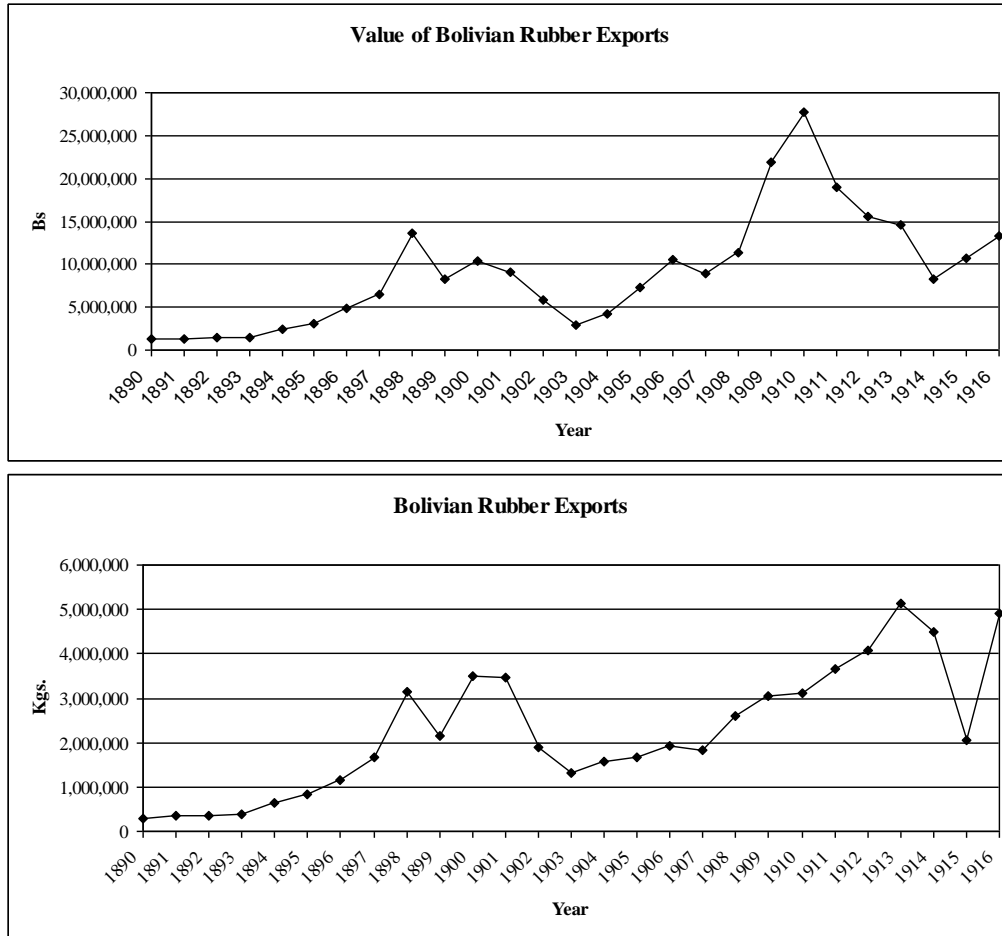


Figure 9. Weight and Value of Bolivian Rubber Exports, 1890 to 1916 (in kg and Bs., respectively)
 Sources: Ballivián and Pinilla eds., *Monografía de la goma elástica*, “Cuadros estadísticos” and *El Noroeste* (Cobija), 20 Dec. 1918, nº25.

areas linked by the huge debts owed to *patrones* and by the fact that these debts were the only way to survive in the frontier.¹⁵³ No other boom followed the rubber boom and, therefore, *siringueros* could not be employed anywhere in the lowlands. On the other

¹⁵³ *El Noroeste* (Cobija), 20 Feb. 1923, nº361.

hand, the mining industry of the highlands was well supplied with indigenous and mestizo workers from the Andean mountains and, besides, *cambas* did not feel comfortable in the Andean environment. There was some migration to Brazil and many returned to the towns of Moxos or Santa Cruz, but the rubber *barracas* continued to be the main settlements in the Northeast well into the twentieth century. Bolivian rubber *patrones* responded by diversifying their production (including Brazil nuts, cattle and eventually logging) and by increasing production, since they had finally managed to obtain a relatively captive and cheap workforce. As table 4 shows, Bolivian production increased in 1916, even though prices were already plunging and the Amazonian rubber boom had officially ended in 1914.

Thus, there were not any significant changes in labor relations during or after the rubber boom. The Bolivian rubber industry did not attempt to change its rubber collection methods to increase production or to reduce labor costs as prices for rubber plunged. On the contrary, its cheap labor force tied to the rubber industry through fictitious debts (which were harder to re-pay as rubber prices fell) continued to be its most important asset. The continuation of “traditional” rubber-tapping methods also reduced costs. Bolivian *siringueros* continued to tap rubber with a minimal investment in tools. On the other hand, as *patrones* diversified their economic activities, it was easier to provide for the *siringueros*’ basic needs. They decreased reliance on foreign merchandise, but diverted more workers from tapping to the production of *charque*, rice, yuca, cotton and sugar, which contributed to the *patrones*’s self-sufficiency.

Although the origins of the Bolivian rubber boom were closely tied to the

Brazilian rubber boom, the peculiar geography of the Bolivian Amazonian region shaped its development. Brazilians and Peruvians had direct access to the Amazon River and to the Atlantic coast and goods and people traveled back and forth with relative ease. Bolivia's Amazon basin, on the other hand, was almost an island. It was cut off from the Amazon River by treacherous *cachuelas* and from the rest of Bolivia by the Andes towards the west and the Chaco towards the south. This is why most of the area remained unexplored and unchartered until the twentieth century. Despite their insertion into the Atlantic economies through the cinchona and rubber booms, the Bolivian lowlands continued to be one of the world's most remote areas. The Bolivian rubber and cinchona booms were, therefore, very self-contained and little foreign involvement existed. Bolivian rubber barons, for example, remained relatively immune to international rubber price fluctuations and it is not surprising that there were few changes in the economy, labor systems and social structure of the area during the rubber boom and that many of these characteristics continued in place until the twentieth century. Many of the assumptions about the Brazilian rubber boom, for example, do not apply to the Bolivian case. For example, rubber wealth did not produce a relatively free labor force that took advantage of the geography to be relatively independent from *aviadores*, as was, according to Barbara Weinstein, the case in Brazil. On the contrary, Bolivian rubber barons limited the independence of their workers through oppressive labor systems. The geography of Bolivia's rubber areas also limited government intervention. Neither the Bolivian state nor foreign developments were able to challenge the supremacy of Bolivia's rubber barons. Bolivia's rubber wealth was concentrated in very

few hands and, as later chapters show, it was not invested in the area. As a result, neither the cinchona nor the rubber booms left much physical evidence of the wealth that they generated. The Bolivian lowlands do not contain any ruins of sumptuous opera houses or mansions, and none of its modest cities could compare with Belem or Manaus.

In conclusion, at the end of the nineteenth century there was a resurgence of interest in the Bolivian lowlands. The War of the Pacific had closed Bolivia's outlet to the Pacific and there was a need to look at alternatives to export its goods. Yet, most of Bolivia's eastern half was *terra incognita* and there was an urgent need to explore and map it. The exploration of the lowlands was a complex affair involving a colorful set of characters ranging from political exiles to foreign scientists. Exploration went hand in hand with economic advancement. A case in point is Edwin Heath's exploration of the Beni River, which led to a rush of Bolivian rubber tappers to the newly re-discovered route. Unlike other Amazonian rubber booms, the Bolivian was closely linked to the cinchona boom. For a few decades, cinchona and rubber co-existed as the main exports of the Bolivian lowlands. The cinchona boom was concentrated in the Andean Piedmont and it only marginally involved Amazonian indigenous peoples. It also was the last example of (failed) Bolivian protectionism. Free trade contributed to its collapse yet free trade would completely dominate the Bolivian rubber boom. Many of the practices of the cinchona boom permeated the rubber boom. The *habilito* system, which was in use throughout Amazonia, was also an important part of the last stages of the cinchona boom. Although it eventually led to the monopoly of powerful rubber barons, it did allow bankrupt cinchona gatherers to get involved in rubber. The next chapter looks at a crucial

aspect of the Bolivian rubber boom, on how the rubber industry dealt with its most-pressing problem in Bolivia, the lack of a permanent and available workforce and how this workforce interacted with the rubber barons.

CHAPTER 4. RUBBER AREAS, CASAS COMERCIALES AND PATRONES; THE MATURITY OF THE BOLIVIAN RUBBER BOOM

As discussed in the previous chapter, the *cascarilla* and the rubber booms co-existed for a few decades. By the end of the nineteenth century, though, Bolivia's lowlands were fully integrated with the Atlantic economies through the Amazonian rubber boom. One of the most stereotypical images of the Amazonian rubber boom, immortalized in Werner Herzog's film *Fitzcarraldo*, is the wealthy rubber baron lighting cigars with paper money. Although the Amazonian rubber boom did indeed produce prodigious wealth, Bolivia's rubber barons were never able to reproduce the urbanization and luxury of Manaus, Belem or even Iquitos. Nevertheless, the rubber boom is still present in the collective memories of the peoples of the Bolivian Oriente. In the present departments of Pando, Beni and Santa Cruz, people still fondly recall the days when gold sovereigns were plentiful and they drank champagne by the bucket. The barons of the rubber boom, such as Antonio Vaca Díez, Nicolás Suárez Callaú, José Manuel Pando and Santos Mercado have become part of the collective imaginary of the Bolivian lowlands and have had cantons, provinces and even departments named after them. This chapter takes a closer look at the height of the rubber boom and its main players, Bolivian and foreign. It also looks at the so-called *casas comerciales* and their modus operandi and at how they

integrated rubber production with other commercial activities. These *casas comerciales* had been essential to the early development of the Amazonian rubber boom because they provided credits in exchange for future rubber deliveries through the *habilito* system. As demand for rubber expanded, they became increasingly more competitive and their economic activities became more diversified. The early differences between *siringueros*, *fleteros* and *habilitadores* became blurrier and *casas comerciales* increasingly monopolized all aspects of rubber production and export. This chapter takes a closer look at how *casas comerciales* achieved this through a closer examination of foreign and Bolivian *casas comerciales*.

One of the most enduring aspects of the Bolivian rubber boom was the transfer of population to previously unexplored areas and the creation of new settlements in the Amazon basin. The rubber boom produced deep transformation in the lowland cities of Trinidad and Santa Cruz de la Sierra and the former mission towns of Moxos, Chiquitos and Caupolicán. Even though most rubber was collected in remote forests, the rubber boom also created new and modest urban centers in the Amazonian basin such as Riberalta, Guayaramerín and Cobija. Even though the rubber boom brought wealth and commercial movement, its effects on the cities of Santa Cruz and Trinidad were ambivalent. Rubber was responsible for a relative decrease in the importance of some of these cities and for population losses. New cities, such as Riberalta became very cosmopolitan frontier settlements. Although they were all technically part of the Bolivian Oriente, they developed along very different lines.

Finally, most studies of the Bolivian rubber boom have concentrated on the

Amazonian area of Bolivia around the present department of Pando and Vaca Díez province in Beni. As seen in chapter 2, the ecology of the Bolivian lowlands, though, is extremely varied and rubber grows in many areas. The first section of this chapter looks at Bolivia's rubber areas and at how they integrated with the Amazonian rubber boom. Only by the end of the rubber boom, rubber production concentrated in the present department of Pando and in the Beni province of Vaca Díez and other regions ceased to be economically viable. This shift was mainly due to geographical and ecological factors. Rubber was more abundant in Bolivia's north because it was in its ideal ecosystem it had not been exploited for dozens of years, and transportation to Brazilian ports and international markets was also easier.

As outlined in the previous chapter, Amazonian rubber production gradually moved westward from the mouth of the Amazon to its upper tributaries. At the end of the nineteenth century, Bolivian rubber production started in the Madeira River and subsequently moved to the Upper Beni area, near Rurrenabaque and Reyes. As exploration of the Northwestern frontier progressed, rubber extraction moved to the lower Beni area and then to the Upper Mamoré, Madre de Dios, Tahuamanu, Abuná, Ortón and Iténez (or Guaporé) Rivers. Eventually, Bolivian *siringueros* reached the Acre (or Aquiry), Inambari and Purús Rivers and clashed with their Brazilian and Peruvian counterparts. By the beginning of the twentieth century, most rubber production concentrated on what can be called the proper Northern Amazon region, which is the present-day department of Pando and Acre state and the northern part of Beni that is the present Vaca Díez province around Riberalta and Guayaramerín. Yet, the complex

Amazonian ecosystem also produced rubber in other areas of Bolivia. Although these areas could not compete in terms of quality or volume with the former, rubber played an



Figure 10. Map of Bolivia and Adjacent Areas during the Amazonian Rubber Boom
 Source: Fifer, "The Empire Builders," 116.

equally significant role in their development.¹ Rubber exploitation in these areas was often spearheaded by *siringueros* who had accumulated experience in the core areas. This section briefly surveys the different rubber districts of Bolivia. The main rubber production areas beyond the Amazonian core were located in the department of La Paz, especially in the tropical province of Caupolicán and, to a lesser extent, in the tropical valleys of Larecaja and the Yungas. The northern half of the department of Santa Cruz, in the areas of Velasco and the area between the Paraguá, Verde and Iténez Rivers, bordering Mato Grosso and the department of Beni, also produced a significant amount of rubber. Within the Beni department, there was also rubber activity in its border with the rubber producing areas of Santa Cruz and in the forests near Baures and Magdalena. Finally, the tropical areas of Cochabamba close to Beni near the Chapare, Ichilo and Sécuré Rivers experienced mostly unsuccessful efforts to extract rubber. Although contemporaries proposed several classifications for the country's rubber-producing areas, for the sake of simplicity they are reduced to four, using not very accurate administrative divisions of the area.

Territorio Nacional de Colonias and Acre

General Pando created the so-called *Territorio Nacional de Colonias* in 1900 to replace the system of *Delegaciones Nacionales*, which the Bolivian government had

¹The optimal conditions for high quality rubber in Bolivia were, according to the French geographer Jean-Claude Roux, an annual precipitation of 1,500 to 2,000 mm. and an average annual temperature between 24 and 27°C. Roux, *La Bolivie orientale*.

created in 1890, on the Amazonian frontier.² This administrative change did not apply to other areas, such as the Chaco. Although neither the functions nor the territorial jurisdiction of these *Delegaciones* was ever clear and, as discussed in chapter 8, created quite a few administrative tangles, they were divided into the *Delegación Nacional de los Ríos Beni y Madre de Dios* and the *Delegación del Purús*. Riberalta, Villa Bella, and Cobija were occasionally the unofficial seats of the central government but most delegates led a semi-nomadic life and were prone to stay at the *barracas* of prominent rubber barons. The *Territorio Nacional de Colonias* covered the present-day department of Pando and the contested areas between the Acre and Purús Rivers. Although President Pando's decree also created Vaca Díez province, attached to the prefecture of the Beni, during the period there were very few economic or cultural differences between the province, (with its capital in Riberalta) and the *Territorio*. During the early twentieth century, they were both heavily dominated by the rubber industry and by Nicolás Suárez.

Most of the rubber production of the former *Delegaciones* (as well as the production of Vaca Díez province) was channeled through the customhouse of Villa Bella and followed the Mamoré-Madeira-Amazon route to Manaus and Pará. For a long time the rubber produced in the upper rivers of the area was directly exported to Brazil and it was shipped directly to Manaus or Pará via the Purús River. According to the first *Delegado Nacional* of the Madre de Dios and Purús, Manuel Vicente Ballivián, Brazilians imposed an ad valorem tax of 20% on rubber exported through the Acre River.

² During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Bolivians often referred to this area as the *Noroeste* (Northwest), presumably because it was located west of the former Bolivian territories in the Madeira and Purús.

Since Bolivia also charged hefty taxes on its rubber exports but did not have the means to collect them in the Acre, this meant that the Bolivian state lost two million bolivianos in revenue per year.³ In 1899, the Bolivian state attempted to solve this situation by establishing a customhouse in Puerto Alonso on the banks of the Acre River. This eventually precipitated armed conflict with both Brazil and Peru.

Department of Beni

As described in the previous chapter, the areas that are framed by the Lower Beni, Lower Mamoré and the Madre de Dios Rivers were among Bolivia's oldest rubber-producing areas. Most Bolivian rubber barons started their careers in this area or shifted to it after operations in the Madeira or Lower Beni. Although limits with *the Territorio Nacional de Colonias* were not clearly defined, this area also included parts of the Ortón, Tahuamanu and Manuripi Rivers. The area's largest city, Riberalta, the head office of the Suárez Empire, Cachuela Esperanza, the port just across the terminus of the Madeira-Mamoré railway, Guayaramerín and the Villa Bella customhouse, were located in the department of Beni. Even though rubber production in this area declined, it continued to be very significant as the seat of most *casas comerciales*, government and the vital communications axis from Santa Cruz and Cochabamba towards the Atlantic.

Further west, on the border between La Paz and Beni, another old rubber production area was located around the Upper Beni, Madidi and Yacuma Rivers. It was

³ Manuel Vicente Ballivián, *La estadística de la goma elástica en Bolivia, estudio preliminar* (La Paz: Imp. "El Telégrafo," 1899), 2.

here that rubber was first exploited in the 1870s and where *cascarilleros* turned to rubber extraction. At the end of the nineteenth century, the ports of Rurrenabaque and Puerto Salinas and the towns of Reyes and Santa Ana de Yacuma were important transportation links to export rubber to the Atlantic. As rubber in this area depleted in the early twentieth century, it lost its significance but it continued to be a supplier of manpower and agricultural products to other rubber areas.

Straddling the department of Beni and Santa Cruz was the Iténez area, near the border with Mato Grosso. On the Beni side, rubber production concentrated in the towns near Magdalena, Baures and San Joaquín. Even though the Iténez is one of the most navigable rivers of the eastern lowlands, the area was one of the remotest areas of Bolivia and home to several hostile unconquered indigenous groups. Most of the rubber in the region was sold to foreign companies based in Brazil. According to a 1907 report, from January to July, Brazilian steamships took about 20,000 to 25,000 *arrobas* (230,000 to 287,500 kg) of rubber per *fábrico* to foreign commercial houses based in Mato Grosso. Not surprisingly, Bolivia did not receive any revenue from this.⁴

Department of Santa Cruz

Rubber production in Santa Cruz concentrated along its northern border with Beni. As chapter 7 discusses, there were many acrimonious disputes between the Beni and Santa Cruz prefectures over this area. Most rubber was tapped in the province of Velasco, in the region of Chiquitos. Besides the Iténez, this area was crossed by the

⁴ Bolivia and López, *Informe...López*.

Paraguá and San Martín Rivers and many minor streams. According to the historian José Luís Roca, one of the competitive advantages of this rubber area over the Northwest was its proximity to the towns of Chiquitos and the Guarayú Franciscan missions. These towns provided relatively easy access to workers and subsistence supplies. Many of the *siringueros* from this area were *cruceños* who had been displaced from the northern regions. They had discovered *hevea* trees as early as 1876.⁵ The exploitation of rubber followed attempts to exploit gold deposits in the Cerro San Simón in the 1890s. This area is geographically similar to the Northern Amazonian region, many rivers cross it and it reaches high temperatures. Since much of it is located near the Pantanal, regular flooding and abundant rainfall assured high concentrations of very productive *hevea* trees.

Some of the rubber from this area followed the Iténez route into Mato Grosso but there were also other routes. Puerto Suárez on the Paraguay River became an important link between the Iténez and the Río de la Plata systems. Rubber was transported directly from Chiquitos or through Santa Cruz using oxcart caravans and then loaded on barges that took it to Brazilian or Argentine ports. Some rubber was also transported from Santa Cruz to the Bolivian town of Yacuiba in the Chaco region, and from there to Salta and the rest of Argentina. Since most of the rubber was transported by land, transportations costs and risks were much lower than in the northern areas. According to official reports, in 1902, 12,206 *estradas* (or 1,830,900 trees) were exploited in the Santa Cruz areas of

⁵ Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, 196-98; see also Hernando Sanabria Fernández, *En busca de Eldorado: la colonización del Oriente boliviano*, 4. ed. (La Paz: Lib. Ed. "Juventud," 1988), 122-98.

and the Northeast and their Santa Cruz counterparts over control of the region's rubber forests.

Department of La Paz

Although the department of La Paz is usually considered to be a highland department, most of its northern half is the Yungas and dense areas of Amazonian rainforest. Its northern border with the present department of Pando and Peru is one of South America's most isolated and unreachable areas, allegedly home of some of Bolivia's last uncontacted indigenous groups. The nineteenth-century province of Caupolicán, along with sections of Larecaja and Yungas, were involved in the cinchona boom and Bolivia's earlier rubber industry began along the Upper Beni River, which serves as a border between the departments of La Paz and Beni. During this early period, the department of La Paz exported relatively high amounts of rubber. Many of the leaders of Bolivia's rubber industry who ended up in the Madre de Dios River and in the *Territorio Nacional de Colonias* were from La Paz, mostly from Caupolicán and the Yungas. Moreover, many of the most important *casas comerciales*, such as the Maison Braillard and many of the German houses, also started their activities trading cinchona from Sorata. Rubber trees found in the uplands of the department were considered to be less productive and to yield latex of lesser quality than trees from flooded lands, and their rubber was not labeled as Pará rubber, but instead as Mollendo-grade rubber. Despite this, rubber extraction was profitable because it was relatively close to the Pacific coast

and its transportation to Peruvian ports was relatively cheap.⁷ The closeness of the Pacific coast and the city of La Paz also led to the introduction of foreign capital. Although they never reached the wealth or preeminence of their northeastern counterparts, there was a small group of German, British, French and US entrepreneurs who were often also involved in other economic activities such as the export of coca or gold.

Rubber produced along the Upper Beni River and its tributaries (such as the Tuichi, Madidi, and Yacuma Rivers) was exported through the Beni/Mamoré/Madeira route and through the Villa Bella customhouse. Rubber from Caupolicán and Larecaja followed trade circuits established during the cinchona boom. Much of it was managed through new and old commercial houses established in the valley town of Sorata.⁸ From Sorata, mule trains transported it to La Paz or Peru. The traditional cinchona route from Caupolicán to Apolo, Pelechuco, Puno and the port of Mollendo continued to be used during the rubber boom. Although the crossing of the Apolobamba range was indeed arduous and was only accomplished by indigenous porters, the Peruvian segment was much easier. In 1871 and 1872, the Peruvian government launched two twenty-ton steamers (the *Yaravi* and the *Yapura*) that linked Bolivian ports with Puno and in 1874, it

⁷ See Isaiah Bowman and American Geographical Society of New York, *The Andes of Southern Peru* ([New York]: Pub. by H. Holt & Co., 1916), 32, and Armentia, *Diario de sus viajes*, 115.

⁸ Sorata was an important link between the highlands and the lowlands and eventually, between the Pacific and Atlantic. It became the main market for cinchona, rubber and gold. For a history of the region, see Jáuregui, *Sorata: historia de una región, 1870-1930*. The Paris-based Maison Braillard opened operations in Sorata in 1875 to exploit *cascarilla* and it eventually moved into rubber production. The Chuquisaca-born Benigno Goytia also used Sorata as a centre of his rubber operations. Other important companies were Pérez, Violant, Gunther and a succession of US-based companies. Roux, *La Bolivie orientale*, 169-71.

completed a railway from Puno and Juliaca to Arequipa and the Pacific port of Mollendo. Eventually this railroad linked to La Paz. These transportation developments intended to take advantage of Peru's silver mining boom, but they also transported Bolivian minerals, cinchona and rubber to Pacific ports and were essential in flooding the Bolivian highlands with Peruvian imports, such as sugar, rice, cotton and alcohol. Finally, in 1892 Bolivia opened a railway from Oruro to the Chilean port of Antofagasta.⁹

Transportation advances in both Bolivia and Peru integrated the western part of Bolivia with the Pacific and, thereby, with world markets. These advances came later in the Bolivian lowlands. The Madeira Mamoré railway, for example, was never fully completed and it started to operate in 1912 without ever reaching Bolivian territory. The city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra was only linked by rail to Argentina (via Yacuiba, in the Chaco) and Brazil (Corumbá, Mato Grosso) by the end of the 1940s. Projects to construct railways from La Paz to Trinidad and from Santa Cruz to Cochabamba never materialized and the western rail networks were never integrated with the lowland links to Argentina and Brazil. On the other hand, a road from Santa Cruz to Cochabamba was constructed in the 1950s with US loans. Roads from La Paz and Santa Cruz to the Beni had to wait until the end of the twentieth century. Ironically, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries technological advances elsewhere managed to isolate the Bolivian lowlands further, despite their potential wealth.

The proximity of La Paz's rubber areas to the capital and the Bolivian highlands

⁹ For Peruvian railways and Peru's mining boom, see José Deustua, *The Bewitchment of Silver: The Social Economy of Mining in Nineteenth-Century*, (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000); for Bolivia's transportation networks, see Bowman, "Trade Routes in the Economic Geography of Bolivia, Part I," 27-29; Fifer, *Bolivia, Land, Location and Politics*.

created a unique situation. As the liberal elite of the city tried to capitalize on export economies, rubber concessions in the department were subject to intense speculation. An analysis of rubber concessions in 1904 reveals some important names within the ranks of the Liberal Party. Vicente Ballivián, for example, a *Delegado Nacional* and future director of the National Office of Geographical Propaganda, and member of the La Paz Geographical Society, held 500 *estradas* in Ixiamas, and his son another 500 in Tumupasa. The future founder of the insurgent Republican Party, Bautista Saavedra, who was President from 1921 to 1925, also controlled 500 *estradas* in the Inambary River and Benigno Goytia, a prominent liberal entrepreneur, became one of the most important rubber merchants in the department.¹⁰ Many of these *estradas* were purely speculative and most of them were never actually exploited. A La Paz prefect, Prudencio Fermín, commented that rubber speculation and corruption in La Paz had frightened foreign investors out of the area.¹¹ Another unusual feature of Caupolicán and Larecaja was that, besides the German houses, it held the few companies with US ownership that dealt in rubber in Bolivia (The Chicago, Boston, and Maryland Rubber Companies) which initially came to the area to exploit gold deposits, lured by Arnous H. de Rivière's campaign to attract US investment to Bolivia's lowlands.¹² Larecaja, Yungas and Caupolicán were the only rubber-producing areas of Bolivia that were located near traditional indigenous communities.

¹⁰ Bolivia. Oficina Nacional de Inmigración, *Industria goma elástica, peticiones*, Dept. de La Paz, cuadros estadísticos (n.p.).

¹¹ Fermín Prudencio and Departamento de La Paz, *Informe Prefectural* (La Paz: Taller Tip.-Lit. de José M. Gamarra, 1905), XVII.

¹² See, e.g., Arnous H. de Rivière, "Explorations in the Beni Province," *Journal of the Geographical Society of New York* 24 (1892), id., "Exploration in the Rubber Districts."

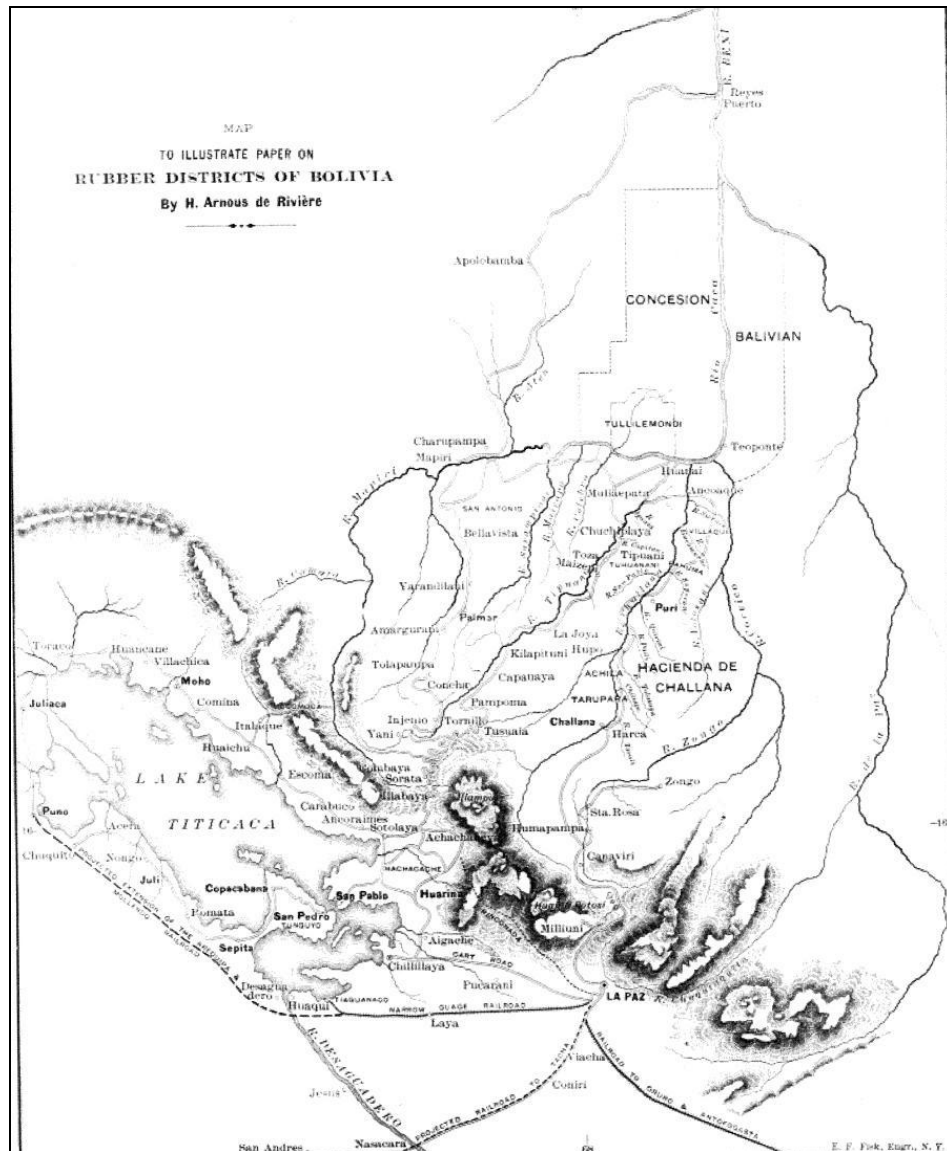


Figure 12. Map of Rubber Areas in La Paz Department
 Source: Rivière, *Exploration in the Rubber Districts*, 432-33.

Department of Cochabamba

The boundaries between the department of Cochabamba and Beni are still in dispute. There is very little information about rubber production in the northernmost tropical areas of Cochabamba, which was the colonial province of Yuracarés and is now

generally called the Chapare. As outlined in the previous chapter, *cochabambinos* were involved in the cinchona boom and, as it collapsed, some merchants continued to trade in the northern Amazonian areas of Bolivia in direct competition with rubber interests. Also, despite competition from both La Paz and Santa Cruz, Cochabamba has one of the most direct routes to both the Beni and the Bolivian North. The voluminous Isiboro, Sécure, Chimoré and Ichilo river system drains into the Mamoré River without any natural hindrances and navigation from the department of Cochabamba to Moxos and Guayaramerín is possible during most of the year. According to official statistics in 1902, 1500 *estradas* were exploited in the Isiboro-Sécure Region.¹³ Mule trains took rubber from this area to the city of Cochabamba and from there it was exported via the Pacific.

Throughout the Amazonian rubber boom period, Bolivian rubber production fluctuated wildly. It is extremely difficult to give estimates of production because rubber export figures never reflected actual production. Besides contraband, much Bolivian rubber was transported directly to Brazil or Peru without passing through Bolivian customs. Moreover, many rubber producers refused to provide accurate production figures in order to avoid taxation. Production figures reflected many variables such as depletion of rubber forests, transportation bottlenecks, international demand and price and availability of labor and supplies. Yet, evidence shows that, despite the existence of different producing regions, the rubber industry gradually became the monopoly of one

¹³ Bolivia. Oficina Nacional de Inmigración Estadística y Propaganda Geográfica, *La Industria de la goma elástica en Bolivia* (La Paz: Tip. Comercial, 1902).

region, generally called the Northwest, and one producer, the Casa Suárez Hermanos. Ironically, the gradual collapse of the Amazonian rubber boom led to higher rubber production in the Bolivian Northwest. As price decreased, Bolivian rubber barons increased production to compensate. They also concentrated their activities in the region that was most suitable to meet international demand. This region yielded high-quality hevea and, despite the *cachuelas*, it could be exported to the Madeira River and then to Manaus and Pará with relative ease.

In Brazil, on the other hand, rubber production declined as prices plunged. Barbara Weinstein has estimated that from 1910 to 1920, the price of Pará rubber had declined by eighty per cent and the state's rubber exports dropped by 12,000 tons.¹⁴ However, the Brazilian economic historian Antônio José Souto Loureiro has analyzed the effects of the rubber bust on other rubber-producing countries. He has based his analysis on rubber exported through Brazilian ports, thus excluding significant rubber export ports such as the Peruvian port of Iquitos. Notwithstanding rubber exported from Iquitos, Peru's exports through Manaus and Belem increased from 343 in 1909 to 491,688 kg in 1916, Colombia's exports increased from 4,950 kg in 1909 to 52,094 kg in 1916. Bolivia's exports went from 2,011,743 to 4,494,695 kg, therefore more than doubling its output (See Table 6). Remarkably, neither Peru nor Colombia experienced Bolivia's slump of 1910 (caused by an oversupply of rubber). Loureiro remarks that production in Bolivia and Peru, as well as Mato Grosso and Acre, grew as a result of the discovery of new rubber resources. It is important to remark that most of Bolivia's rubber had to be

¹⁴ Weinstein, *Amazon Rubber Boom*, 258.

shipped through Brazil, whereas other Amazonian countries often had alternative shipping ports.¹⁵

Table 6. Exports of Rubber through Brazilian Ports in kg (1909-16)

Year	Bolivia	Peru	Colombia
1909	2,011,743	343	4,950
1910	247,283	n.a.	18,468
1911	2,948,738	4,275	26,403
1912	3,346,856	249,751	57,469
1913	4,036,929	308,309	36,666
1914	3,998,496	356,076	41,506
1915	4,622,666	344,764	41,997
1916	4,494,695	491,688	52,095

Source: Loureiro, *A Grande Crise*, 141-42.

Michael Edward Stanfield, on the other hand, noted that, by 1912 Iquitos was experiencing a major rubber crisis. Declining rubber prices as a result of Asian competition, the bad press of the Putumayo scandal over atrocities against rubber tappers, and international clashes with Colombia and Ecuador had caused dislocations in the local economy. Peruvian rubber exporters responded by producing lower-quality rubber. According to Stanfield, the Peruvian rubber baron Julio César Arana started to produce “Putumayo tails,” an amalgam of different low quality rubbers.¹⁶ It is important to note that most of the rubber production of Colombia, Ecuador and Peru was from *caucho* (*castilloa elastica*) or *balata* (*Manilkara bidentata*) trees. In both cases, *caucheros* had to fell the tree to obtain its latex. The eventual depletion of *caucho* trees led to the exploitation of other species. In Bolivia and Brazil, in contrast, most of rubber exports continued to be of high-grade Pará rubber from *hevea* trees. They did not yield as much

¹⁵ Loureiro, *A Grande Crise (1908-1916)*, 141-42.

¹⁶ Stanfield, *Red Rubber, Bleeding Trees*, 162-63.

latex as other varieties, but it seems that Pará rubber continued to have a market niche for a few decades after 1913. As discussed above, both Brazil and Bolivia continued to expand into previously untapped areas, especially in the Acre/Purús region and areas near Mato Grosso. Southern Asian rubber achieved sixty per cent of the global market in 1914 and continued to increase until, by 1920, it had reached 89.3 per cent of the world rubber market.¹⁷

Bolivia, thanks to the Casa Suárez's monopoly of rubber production and transportation and the survival of the *habilito* and *enganche* systems, was able to produce rubber at relatively low cost and to be relatively immune to world prices. Ironically, the "antiquated" nature of Bolivia's rubber industry preserved it. Its labor systems ensured that there was a cheap labor force available to tap rubber. This labor force was tied to *barracas* through several debt schemes and did not experience any fluctuation in wages, regardless of world rubber prices. The same labor force was engaged in transporting rubber in rowboats or small steamboats. Again, transportation costs were minimized by the fact that all watercraft was owned by rubber barons and by the fact that their crews were also under the same debt schemes. Imported steamboats were expensive, but they were fueled with abundant local timber. Remarkably, even after the completion of the Madeira Mamoré Railway in 1912, small rowboats continued to be used because railway transportation costs were too high.¹⁸ A similar phenomenon took place during the Peruvian and Bolivian mining booms of the nineteenth century. In Peru, despite the

¹⁷ Ibid., 164.

¹⁸ Woodroffe considered that the Madeira-Mamoré Railway was too expensive and observed that the canoe trade through the *cachuelas* had been resurrected. He blamed the high salaries that the company's engineers received for its expense. Woodruff, *The Rubber Industry*, 159.

frantic investment in railways, Andean muleteer teams continued to haul goods from and to the mines at a lower cost and, at times, faster than railways. Llama and mule teams were more suited to the Andean environment and canoes were also more suited to the conditions of Bolivia's Amazonian rivers than steamboats.¹⁹

In these cases, "modern" export economies geared towards the international capitalist market operated with time-honored methods. Neither transportation nor production new technologies were more efficient than traditional methods. New technology might have worked in the more controlled environment of Asian plantations, where colonial powers and entrepreneurs had the capital and resources to implement them. In the Upper Amazonian forests, however, they were simply too costly. By using indigenous labor and indigenous expertise, the Bolivian rubber industry was able to outlast the Brazilian rubber industry. The rapidly industrializing economies of the Atlantic world did not have much impact at the local level, other than the importation of luxury goods and basic technology, such as steamboats. The economic history of Latin America is full of similar examples that show that the development of export economics does not necessarily translate into "development" at the local level. As Barbara Weinstein and others have shown, one of the trademarks of the Amazonian rubber boom was its legacy of underdevelopment. Although Brazil's rubber industry was more "advanced," in the long run, it suffered the fate of other Amazonian rubber industries. After the collapse of the rubber boom, Brazil's Amazonia continued to be as undeveloped

¹⁹ For the coexistence of muleteers and railways in nineteenth-century Peru, see Deustua, *The Bewitchment of Silver*, esp. chap. 5.

as any other part of Amazonia.

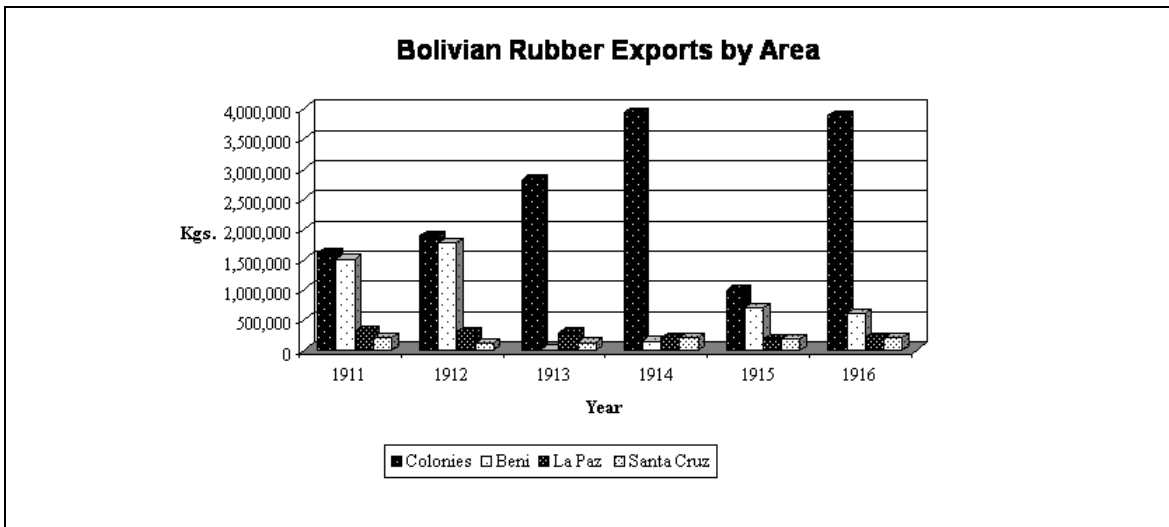


Figure 13. Bolivian Rubber Exports by Area (1911-1916)

Source: Based on *El Noroeste*, (Cobija), 20 Dec. 1918, n°255.

There are no accurate statistics that compare rubber production of the different rubber areas prior to the early twentieth century. Figure 13, though, shows how the so-called colonies gradually became the leaders of rubber production in Bolivia. Remarkably, official statistics ceased to show regional production after 1916, which shows that, at least at the national level, the Colonies started to monopolize rubber exports and the other areas became negligible. Even though there was a production slump during the second year of World War I, by 1916, rubber from the Colonies had almost reached its 1914 level. It should be noted that these figures only compare rubber exports within Bolivia's rubber areas. Total rubber exports and the value of these exports declined sharply during World War I, as Figure 9 of chapter 3 shows.²⁰ The fact

²⁰ Bolivia's best year for rubber exports was 1910. It exported 3,117,650 kg at a value of 27,653,556 Bs. and the state received 1,920,468 Bs. in duties. Bolivia. Dirección General de Estadística y Estudios Geográficos, *Monografía de la industria de la goma elástica en Bolivia*, ed. Manuel V. Ballivián and Casto

that, according to most sources, the Amazonian boom collapsed in 1910 is also significant. Bolivia's rubber boom started later than Brazil's, but it also managed to outlast it by a few years. This is due to the peculiar monopolistic organization of the Bolivian rubber boom and its high degree of vertical integration. When world prices descended, Bolivia rubber barons responded by lowering costs and thus adjusting to lower world prices for rubber.

Urban Landscapes in the Rubber Frontier

Although rubber brought unprecedented wealth to one of the most isolated corners of the Amazon basin, as previously mentioned, it did not fulfill the dreams of Bolivia's liberal elites of "modernizing" the nation. Like most Latin American liberal export economies, rubber brought wealth to a few and misery to many, but it transferred population to previously unexplored areas of the country. Yet, Bolivia was not able to create a European-inspired metropolis like Manaus or Belem. Despite this, not all activity took place in *barracas*. After the initial pioneering period, commercial houses, government bureaucrats and merchants established modest urban centers. These centers did not reach the opulence and population of Manaus or Belem do Pará, but they did establish a larger urban presence on the Amazonian frontier. Also, the impact of the rubber boom went beyond its core area of exploitation. Lowland cities, such as Santa Cruz de la Sierra and Trinidad provided manpower, supplies and served as distribution and administrative centers. According to most contemporaries, this impact was negative

Francisco Pinilla (La Paz: Dirección General de Estadística y Estudios Geográficos, 1912), Cuadros estadísticos.

for the urban centers and they, along with the towns near them such as Moxos and Chiquitos, lost population and, therefore, industry, agriculture and commerce declined. This section looks at the impact of the rubber boom on the cities and towns of the lowlands and at the nature of the new settlements that mushroomed because of the rubber boom.

Santa Cruz de la Sierra

The role of the rubber boom on the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra is equivocal. Most contemporary sources stressed the fact that the rubber boom had been detrimental to the city by draining its labor force. Nevertheless, the truth is that this drainage was also caused by a lack of opportunities for the local population in the urban economy. The introduction of free trade policies in the second half of the nineteenth century and the improvement of communications between highland Bolivia and its neighbors (especially Argentina and Peru), was disastrous for Santa Cruz. Peru, for example, produced large quantities of many of the traditional products of Santa Cruz. Peru's surplus sugar production could be placed in Oruro and La Paz through a relatively efficient network of railroads whereas Santa Cruz's products had to reach the highlands through tortuous mountain passes in the backs of mule teams.²¹

Yet, the rubber boom opened other opportunities for the department of Santa Cruz. Despite transportation difficulties, commercial circuits with the Beni were revitalized. The demise of Moxos' ranching industry and agriculture, through the massive

²¹ In 1896, e.g., the Minister of Industry specifically accused Peru of having ruined Santa Cruz's sugar industry. Bolivia, *Informe de Hacienda e Industria*, ANB/PL 1896. n°302.

emigration of indigenous labor and *patrones* to the rubber fields, and the annihilation of Moxos' horses by disease, created a market for products from the department of Santa Cruz that could be perfectly produced in the department of Beni. By 1910, for example, the prefect of Beni complained that essential items such as coffee, rice and sugar had to be imported from the department of Santa Cruz.²²

Many *cruceños* had migrated to Moxos to establish ranches and, eventually, to participate in the cinchona and early rubber booms. Despite migration from other areas of Bolivia and abroad, Beni and the future department of Pando became heavily influenced by the lowland culture of Santa Cruz. At present, these two departments are considered *camba* departments and have allied themselves to form the so-called *Media Luna*.²³ In his autobiographical novel *Siringa*, set in the early twentieth century, Juan B. Coimbra described how comfortable natives of Santa Cruz felt in the towns of Moxos. Speaking of Magdalena, he wrote:

It is a town like many others of the Bolivian Oriente, due to its urban appearance and the lifestyle of its inhabitants. Therefore, we truly felt “at home” [...]. Moreover, this similarity makes sense, because since colonial times, and even more intensely during the republican period, the governors, priests, schoolmasters, clerical and secular administrators, traders, businessmen and artisans who stood out in the foundation of all these towns were *cruceños*. This Santa Cruz influence, with all the virtues and defects of our race spread out throughout the Bolivian lowlands, from Mato Grosso to the Andes.²⁴

The most obvious aspect of Santa Cruz culture is its Spanish. It is remarkable that

²² Bolivia, Departamento del Beni, and José Cronenbold, *Informe del Perfecto y Comandante del Departamento del Beni, Sr. José Cronenbold, presentado ante el Supremo Gobierno de la República* (Trinidad: "El Heraldo," 1910), 8.

²³ See chap. 2.

²⁴ Coimbra, *Siringa*, 59.

the Spanish of Pando and Beni has very few borrowings from local indigenous languages and yet many of the words for local flora and fauna have Guaraní, Chané, Chiquitano and even Quechua roots that have been borrowed from Santa Cruz Spanish. The lack of local Spanish-speakers during most of the colonial period and the strong immigration of *cruceños* to the area explain this. Bolivian lowland Spanish, as elsewhere in Latin America, also tends to aspirate or drop final *eses* and uses the distinctive diminutive *ingo*, *inga* as opposed to *ito*, *ita* or *ico*, *ica*, which is probably due to Portuguese influence (*inho*, *inha*).²⁵ Part of the common cultural baggage of the lowlands is a tropical slash and burn agriculture based on a mixture of indigenous and imported crops, such as yuca (cassava or manioc), plantains and bananas, sweet potatoes, maize, rice, sugar cane, cacao, coffee and peanuts and a horse and cattle breeding culture, based on animals introduced by Spanish colonizers and Jesuit missionaries.

Civil servants, who were for the most part from the highlands, were highly critical of lowland agricultural practices and accused them of being responsible for the general poverty of the department. For example, in 1903 the prefect of Santa Cruz Rosendo Rojas informed that the once-fertile plains that surrounded Santa Cruz had become barren wastelands by the tradition of draining *curichis* to produce pastureland.²⁶ As a result, cattle were dying of thirst. In another report, he accused *cruceños* of laziness because

²⁵ See Hernando Sanabria Fernández, *El habla popular de Santa Cruz* (La Paz: Lib. Ed. "Juventud," 1975).

²⁶ For a description of the different types of wetlands of the Bolivian lowlands, see chap. 2. A *curichi* is a swampy area left after the rainy season (Dec. to May), usually caused by poor drainage, due to clayish soils.

they preferred to burn virgin forests than to use fertilizers.²⁷

Historian Pilar Gamarra Téllez has claimed that the department of Santa Cruz's participation in the Amazonian rubber boom from 1870 to the 1910 was only indirect and that it was limited to the supply of foodstuffs and manpower.²⁸ Yet, as mentioned above, the department had rubber within its borders and many of the pioneers of cinchona and rubber in Bolivia were indeed from the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Additionally, many of the rubber *habilitos* were initiated in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. The Cochabamba-born Pedro Vega, for example, became an active rubber entrepreneur who, as early as 1897-98, exported 30 metric tons of rubber. Eventually, he became one of Santa Cruz's most prosperous citizens and was one of the founders (in 1915) of Santa Cruz's Chamber of Commerce.²⁹ During the gradual collapse of the rubber boom (especially after 1914), many former rubber entrepreneurs and domestic and foreign *casas comerciales* also established themselves in the city of Santa Cruz and contributed to its increasing importance within Bolivia. Many of the public buildings in the city's downtown core, such as the Prefectural Palace, the City Hall, the Social Club and the present public university archives belonged to former rubber concerns.

The *cruceño* historian Hernando Sanabria has calculated that as many as 80,000 people migrated from the city of Santa Cruz and its environs to the northern rubber areas

²⁷ Rosendo Rojas and Departamento de Santa Cruz, *Informe del Prefecto y Comandante General, Coronel Rosendo Rojas en la gestión de 1904* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Tip. de "La Ley," 1904), 63; Rosendo Rojas and Departamento de Santa Cruz, *Informe que el Perfecto y Comandante General del Departamento de Santa Cruz eleva a la consideración del Supremo Gobierno, gestión de 1905* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Tip. Comercial, 1906), 92.

²⁸ Gamarra Téllez, "Haciendas y peones," 39.

²⁹ See Sanabria Fernández, *En busca de Eldorado*, 288-89, and Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, 108-13.

during the rubber boom.³⁰ This migration affected the city's population across the board. Migrants included impoverished *mozos*, indentured Indians, women and children, members of the local landowning elite and members of the minuscule "middle class," as well as soldiers, bureaucrats and artisans. Although this is a significant number, the population of the department of Santa Cruz did not diminish significantly, as was the case in other less populated areas such as Moxos and Caupolicán. These migration patterns, moreover, were a continuation of a tradition that had already been established by the end of the colonial period.

The following charts show the population of the city and department of Santa Cruz in 1881. Unlike other Bolivian departments, both the city and department claimed to have a "white" majority and a negligible foreign population.³¹ The lack of a *mestizo* or *cholo* category is remarkable. Many of the whites of Santa Cruz could be considered *mestizos* and the term only denoted the fact that they spoke Spanish and did not belong to any indigenous communities or missions. Chapter 2 has already discussed the speedy acculturation of the indigenous population of the Santa Cruz area. Even in the colonial area, travelers remarked on the fact that most of the population of the city of Santa Cruz spoke Castilian, as opposed to indigenous languages.

The total population of the city before the rubber boom was 10,288 and that of the

³⁰ Sanabria Fernández, *En busca de Eldorado*, 96. Sanabria Fernández did not elaborate on how he reached this number, but it has become generally accepted.

³¹ Many of the foreigners were German (including Swiss and Austrians). According to the German/Bolivian historian Mario Gabriel Hollweg, by 1891, German immigrants were already firmly established in Santa Cruz. He mentions Francisco Treu, Alberto Natusch, Jorge Banzer and the Austrian David Cronenbold as pioneers of German immigration. The latter three established *casas comerciales* in the city. Mario Gabriel Hollweg, *Alemanes en el oriente boliviano: Su aporte al desarrollo de Bolivia*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: n.p., 1995), 224.

department 95,299. By 1905, Guillermo Velasco estimated that the department of Santa Cruz had a population of 160,000 and the main beneficiary of Santa Cruz immigration, Beni, a population of 40,000 or 1 person per square kilometer.³² The 1900 census had estimated that the department had a population of 209,392 and the city 18,325, so the department had indeed lost population in five years.³³ It should also be noted that the Northeast and Beni were not the only recipients of *cruceño* immigration. Many *cruceños* also migrated to the unoccupied rubber areas of Santa Cruz (in Velasco and Chiquitos) and, to a lesser extent, to the recently occupied areas of the Chaco and the humid tropical

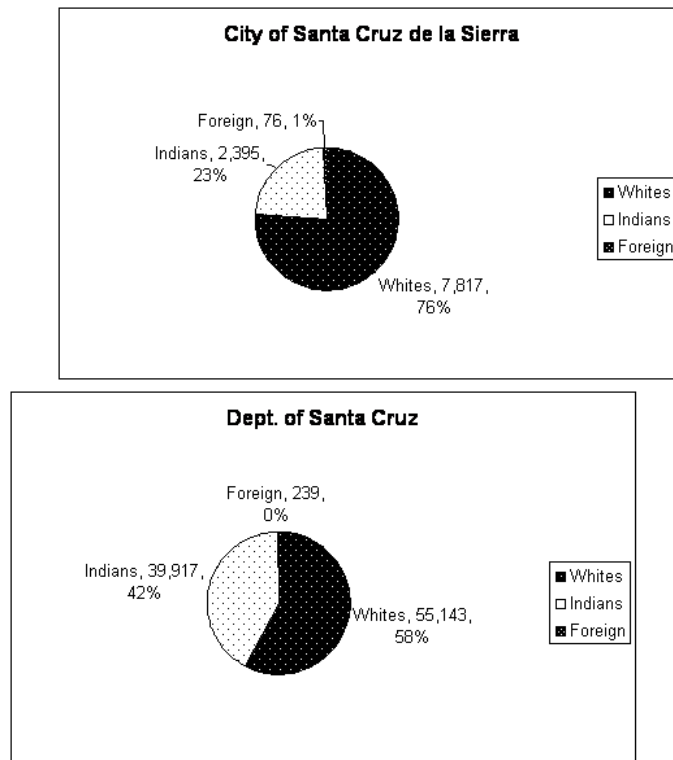


Figure 14. Population of the City and Department of Santa Cruz by Race (1881)
 Source: *El Amigo del País* (Santa Cruz), 26 Feb. 1881, n° 15, in ANB/RUCK, n°397 (1843-90).

³² Guillermo Velasco, *El Oriente Boliviano O sea su descripción territorial a grandes líneas* (Buenos Aires: Imp. A. Díaz Vila y Cía, 1905), 14.
³³ Bolivia, *Censo general 1901*, 30.

lowlands to the northwest of the city, near the towns of Buenavista, Santa Rosa del Sara and Portachuelo. Nevertheless, if the figure of 80,000 emigrants is correct, it shows a massive exodus from Santa Cruz to the Beni and the Northeast, which affected both regions significantly.

Trinidad

The Jesuit missionary Cipriano Barace founded the *reducción* of Santísima Trinidad in 1687. It was the second successful mission in Moxos (Loreto had been founded in 1682), since the first Jesuit incursions in 1674. Part of the mission's success was because it was on the banks of the Upper Mamoré and was relatively accessible from the Jesuits' headquarters in Santa Cruz de la Sierra and that it was at the core of the densely populated Arawak-speaking Moxos.³⁴ In 1769, pestilence and floods forced its relocation fourteen kilometers from the original site, on the Arroyo de San Juan. During most of the colonial period, (before and after the 1769 expulsion of the Jesuits) Trinidad was neither the most populated nor the most prosperous mission of Moxos and the "capital" of Moxos was the nearby Canichana settlement of San Pedro de Moxos. In 1822, the *cruceño* governor of Moxos Francisco de Velasco murdered the Canichana cacique Juan Maraza, and, in retaliation, the Canichana burned the town's church (along with Velasco and his officials inside) and most of the town.³⁵ San Pedro lost its importance and survived as a Canichana hamlet until the early twentieth century, when it

³⁴ Block, *Mission Culture*, 20.

³⁵ José Chávez Suárez, *Historia de Moxos*, 2a ed.(La Paz: Ed. Don Bosco, 1986), 486. One of the unfortunate aspects of this incident was the loss of Moxos' Jesuit archives.

was incorporated to Trinidad and most of the Canichana were acculturated, while Trinidad became the official capital of Moxos.

During the early republican period, Moxos was linked to the department of Santa Cruz, and as discussed above, this initiated a continuous immigration to the area. In 1842, Moxos separated from Santa Cruz through President José Ballivián Segurola's creation of the department of Beni. After a period of itinerant governors and prefects, in 1848 Trinidad became the administrative capital of a vast, thinly populated and mostly unexplored wilderness.³⁶ Despite *cruceño* immigration, according to Alcide d'Orbigny who visited the area during Ballivián's Presidency, only thirty to fifty people in the entire department were fluent in the Castilian language: the other twenty-two thousand only spoke their native language.³⁷

By the 1850s this had changed somewhat. The US Navy lieutenants Herndon and Gibbon wrote that the department of Beni had a population of 30,148 with only 325 Creoles. As in colonial times, the main economic activities of the department were the export of cacao and of "horned cattle," to the department of Santa Cruz. Herndon and Gibbon, like many other travelers, had reservations about the so-called Creole inhabitants. Since independence, Beni had become "Bolivia's dungeon" and any deemed undesirables were quickly dispatched to Trinidad. This tradition continued during the

³⁶ The original department included the colonial province of Yuracarés (present Chapare province) which was awarded to the department of Cochabamba in 1854 and Caupolicán, which was incorporated to the department of La Paz in 1856. It also included the Missions of Guarayos, which were eventually awarded to Santa Cruz and the unexplored Northeast, up to the Madeira River. For an analysis of the implications of these decisions on Bolivian regionalism, see José Luis Roca, *Fisonomía del regionalismo boliviano* (La Paz: Ed. Los Amigos del Libro, 1980).

³⁷ Orbigny, *Descripción geográfica*, 347.

twentieth-century dictatorships of Hugo Banzer (1971-78) and Luís García Meza (1980-81).³⁸ The Navy officers claimed that they had “never beheld such a rough-looking set—seemed to be the very outcasts of the nation.”³⁹ The British engineer Edward Davies Mathews, who passed through the city en route to Lima in the late 1870s, commented on the de-population of Moxos. He claimed that, in 1749, Beni had a population of 26,000 Indians but now there were only 8,000 left a century and a half later. He also observed that there was an unusually high ratio of women to men. In most Moxos towns, there were five females per one man.⁴⁰

The depopulation of Moxos was a direct result of the cinchona and rubber booms. Although the demand for Moxo labor affected most of the ex-missions, the indigenous population of Trinidad was particularly vulnerable because it was located in the main route from both Cochabamba and Santa Cruz and the rubber forests of the northeast and because it was the seat of the Beni Prefecture. In the early days of the rubber boom, Beni prefects were often accused of collusion with labor recruiters to provide indigenous labor for a profit. As early as 1871, the prefect Ramón Barberi forced more than two hundred *benianos* to go to the Madeira River against their will, unless they bribed him. He even

³⁸ The town of Caranavi, in the tropical lowlands of Larecaja (La Paz) was also a sort of “penal colony.”

³⁹ Herndon, Gibbon, and Dept., *Exploration*, 232, 234 & 249 respectively. As discussed in chap. 3, this tradition continued into the twentieth century, two of the most renowned explorers of the Bolivian Amazon basin, Colonel Quintín Quevedo and future liberal President General Juan Manuel Pando, were political exiles. Besides, the rubber baron Antonio Vaca Díez and his father Colonel José Manuel Vaca Guzmán became involved in the rubber and cinchona boom as a result of their banishment from the centers of power.

⁴⁰ Mathews, *Up the Amazon and Madeira Rivers*, 132.

tried to monopolize this business by fining 500 bolivianos to *corregidores* who allowed the transfer of Indians to the Madeira River without his written authorization.⁴¹

Even though the Jesuits had already moved the city, the new location was also problematic. The city is located in the Moxos savanna; besides having clay soils and few heights, Trinidad is surrounded by the notoriously meandering and unstable Mamoré River and several of its tributaries. Flooding and subsequent epidemics have been a constant of the city's history and contributed to the demise of its indigenous inhabitants. In 1896, for example, the municipality of Trinidad reported that a smallpox and cholera epidemic had decimated the already small indigenous population of Trinidad. It added that cholera was an endemic disease of the rainy season, caused by its oppressive heat and torrential rains. Besides the lack of drugs and trained physicians, citizens could not bury their dead because there were not any available bodies to either construct coffins or dig graves. According to the municipality, the indigenous population was also more vulnerable because their houses were in ruins because there was a shortage of masons.⁴²

Chapter 6 analyzes in detail the relationship between the rubber boom and indigenous labor; the pressures on Trinidad's indigenous population, however, were manifold. Besides the need for rowers and tappers for the rubber industry, Trinitarios were required to tend to cattle *estancias*, to cultivate food staples, to contribute labor for

⁴¹ The term *beniano*, was used to describe the indigenous population of Moxos. As noted above "white" inhabitants of the department, even if they had been born in the department were considered *cruceños*. Trinidad, 13 Dec. 1871, to the Supreme Government, signed by illegible group of citizens. ALP/SGL, 1871, C3, D57.

⁴² Trinidad, 1 Mar. 1896, Concejo Municipal del Beni to Ministro del Interior, signed by Carlos Bravo, ANB/MI 1896, t.2933, n° 87.

the local Prefecture and to engage in their traditional crafts.⁴³ Trinitarios responded to these pressures by open rebellion, flight or millenarian movements. The abandonment of their communal lands resulted in a huge land grab. In 1882, Lucio Velasco informed that Creoles had already illegally expropriated all properties of indigenous absentees within city limits.⁴⁴ These expropriations assumed that these lands were vacant, even though, as Velasco explained, many of their lawful owners were only away temporarily.

In 1901, a local newspaper summed up the city's situation: "the natives have ceased to plant cotton and to manufacture their textiles, which were once extremely valued in other regions. It looks like ranching will be soon extinct, due to the "peste del deslome" which since 1853 has been decimating horses and mules which, for that reason, have to be imported at very high prices and the lack of peons to take care of *estancias*."⁴⁵ The author continued with a complete litany of Trinidad's problems. As mentioned above, steamboats sailed directly from the port of Cuatro Ojos (near the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra) to Guayaramerín (on the Mamoré River, below its junction with the Madeira River), by-passing Trinidad. There was generalized inflation, a total lack of currency, local agriculture had almost disappeared and *patrones* had to rely on casual labor or to abandon their properties, and, finally, a state of "complete separation" of the indigenous race.⁴⁶

⁴³ Chap. 6 will deal with the different ethnic groups of the lowlands. The Arawak-speaking Moxos were divided, since Jesuit time, according to the mission to which they were assigned: Trinitarios (Trinidad), Ignacianos (San Ignacio de Moxos) and Loretanos (Loreto).

⁴⁴ Bolivia, *Informes y documentos referentes al Departamento del Beni*, VI.

⁴⁵ It is also called *mal de caderas*, the New World version of *surra*, a trypanosomiasis spread by the abundant vampire bats and biting flies of the savanna.

⁴⁶ *El hijo del Beni*, (Trinidad), 22 May 1901, n°8.

According to most sources, the population loss of the city of Trinidad since the 1870s to the 1890 reached fifty per cent. For example, in 1897 the prefect Rodolfo Aráuz had estimated that the total population of the city was 2,077, twenty years before (1877) it had been at least double that amount. Like many other sources, he stressed that there was an extremely high women to men ratio and that the city was very much “behind” in terms of economic development as compared to Riberalta and other “colonial” centers.⁴⁷ By 1901, Trinidad had 2,400 inhabitants and most of the Indians found in the city were “floating,” that is they were only in the city temporarily.⁴⁸

Even though the city was the capital of a department and it housed lay and ecclesiastical authorities, its disrepair shocked most travelers. The Italian Franciscans Ducci and Pifferi, who visited the city in the 1890s, commented that its cathedral was magnificent but in ruins. The prefect Rodolfo Aráuz also observed that seventy-five per cent of its houses were in disrepair and that ecclesiastical and official buildings were only standing because hundreds of “provisional” timber propped them up poles.⁴⁹ Even an official *Geography of Bolivia*, published in 1905 to be used in the Republic’s schools, stated, “Of the ten or twelve blocks that Trinidad boasts, none is complete. The deserted and swampy streets are almost impassable. There are no more streets than the four that begin in the plaza and end one hundred or one hundred-and-fifty meters from it, in the

⁴⁷ Bolivia, Rodolfo Aráuz and Departamento del Beni, *Informe del Prefecto y Comandante general del Departamento del Beni* (Sucre: Imprenta Excelsior, 1897), 20.

⁴⁸ *La Estrella del Norte* (Riberalta), 22 Apr. 1901, n°16.

⁴⁹ Zacarías Ducci and Sebastián Pifferi, *Diario de la visita a todas las misiones existentes en la República de Bolivia, América meridional* (Asís: Lit. de la Porciúncula, 1895), 89; Aráuz and Bolivia, *Informe*, 26.

middle of the savanna's swamps."⁵⁰

The Beni prefectures were chronically underfunded. The department's crumbling economy could not provide enough revenue and its authorities were constantly asking for the assistance of either the prefects of Santa Cruz or the central government. As early as 1871, in the first days of the rubber boom, the prefect Domingo Ardaya was predicting the department's increasingly imminent insolvency "due to the migration of natives to the Madeira River there is no more *contribución indigenal*. Additionally, the suspension of the sale of cattle [which was the property of the state] and common lands are depleting the department's treasury."⁵¹ Extremely hazy jurisdictional definitions compounded the problems of the department. Beni department continues to have an undefined border with the department of Cochabamba up to the present. During the rubber boom, there were jurisdictional issues with the department of Santa Cruz and the creation of the National Delegations and, later, the *Territorio Nacional de Colonias* further eroded the powers of Beni prefects with endless conflicts among different offices.

In sum, although Trinidad was drawn into the Amazonian rubber boom, it brought little benefits to the city. At most, its citizens became involved in transportation or produced *charque* for the men working in the rubber forests. The rubber boom also accelerated a process that started at the end of the colonial period, the immigration of non-Indians to the former Jesuit missions. Most of these immigrants were from Santa Cruz and eventually became involved in various aspects of the rubber boom. The

⁵⁰ Bolivia. Oficina Nacional de Inmigración, Estadística y Propaganda Geográfica, *Geografía de la República de Bolivia*, Ed. Oficial (La Paz: Tip. Comercial L. Artote, 1905), 37.

⁵¹ Prefectura del Beni to Ministro de Hacienda, Trinidad, 8 Jan. 1873. Signed by Domingo Ardaya. (ANB/MH, 1873, t.186, n°46).

indigenous population of Trinidad, like in the rest of the Moxos towns, bore the burden of the Amazonian rubber boom. Forced labor, repression, epidemics, and migration seriously challenged their survival; yet, despite all odds Trinitarios managed to survive into the twenty-first century and continue to be an integral part of the city's cultural landscape.⁵²

Riberalta and Vaca Díez Province

The exploration of Bolivia's northern forests produced many new settlements with varying fortunes. Many of them disappeared with the collapse of the Amazonian rubber boom or continued to exist as rubber *barracas*, *centros ganaderos* or mere hamlets; others have survived to this date. The city of Riberalta is considered the capital of the Bolivian Amazon and its history is closely linked to the rubber boom. The main reason behind its importance is its location. It is located in the midst of the Northwestern rubber region at the confluence of the Beni and Madre de Dios Rivers. Through the Madre de Dios, it was linked to the rich rubber forests along the Peruvian border and to the *Territorio Nacional de Colonias* and through the Beni, it was linked to the rubber districts of Upper Beni and La Paz and, downstream, to the Mamoré and Madeira Rivers and the Brazilian border. According to Lisimaco Gutiérrez, the *Delegado Nacional* in 1895, Riberalta was a meeting point where all the rubber barons from the Beni, Ortón and Madre de Dios Rivers met with *fleteros* and importers from Villa Bella and commodity

⁵² For an analysis of the role of Trinitarios within the complex interethnic mosaic of the present department of Beni, see Lehm, *Milenarismo y movimientos sociales en la Amazonía Boliviana*.

traders from Trinidad and Moxos.⁵³

Despite its importance, Riberalta reflects Bolivia's relatively low urbanization during the Amazonian rubber boom. Riberalta could not be compared to some of its counterparts like Iquitos, Manaus or Belem. It was never urbanized following the latest European trends and it did not boast botanical gardens, tramways or opera houses. Although Bolivians have often called it their "Amazonian miracle," foreign visitors were struck by the rough frontier feeling of the city.⁵⁴ Although it was the undisputed capital of the Bolivian rubber boom, its administrative status was uncertain until, in 1901, it became the capital of Vaca Díez province, within the department of Beni, separate, therefore, from the *Territorio Nacional de Colonias*. This decision led to a continuous rivalry with the city of Trinidad, the smaller and poorer official capital of the department of Beni. According to Bolivian bureaucrats, the multicultural population of Riberalta did not feel particularly Bolivian and, whenever they had to travel to Trinidad they said, "They are going to Bolivia."⁵⁵

The origins of the first settlement in Riberalta site hark back to 1886. The German Federico Bodo Claussen, who was a member of the Paris-based Braillard Company, established an agency on the former Barraca de La Cruz, founded by the *cruceño* Plácido Méndez, and renamed it Riberalta, due to the high banks of the Beni River. Other rubber entrepreneurs followed and, in February 3, 1894, the Bolivian

⁵³ Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Colonización Bolivia, Lisímaco Gutiérrez, and Ramón Paz, *Informe preliminar de los actos de la Delegación Nacional en el Noroeste de la República* (Sucre: Tip. Excelsior, 1895), 26.

⁵⁴ Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, 292.

⁵⁵ Bolivia, Gutiérrez, and Paz, *Informe preliminar actos*, 27.

government re-founded the city to assert its authority in the frontier. The National Delegation reached Riberalta after an arduous descent from La Paz, of nearly two months. Under the leadership of the National Delegate Lisímaco Gutiérrez, the sub-Delegate Manuel Vicente Ballivián and a long list of civilian and military personnel founded the city following a mixture of republican and Spanish colonial patterns. It was placed under the protection of both the Holy Cross and the Conservative President of the Republic Mariano Baptista (President 1892-86) and was dedicated to the liberator General Antonio José de Sucre (1795-1830).

The government confirmed the properties of the rubber houses that had already been established there: Braillard & Claussen, Velasco & Henicke, Suárez & Mansilla, Hugo Winkelman, Cornelia Saravia and Sons, Manuela Suárez and Esperanza Arce. The National Delegation proceeded to draw *manzanas* (lots) using the traditional colonial checkered pattern of *a cordel y escuadra* (with rope and a setsquare) and assigned locations for a large Central Plaza, the Delegation's headquarters, army barracks, public school, cemetery and cathedral.⁵⁶ The arrival of the National Delegation and its military personnel in 1893 caused riots and a military mutiny, since the inhabitants of Riberalta considered it an armed invasion of their territory. Neither local rubber barons nor employees of foreign *casas comerciales* appreciated the presence of the Bolivian Army, which, to a certain extent, competed with their own private armies. Moreover, all the civilian and military members of the expedition were *collas* from La Paz, resented by the

⁵⁶ *Acta de Fundación de Riberalta*, Riberalta, 3 Feb. 1894. Signed by Lisímaco Gutiérrez, Manuel Vicente Ballivián, Román Paz, in *Ibid.*.

mostly *camba* population of the city. After several violent incidents between *colla* soldiers and armed locals, and a summary court martial, the thirty offenders (mostly soldiers) were pardoned because the nearest jail was located too far, in Trinidad.⁵⁷

In 1894, Riberalta had a population of 252; by 1896, José Vicente Ballivián claimed that it had a permanent population of 2,544 and a “floating” population of twice that number. Since most of that transient population was made of Moxos crews operating canoes en route to Villa Bella and the Madeira River, the term “floating” was not inaccurate.⁵⁸ The sex ratios of the population of Vaca Díez province were opposite to those of Moxos’ population. Like many other frontier settlements, it had more men than women. For example in 1901, Riberalta had 54% men, 46% women, Guayaramerín 77% men, 23% women, Villa Bella 65% men, and 35% women.⁵⁹ One of Riberalta’s characteristics was its cosmopolitan outlook. Since its early days various Europeans (particularly Germans), Brazilians, Peruvians and Bolivians (from both the highlands and the lowlands) co-existed. Later, Arabs (so-called *turcos*), Sephardic Jews, Chinese and Japanese immigrants added to the area’s ethnic mix. In 1913, at the beginning of the decline of the rubber boom, a prefectural report claimed that the population of Vaca Díez province (including Villa Bella, Guayaramerín and Riberalta) was as follows:

⁵⁷ See Juan L. Muñoz to Sr. Ministro de Colonización, Reyes, 14 Dec. 1893. (ANB/MI 1893 t.269, n°47).

⁵⁸ Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Colonización Bolivia and Manuel Vicente Ballivián, *Diario del viaje de la Delegación Nacional a los Territorios del Noroeste de la República y el Departamento del Beni (Notas de cuadermeta por Manuel Vicente Balliviá , ex-Sub-Delegado Nacional y Vice-Presidente de la Sociedad Geográfica de La Paz)* (La Paz: Imp. "El Comercio," 1896), 52.

⁵⁹ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 6 Aug. 1901, n°94.

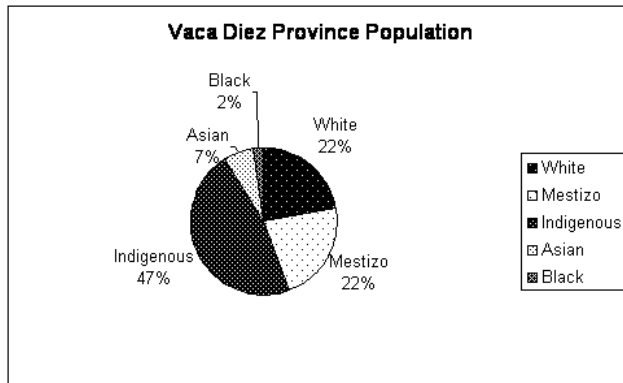


Figure 15. Population of Vaca Díez Province by Race (1913)

Source: Subprefectura de la Provincia Vaca Díez, Beni, Bolivia, Riberalta 28 Apr., 1913, signed by Rodolfo Barriga, in *Informe del Prefecto del Beni, Fabián Vaca Chávez* (ANB/PO (P), BENI 1912-13. VIII).

It is remarkable that, despite the rubber boom, Indians represented about half of the population. Actual definitions of race are a matter of speculation, whether this indigenous population was local or whether it was composed of immigrants from Moxos, Chiquitos and Caupolicán is not apparent. Moreover, the distinction between White and mestizo categories was blurry. Were Europeans and *cruceños* “White” and highlanders “Mestizo”? To what extent were the *cambas* from the towns of Moxos considered indigenous or mestizo? Nevertheless, the presence of relatively large Asian and Black populations from Brazil was also significant.

Despite the collapse of the rubber boom, many of these immigrants stayed in the area and eventually became part of the regional elites. It was probably simply too costly to return to their homelands and, in many cases, they were tied to the Bolivian Northwest by contractual obligations. This contrasts with the massive exodus of Nordestino

immigrants from the Brazilian rubber areas, after the collapse of the rubber boom.⁶⁰ At present, the elites of Vaca Díez province and Pando include a large number of German, Arab and Japanese surnames, which have integrated into the local elites.⁶¹ The following table provides a break up of Riberalta's population in 1929 by country of origin. As Riberalta became less of a frontier town sex ratios evened out. The lack of foreign-born women is also evident. As seen in the following chapter, most migrants to the rubber areas were single men and married local (mostly indigenous) women.

To Bolivian visitors, Riberalta seemed a sophisticated and cosmopolitan city, especially after the decay of the Moxos towns. The intendant Pastor Baldivieso, who came with the National Delegation, listed its main attractions: Its four large stores belonged to Braillard from Paris, Saravia & Sons, Heinecke and Suárez and Mansilla. Patricio Gibson and Carlos Weigand, Juan Alberdi, Máximo Heinecke and Sr. Extremadoiro headed them respectively. The "second-class" stores" included those belonging to Ricardo Haberland, Hugo Winckelmann and José do Amaral Martins. He also mentioned three to four additional commercial houses, a hotel owned by Juan Graverald, an inn belonging to Lionides Oporto, a *cantina* belonging to Millán Ribero, a private club with billiards, seven lawyers and a school. He also noted that the city lacked a church or mission, did not have any priests or physicians, and that neither family nor

⁶⁰ Weinstein, *Amazon Rubber Boom*, 243-44.

⁶¹ For a sociological study of the present élites of Beni, see Gonzalo Rojas Ortuste, *Elites a la vuelta del siglo: cultura política en el Beni* (La Paz: Programa de Investigación Estratégica en Bolivia, 2000).

religion held any sway and, as a result, there was a large amount of abandoned children.⁶²

A rapid glance at the above list suggests from the surnames Bolivian, German and Brazilian citizens.

Table 7. Country of Origin and Sex of Riberalta's Urban Population, 1929

Country	Men	Women	Total
Bolivia	1,364	1,321	2,685
Japan	95	4	99
Peru	30	11	41
Spain	17	0	17
Switzerland	11	2	13
Brazil	13	1	14
Germany	9	3	12
China	7	0	7
Ecuador	6	0	6
Italy	6	0	6
France	3	1	4
Portugal	4	0	4
Syria	3	1	4
Colombia	2	0	2
Chile	3	0	3
Algeria	2	0	2
Greece	3	0	3
England	2	0	2
Argentina	1	0	1
Morocco	1	0	1
Austria	1	0	1
Denmark	1	0	1
Total	1,584	1,344	2,928

Source: "Censo de Riberalta levantado por la H. Junta Municipal el 4 de Mayo del 1929" in *La Gaceta del Norte*, (Riberalta), 30 Aug. 1929, n°115.

Other visitors, especially if they came through Manaus and Belem, had other impressions. The Spanish writer Ciro Bayo, who had been offered a job at the local

⁶² "Informe que presenta al Sr. Ministro del Gobierno Nacional el Intendente de la Delegación Nacional en el Noroeste, Teniente Coronel Pastor Valdivieso." Riberalta 1895 (ANB/MI Delegación Nacional en el Noroeste t.284, n°15), 92.

Escuela Sucre, complained that everything was terribly expensive. He added that most houses were made of *tacuara* bamboo (*Guadua angustifolia*) and *palha* (the local name



Figure 16. Head Office of the Maison Brillard in Riberalta in the early 1900s

Source: Photographed by Karl Blattmann. Reproduced from Centeno et al., *Imágenes del Auge de la Goma*, 14.

for the *jatata* palm leaf (*Geonoma deversa*) and did not last more than six years due to humidity and termites. Curiously, sidewalks were paved with expensive imported beer bottles worth three bolivianos a bottle, so that *Ciro Bayo* ironically observed that they were technically paved in silver.⁶³ An article in one of the local newspapers described the best houses of the city. *Rómulo Pinto*'s residence had a *palha* roof, yet it had whitewashed adobe walls. The house of the editor of the paper, *Antonio Pérez*, had unpainted adobes with a *palha* roof and the residences and offices of *Dr. Vaca Díez* and other wealthy rubber entrepreneurs, such as *Aponte*, *Velasco* and *Heinicke*, had either tile or zinc roofs and, finally *Nicolás Suárez*'s business partner, *Sr. Mansilla*, had *tacuara*

⁶³ *Ciro Bayo*, *Por la América desconocida* (Madrid: R.C. Raggio, 1927), 270-72.

walls and *palha* roof but “elegant doors” and its interior was painted with “oil paint and luxuriously decorated.”⁶⁴ On the other hand, it should be noted that *tacuara* walls and thatched roofs allowed breezes to circulate and were, therefore, quite appropriate for the torrid climate (See Fig. 16).

The lack of creature comforts was not only the only problem facing the city. Despite the city’s claim to modernity, it lacked modern hygiene. The British colonel Percy Fawcett complained that the city was extremely unhealthy and that beriberi, due to the lack of vitamins and fresh food, was rampant. According to Fawcett, in Riberalta a healthy person was regarded as a freak. The British rubber expert Joseph F. Woodroffe also joked that the only “sanitary inspectors” were the roaming pigs that took care of garbage.⁶⁵ Ironies aside, the city did suffer from serious food shortages. Until the Japanese started to plant vegetables in the early twentieth century, it was very dependent on food imports from Moxos.⁶⁶ Since as early as 1897 game had been extinct from its vicinity, and could only be found five to six hours from the city and fish was considered an “Indian” food, there were few alternatives.⁶⁷ Eventually, on-the-hoof cattle from Moxos supplied fresh meat. This, however, also caused some problems, since the cattle was allowed to wander around the city. In 1890, a local newspaper demanded that cattle

⁶⁴ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 16 July 1898, n°55.

⁶⁵ Fawcett, *Exploration Fawcett*, 15; Joseph F. Woodroffe, *The Upper Reaches of the Amazon* (London: Meuthen & Co. Ltd., 1914), 215.

⁶⁶ According to Woodroffe, the Japanese had migrated to Riberalta from the Peruvian town of Chanchamayo in Peru’s Selva Central, in the early 1900s. It seems they were fleeing from their contracts as indentured workers in Peruvian plantations. Woodroffe, *The Rubber Industry*, 150. According to Tigner, many Japanese moved from the Tambopata valley (in the Peruvian Amazon) to Riberalta from 1900 to 1910. Some were hired directly by Bolivian and foreign rubber houses, see James Lawrence Tigner, “The Ryukyuan in Bolivia,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 43, no. 2 (1963): 207.

⁶⁷ *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 9 Oct. 1897, n°40.

be removed from the main streets of the city. It also complained that people should refrain from shooting their revolvers on public streets, since the fragile construction of houses made stray bullets very dangerous to their inhabitants.⁶⁸ These conditions were probably common in all of Bolivia's tropical urban areas, yet they show that Riberalta was not as developed as Brazil's rubber centers. It never had an opera house or a tramway system or public lighting, like Manaus or Belem.

Despite these problems, Riberalta was indeed the capital of the Bolivian Amazon. Since its early days it boasted a printing press belonging to Antonio Vaca Díez; later Nicanor G. Salvatierra and the Aponte Brothers brought other printing presses. These presses were used to print contracts, newspapers and pamphlets. In a feud involving two of the most powerful rubber barons of Bolivia, Antonio Vaca Díez and Nicanor G. Salvatierra, used their presses and newspapers in a spiteful war of words. The first founded the daily *La Gaceta del Norte* in 1887 and the latter founded the rival *El Noroeste*. Eventually, the city boasted several banks, electrical light and a few social clubs. As evidence of Riberalta's sophistication the Riberalta Press published the menu that was given at a banquet, attended by three hundred people, in honor of the Papal Nuncio's visit in 1910, at the height of the city's prosperity. The menu was written in French and followed the customary sequence of courses: it included hors d'oeuvres, soup, fish, several entrées, roast turkey and veal fillet, sorbets, cheese, desert, fruits, wine,

⁶⁸ Ibid., Feb. (?), 1890, n°57.

liqueurs, coffee and Cuban cigars. The liqueurs were Bénédictine and Chartreuse and the wine list included Champagne, Chamberlin, Sauternes and Bordeaux.⁶⁹

Highlanders, though, continued to feel out of place within the town. The *paceño* army surgeon Elías Sagárnaga, who visited the city during the Acre campaign (1903), was shocked by the unenthusiastic welcome the Bolivian army received, reminiscent of the problems that the National Delegation had found in 1893. The local rubber barons, dressed in white linen suits and donning Panama hats, competed with each other to offer luxurious luncheons and dinners, offering wines, liqueurs and imported delicacies, yet Sagárnaga and his entourage felt that they were arriving in a foreign city. Neither the *cruceño* rubber barons, nor the foreign staff of the *casas comerciales* nor the lowland Indians would have been very familiar to an average highlander. The contrasts of wealth and poverty in the city also struck the party.⁷⁰ Surprisingly, the Swedish ethnographer Erland Nordenskiöld, who was very critical of the Bolivian rubber industry, was pleasantly struck by Riberalta. After a 1914 visit, he wrote that:

I must admit that I have felt very at ease among most people that one finds in a place like Riberalta. They are men who know about life and who have something to tell. The intellectual interests of many of these men, is surprising. One can find here the best magazines that deal with literary, artistic and literary affairs. There are far fewer adventurers, in the worse meaning of the word, than one might expect in such a remote place.⁷¹

Other settlements of Vaca Díez province had varying fortunes. Nearby Villa Bella, near the confluence of the Mamoré and Beni Rivers that formed the Madeira River,

⁶⁹ Ibid., 27 June 1910, n° 300.

⁷⁰ Sagárnaga, *Recuerdos*, 54-56.

⁷¹ Nordenskiöld, *Exploraciones y Aventuras*, 332.

and the official seat of Bolivia's main customhouse in the area, at times had a greater population and importance than Riberalta but it collapsed along with the rubber boom and, at present, it is an almost abandoned hamlet.⁷² On the other hand, the port of Guayaramerín, which had been a malaria-infested settlement along the Mamoré's *cachuelas*, became increasingly important in the early twentieth century because it was located across the terminus of the Madeira/Mamoré railway on the Brazilian side of the river. It is possible that its growth was also related to sanitation improvements, after all the Madeira/Mamoré Railway Company had imported doctors and two tons of quinine pills from the USA.⁷³ After the Acre War, Bolivians retained control of Nicolás Suárez's Barraca Bahía, on the Bolivian side of the Acre River and in 1906 renamed it Cobija in honor of the lost port on the Pacific War. During the early twentieth century, Cobija also rivaled with Riberalta in terms of population and rubber commerce. In 1915, the *National Delegation* moved its seat from Riberalta to Cobija and in 1938, the government of Bolivia created the new department of Pando, with its capital in Cobija. The history of some of the area's larger *barracas* is discussed below; some of them like Nicolás Suarez's Cachuela Esperanza on the Beni River or Antonio Vaca Díez's Barracón Ortón on the Ortón River were at their height considerable urban centers, given the low urban development of the region. Cachuela Esperanza today is a semi-abandoned

⁷² For example in 1895, the National delegate Lisimaco Gutiérrez informed that Villa Bella had more population than Riberalta and that it was much more important. Bolivia, Gutiérrez, and Paz, *Informe preliminar actos*, 37. The town's location made it vulnerable to floods and epidemics. In 1899, e.g., flooding and a malaria epidemic had reduced its population to 150. *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 28 Mar. 1899, n° 69. On the other hand, in 1900 Villa Bella had a population of 1,028, Riberalta 1,796 and Guayaramerín 91. Bolivia, *Censo general 1901*, 20.

⁷³ "Algo sobre el Amazonas, por el ex-Delegado Nacional Carlos Gutiérrez, Conferencia dada en el Liceo de Señoritas de Sucre." *El Noroeste* (Cobija), 1 July 1917, n° 225.

ghost town and Ortón has completely disappeared.⁷⁴

The Bolivian rubber boom did not produce any metropolis but it had mostly negative effects on the pre-existing modest towns of Moxos; they lost population and suffered economic stagnation. Its effects on the colonial city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra were ambivalent. It lost population, yet many of its citizens found new opportunities in the exploitation of rubber on the northern borders of the department or the Northwest. As the rubber boom collapsed, many rubber barons returned to the city and invested in modernizing its infrastructure. The rubber boom had nefarious effects on Trinidad and its hinterland. It lost most of its indigenous population and many *cruceño* entrepreneurs, and led to the ruin of many economic activities. As new lands were discovered and new jurisdictions created, the capital of Beni department lost its importance. By the early twentieth century, Trinidad was a crumbling city and its prefects were increasingly desperate to sustain their budgets. The richest rubber areas, the so-called Northwest or *Territorio Nacional de Colonias*, attracted population throughout the lowlands and new settlements mushroomed. Many of these collapsed along with the rubber boom, but some have survived to date. Despite this, the heart of the rubber areas was not in their modest cities but in the *barracas*, which speckled the banks of the Amazonian rivers. Bolivia's rubber boom followed the pattern of many other booms throughout the world. Cities mushroomed overnight in unexplored areas, but, after the boom was over, it left a legacy of decaying settlements or ghost towns.

⁷⁴ For photographs of Cachuela Esperanza during the rubber boom, see Ricardo Centeno and Patricia O. Fernández, *Imágenes del auge de la goma, reportaje gráfico* (La Paz: La Papelera S.A., 1998).

Casas Comerciales and Rubber Barons

The history of the city of Riberalta cannot be explained without the presence of Bolivian and foreign *casas comerciales*. Employees of these enterprises had founded the city and their presence prompted the Bolivian government to re-found the city as the capital of its northeastern frontier. This section describes the activities of these *casas comerciales* during the rubber boom and how they led to the emergence of Bolivia's powerful rubber barons.

At the outset of the rubber boom, the pioneers of Bolivia's rubber industry had a certain degree of economic specialization. *Fleteros* took care of transportation, *siringueros* tapped rubber, *casas comerciales* took care of advancing credit through the *habilito* system in exchange for future rubber deliveries, taking advantage of high rubber prices abroad to import North American, and European manufactured goods and luxury items. As the rubber boom progressed, *casas comerciales* amalgamated many of these functions and started to dominate Bolivia's rubber industry. By the end of the rubber boom, most *casas comerciales* had consolidated into a few powerful enterprises that dominated virtually every aspect of life and politics in Bolivia's rubber areas. This was not the case in Brazil, where there was a higher degree of specialization from the outset of the boom. According to Barbara Weinstein, there was an increasingly antagonistic stance between *aviadores* and rubber exporters (who were mostly foreign). As the boom progressed, these groups became more entrenched, and manipulated other players, such as the regional and national states, to preserve their privileges. Foreign companies, such as the British Amazon Steam Navigation Company controlled most shipping within the

Amazon River (from Iquitos to Belem), and also monopolized rubber exports from Belem and Manaus to Europe and North America. Many rubber barons also depended on direct credit provided by European and North American banks with branches in Brazil and had access to foreign insurance companies.⁷⁵

Lanchas and Vapores

One of the problems that faced rubber producers was the unpredictable nature of river transportation in Amazonian rivers. Shortages of rowers or shipwrecks jeopardized the smooth exchange of rubber for foreign goods. At the end of the *cascarilla* boom and during the early rubber boom, *fleteros* dominated the rubber industry and were able to charge exorbitant amounts for their services. Most of them came from the towns of Moxos. They had become involved in transportation because they had control, through arrangements with local Indian *caciques*, the Prefecture or through client/patron relationships through their own haciendas and ranches, over indigenous experienced labor. As the population of Moxos declined, it was increasingly difficult to obtain rowers. Moreover, many observers indicated that the local ethnic groups of the northern rubber forests were not suitable for rowing and it was, therefore, near impossible to replace the Moxos crews.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Weinstein, *Amazon Rubber Boom*, 138 & 18, respectively.

⁷⁶ Many of the local indigenous groups, such as the Araona, had been confined to the uplands so they had lost their knowledge of navigation. Others, such as the Esse Esseja and the Karipuna, constructed light craft with room for no more than five people. None of them was used to the sustained, long-distance rowing of the Moxos crews, which had been trained from childhood since Jesuit times. *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 29 June 1922, n° 17. Signed by Lucio del Rosal.

As the price of rubber increased, *casas comerciales* were able to afford the luxuries of Western technology. When Bolivian rubber barons traveled to Brazil and Europe, they began to import technology to their remote *barracas*. One of the most practical innovations was steamboats. Because of the absence of railways in the lowlands (at least until the 1912 completion of the Madeira-Mamoré Railway), steamboats became the ultimate expressions of modernity and progress. There was soon a race among commercial houses to acquire foreign-manufactured steam craft. These craft were brought abroad in pieces and were assembled in the shipyards of Guayaramerín, Villa Bella o Riberalta by German or British experts who were presumably more familiar with steam engines than locals were.

The most important rubber houses imported the first steamboats. Not surprisingly, the powerful Maison Brillard imported the first steam launch in 1888 (See Fig. 17, below). By 1898, a Riberalta newspaper boasted that *cruceños* owned all steamboats, with the exception of those belonging to the French Compagnie Brillard and those belonging to the Brazilian firm Maciel Hermanos⁷⁷ In 1901, this was not necessarily true, the following steamboats were navigating the waters of the Bolivian lowlands: On the Mamoré River the boats *Sucre* and *Santa Cruz* (belonging to Suárez Hermanos), *Inambari* (belonging to the Orton Rubber Company), and *Estrella del Oriente* (Barber and Von Beck). On the Iténez (or Guaporé) the launches of Maciel and Company; on the Guapay or Río Grande *Siglo XX*, belonging to Cronembold and Company, *Celina* belonging to Rodolfo Barriga and *Mercedes* to José Rondeau. On the

⁷⁷ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 16 July 1898, n°55.

Beni River: *Campa*, *Roca*, *Esperanza* and *Sena* (Suárez Hnos), *Luis Ernesto* and *Braillard* (to Maison Braillard), *Sernambí* and *Ortón* (Orton Company) and *Illimani* (Ortiz and Company).⁷⁸

Although steam made the transportation of passengers more comfortable, it did not eliminate navigation problems in the Bolivian lowlands. Steamboats were even more prone to run aground than canoes, since there was a lack of navigational charts and steamboats were less maneuverable. In order to carry extra cargo, steamships attached barges (locally called *albarengas*) to their sides, which made them even more unwieldy. Many of them ended stuck in sandbanks or sank in rapids or because of *palizadas* (trunks and sticks stuck in the clay beds of rivers and hidden from view). Their paddlewheels were especially vulnerable to *palizadas* and rocks.

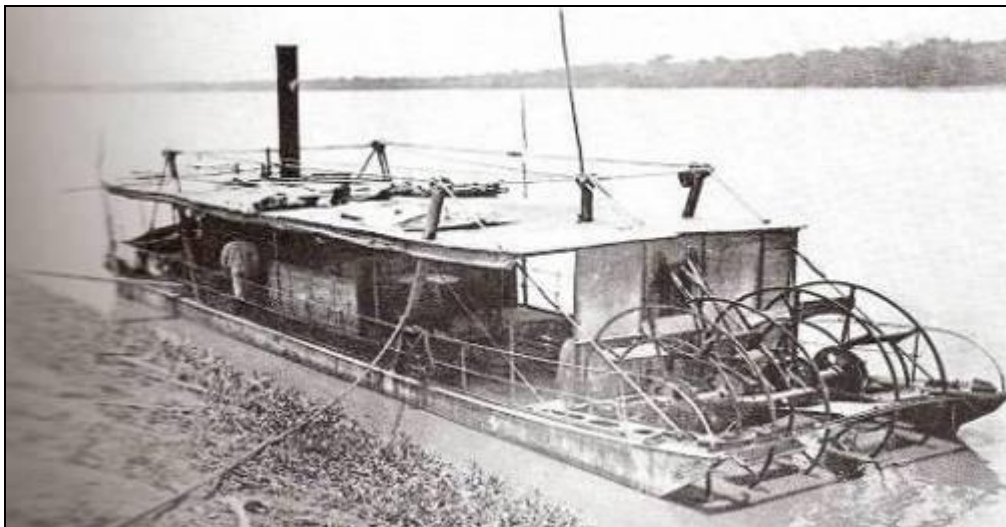


Figure 17. Bolivia's First Steam-powered Launch, the Braillard, built in France for the Cie. Braillard

Source: Karl Blattmann. Reproduced from Centeno et al., *Imágenes del Auge de la Goma*, 33.

⁷⁸ Ibid., (Riberalta), 15 Dec. 1901, n°102.

Of course, steamboats were useless to cross the *cachuelas*, and as a result, canoes continued to transport much rubber. Moreover, the highly specialized river captains (mostly German) and their crews were expensive and took away resources and labor from rubber production. Although fuel was theoretically free, the gathering of timber for the engines was time-consuming. Workers in *barracas* along the river were supposed to stockpile timber for boats that belonged to their *patrones* and this task interfered with their rubber collecting. When they were away from company *barracas*, boat crews spent valuable hours collecting wood. There is an ironic parallelism between the highlands and the lowlands: railways never displaced llama and mule packs and steamboats were not able to displace canoes.

Casas comerciales engaged in keen competition since the control of navigation was one of the most obvious features of the prestige of a rubber company. Contemporaries commented on the fact that water craft (whether mechanized or not) were zealously guarded and that *casas comerciales* would not lend their boats or their crews to anybody.

Initially, the Bolivian governments' representatives suffered the consequences of this reality. When the National Delegation travelled to Riberalta, it was forced to travel by *callapo* and *batelote* because the local rubber barons wanted to charge them the exorbitant sum of 5,000 bolivianos to use their costly steamboats. Obtaining crews for the rowboats also became difficult and was only accomplished through a combination of

coercion and many silver coins.⁷⁹ Steamboat travel was a luxury and the long journeys aboard steamers became a meeting point for all the powerful players of the Bolivian rubber boom.⁸⁰



Figure 18. The Steamer Rodolfo Aráuz. It plied the deeper waters of the Abuná, Madeira and Acre Rivers

Source: Karl Blattmann. Reproduced from Centeno et al., *Imágenes del Auge de la Goma*, 53.

Beyond Rubber, the Diversification of Casas Comerciales

As the previous chapter explained, Bolivia's rubber industry was closely linked to the *cascarilla* boom. As the international demand for rubber increased, foreign and domestic merchants switched from *cascarilla* to rubber. The extraction and export of rubber in Bolivia took on a particularly symbiotic character. Foreign houses could provide access to international markets and, therefore, facilitate the purchase of foreign merchandise, which was essential in maintaining the *habilito* system. In addition, they

⁷⁹ Bolivia and Ballivián, *Diario del viaje Delegación Nacional*, 34.

⁸⁰ The Spanish adventurer Ciro Bayo, who was in Bolivia in the 1890s, e.g., complained that he was charged 20 Bs. to go from Cachuela Esperanza to Riberalta. According to him, the trip was only a few hours and he did not get any meals or even a cabin. Bayo, *América desconocida*, 268.

eased the complicated transportation of rubber and merchandise to and from Brazilian ports (dealing, for example, with steamship companies and storage facilities). Their most important function, though, was probably to provide capital, which was a rare commodity throughout the Amazon. On the other hand, local rubber barons were the intermediaries who negotiated the intricacies of obtaining labor for the extraction and transportation of rubber. They were also useful in dealing with the often-volatile local power struggles and with the representatives of the central government.

Casas comerciales were hybrid in nature. They usually involved a foreign company and one or several local partners. Of course, in the cosmopolitan environment of the Amazonian rubber boom, foreign and local were often relative terms. Many of the German rubber businessmen, such as Otto Richter, had been operating in Bolivia for a long time and could be considered local. The following table provides a list of Bolivia's most prominent *casas comerciales* and their approximate date of foundation. The Germans (including Austrians, Alsatians and Swiss), were by far the most numerous group of immigrants towards Bolivia. They were present as merchants in cities and towns of the valleys and the Altiplano but were particularly strong in the Bolivian eastern lowlands.⁸¹ The French Maison Brillard, which had come to Bolivia during the *cascarilla* boom, was a modern multinational with offices in Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador and was one of the most influential companies in the lowlands. Other French companies were Devés Frères and the less important Societé Picollet. The British

⁸¹ For a history of German influence in Bolivia, see Antonio Mitre, *Los Hilos de la Memoria, Ascensión y Crisis de las Casas Comerciales Alemanas en Bolivia (1900-1942)* (La Paz: Anthropos, 1996), and Hollweg, *Alemanes en el Oriente boliviano*.

influence was more indirect because Bolivia had broken diplomatic relations with Great Britain during Mariano Melgarejo's dictatorship (1864-1871). The two most important rubber houses, that is Antonio Vaca Díez's Orton Rubber Company and Nicolás Suárez's Suárez Hermanos, were incorporated in London and had British shareholders. Later, the Anglo Bolivian Rubber Company entered the Bolivian rubber boom as an appendage of British interests in Mato Grosso. U.S. involvement came later and was concentrated in Caupolicán, in the department of La Paz (See Table 8).

At the outset of the rubber boom, it seemed that rubber extraction was open to anybody who had access to a work force and had the skill and resources to find new *siringales*. Since rubber was abundant, *casas comerciales* were willing to advance tools and goods to anybody who was determined and was relatively familiar with the Amazonian environment. However, few prevailed. Antonio Vaca Díez, one of the pioneers of rubber exploration in Bolivia, explained the fate of many of the *patrones* who had started to explore for rubber forests. In 1876 Juan Galindo was murdered by his *mozos*, in 1876 Julián Vásquez was wounded when his rifle backfired, José Arroyo died of malaria, in 1880 the Caripuna attacked and killed Viador Buceta, in 1886 the Araona ambushed Estanislao Farfán, in 1890 N. Arzaba was murdered by his own *mozos*, and in 1893, the Viveros brothers suffered the same fate.⁸² The last chapters of this dissertation explains labor arrangements in the rubber *barracas* and workers' responses to the rubber industry's demands, but the murder of *patrones* and managers was not unusual during the rubber boom. It seems, though that it was particularly common during the early rubber

⁸² Vaca Díez, *Intereses de la industria*, 36.

boom. *Patrones* had not established enough labor discipline to keep their workforce in

Table 8. Main Bolivian and Foreign Casas Comerciales

Otto Richter	1860
Antonio Vaca Díez	1880
Suárez Hnos.	1881
Brillard & Claussen & Co.	1882
Zeller & Roessler	1890
Devés Frères & Co.	1890
Haberland & Co.	1892
Salvatierra & Krauss	1892
Velasco & Heinecke	1892
Voss & Villinger	1893
Alfredo W. Barber	1894
Amelunge & Abrecht	1895
Gustavo Demmer	1897
Arnold & Co.	1897
Fricke & Co.	1900
Zeller, Villinger & Co.	1900
Gasser & Schweitzer	1903
Baltimore Bolivian Rubber Co. Boston Bolivian Rubber Co. Chicago-Bolivian Rubber Co.	1903?
Wichtendahl & Co.	1905
Anglo Bolivian Rubber Company.	1910?
Stoeffens, Schnack, Mueller & Co.	1910
Société Picollet	1910
Kamareck & Brueckner	1913

Sources: Based on Mitre, *Los Hilos de la Memoria*, 24; Roux, *La Bolivie orientale*, 205-6

place. Many *mozos* were disappointed at the working conditions in *barracas* and took advantage of the fact that *patrones* had not yet fully established their repressive mechanisms to murder them and run away.

Antonio Vaca Díez's rubber explorations had also been problematic. Once the capital had been obtained to recruit manpower and a heavy debt incurred to explore potential new *siringales*, there was the threat of desertions. A Riberalta newspaper cited one of his books: "each day a desertion occurred, and each desertion led to a general loss of trust, out of one hundred men who were recruited through advance payments worth hundreds of bolivianos, only fifteen to twenty made it to this river, and they were often of the worse kind."⁸³ The first twenty-five years of the rubber boom were often full of violence among rubber barons and between rubber barons and their workers. Keen competition to establish rubber *estradas* and a total lack of government institutions to curb violence were behind most of the violence. The most important characters that emerged after this period did so at the expense of weaker players. One of the most violent feuds of the rubber era took place between Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra and Antonio Vaca Díez and Augusto Roca. In November 1892, according to the Trinidad press, Nicanor G. Salvatierra declared that the *cruceño* Augusto Roca, who had been named by the Beni prefect as "Military Commander of the Beni and Madre de Dios Rivers," had left Riberalta at the head of one hundred and ten heavily armed men against Nicanor G. Salvatierra. Augusto Roca's "expedition" confiscated forty rifles, six

⁸³ "El Río Ortón y su colonización por el Dr. Vaca Díez" in *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 20 Feb. 1923, n°5.

thousand rifle bullets and thirty shotguns with abundant ammunition from Salvatierra.⁸⁴

In 1893, in retaliation Salvatierra publicly announced that he would take over Antonio Vaca Díez's *siringales* by force. The Bolivian government and Nicolás Suárez intervened, the different parties reached an agreement, and the situation was defused.⁸⁵

In the long run, capital and political connections proved to be more useful than armed confrontations or verbal abuse. Not surprisingly, Nicolás Suárez ended up owning the properties of Antonio Vaca Díez and Augusto Roca. Two of the most important rubber barons, Antonio Vaca Díez and Fermín Fitzcarrald, drowned in the Urubamba River in 1897. Vaca Díez was returning from Europe, where he had unsuccessfully tried to recruit colonizers for the Bolivian Northwest. Fitzcarrald's death opened up a world of possibilities. Suárez expanded northwards and boosted his important commercial connections with Iquitos. According to the Riberalta Press, Antonio Vaca Díez's company owed Nicolás Suárez the staggering sum of £585,000.00. The original investment by European shareholders had been of £50,000.00 and Vaca Díez had further borrowed £100,000.00 in Europe.⁸⁶ Nicolás Suárez had been Antonio Vaca Díez's main *habilitador* and had financed his disastrous trip to Europe. After Vaca Díez's death, his

⁸⁴ *El Correo del Beni* (Trinidad), 19 Apr. 1893. Signed by Augusto Roca.

⁸⁵ As mentioned above, this feud unleashed vicious attacks in the Riberalta press (Antonio Vaca Díez owned *La Gaceta del Norte* and Nicanor Salvatierra owned *El Noroeste*). In addition, both parties published a series of pamphlets against each other. See, e.g., *Impugnación a los folletos mandados publicar por Augusto Roca en La Paz y Santa Cruz contra Nicanor Salvatierra en el año 1893* (Riberalta: Tip. Haencke, 1894); *A la opinión nacional*, (Trinidad: Imp. Salvatierra y González, 1894); Augusto Roca and Nicanor Salvatierra, *Acontecimientos de la región Septentrional de Bolivia* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Imp. de "La Ley," 1893), and Nicanor Salvatierra and Juan Rober[t]son, *Atentados cometidos por D. Antonio Vaca Díez y Augusto Roca contra D. Nicanor Salvatierra y Juan Rober[t]son en los establecimientos gomeros de Tahuamanu y Madre de Dios* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Imp. "La Estrella de Oriente," 1893).

⁸⁶ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 2 Oct. 1901, n° 96 and *Ibid.*, 30 Aug. 1901, n° 97.

widow granted Nicolás power of attorney. He also became the firm's representative in London.⁸⁷ Following a lengthy judicial process, The Orton (Bolivia) Rubber Company declared bankruptcy and its assets were granted to its main creditor, Nicolás Suárez, even though the company had never been registered in Bolivia and could not, therefore, claim protection under Bolivia's bankruptcy laws. Its other creditors did not get anything. By this, Suárez Hermanos gained *siringales* in the Beni, Orton and Tahuamanu Rivers, 200 square leagues (1,000 square km) of vacant land, three steam launches, 250 workers, a yearly production of 7,000 *arrobas* (80,500 kg), of fine Pará rubber, which yielded £35,000 per year, 150,000 bolivianos of various merchandise, unknown numbers of cattle *estancias*, shipyards in Barraca La Florida, a house, and so forth.⁸⁸ Bolivian courts dismissed the obvious accusations of conflict of interest, since Nicolás Suárez was, at once, creditor, representative and had power of attorney.⁸⁹

Another rubber pioneer, Augusto Roca, who had been in the Madeira in the 1870s, was one of the founders of Riberalta and had, along Antonio Vaca Díez, issued his own currency, suffered a similar fate. Since the 1870s, the brothers Augusto and Jesús Roca had established *barracas* along the Beni and Madre de Dios Rivers. In, 1897, claiming arrears in payments of *habilitos* and transportation costs, Nicolás Suárez became the owner of 408 *estradas* of the Rocas' properties, with a yearly production of 14,000

⁸⁷ See *Testimonio del Acta de la Junta de Reconocimiento de crédito de la compañía en quiebra The Orton (Bolivia) Goma [sic] Company Ltd. Emisión del certificado del notario en Londres por el cual confirma que es fiel y conforme la traducción al español de la escritura celebrada entre la The Orton Bolivia Goma [sic] Company y los Sres. Suárez Hnos. y Compañía* in AJR/ACS Caja XXX, 1903.

⁸⁸ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 30 Aug. 1901, n° 96 and *Ibid.*, 2 Oct. 1901, n° 97.

⁸⁹ See Feliciano Antelo, *La personería de la Sociedad Anónima 'The Orton Bolivia Rubber Company Ltd.' contestada por sus acreedores* (Cochabamba: Imp. de "El Heraldo," 1904).

arrobas (161,000 kg) of fine rubber. After Augusto Roca's death, Suárez founded a company with Augusto's brother, Jesús, "Suárez, Roca y Compañía" by which he became the owner of all of the Rocas' properties.⁹⁰ Despite this, judicial battles between the Rocas and Nicolás Suárez continued for quite a while. In 1901, for example, the Riberalta press announced a judicial process against Jesús Roca and Buoncompagni, Lugones, and Company for immediate payment of 90,000 bolivianos in interest.⁹¹ Even though another veteran of the *cascarilla* trade and the Madeira rubber industry, Nicanor Salvatierra, suffered some losses to Suárez Hermanos, he managed to maintain his isolated *barracas* on the Madre de Dios River, until his death in 1922.⁹²

Many of the original *siringueros* of the Bolivian Northwest disappeared because they lacked capital. In their attempts to recover their *habilito* investments, *casas comerciales* became more immersed in the local economy and started to own real estate and rubber *estradas*. Even though, at first glance it would seem that the Bolivian rubber economy was a classic case of an economic enclave, a closer look reveals surprisingly strong regional economic circuits. Despite the isolation of Bolivia's rubber areas, the rubber boom created a constant back and forth flow of people and goods within the Bolivian lowlands and, to a certain extent, the transitional areas of La Paz and Cochabamba. Canoes and, later steamboats could not return to their ports of origin empty, so every trip was a commercial trip.

Advertisements in the local press announced the many services that *casas*

⁹⁰ Bolivia, *Monografía*, 252-57.

⁹¹ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 2 Oct. 1901, n° 97.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 6 May 1922, n° 9.

comerciales provided. In 1898, for example, the Orton Company advertised that, besides its *siringales*, it had carpentry, blacksmith and tin workshops, a general machine shop, dock-yards and an armory, steam machinery and steamboats, print shops in Ortón and Trinidad, its own *estancias* and it bought and sold cattle, horses and mules. Besides, it sold imported goods in stores in Ortón, Villa Bella, Trinidad, Riberalta, Reyes, Puerto Rico (in present-day Pando), and Iquitos. It also bought and sold local goods and bought fine rubber and *sernambí*. Its financial services included bank drafts drawn from banks in London, New York, Paris, Hamburg, Pará, La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. It also sold weapons, munitions and offered credit, and merchandise for the exploitation of rubber.⁹³

The German house Zeller Willinger and Company specialized in passenger and cargo transportation. In 1908, it advertised the passenger services of its two steam launches to Trinidad, the Iténez and Chimoré (in the department of Cochabamba), Santa Ana del Yacuma and Guayaramerín.⁹⁴ It also provided the transportation of cargo from Santa Cruz to Villa Bella and Riberalta (back and forth) and from Trinidad to Villa Bella and the Iténez towns. Thanks to its trips to the interior of Bolivia the house was able to sell sugar, sugar cane alcohol, coffee, and both rock and molded salt from the Altiplano,

⁹³ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Ortón), 16 Mar. 1898, n°47

⁹⁴ As labor became scarcer in Moxos, much of its economic activity was transferred to the Iténez. The Iténez towns were closer to the Northwest thanks to the easily navigable Iténez River. Moreover, the indigenous populations of San Ramón, Magdalena, El Carmen, San Joaquín, Huacaraje and Baures had not been as affected by labor drafts and epidemics as their counterparts in the towns of the Moxos savanna. Most *patrones* were *cruceños* engaged in ranching, agriculture (rice, tobacco, yuca and maize) and the manufacture of sugar and molasses, cane alcohol, *charque*, *chivé* (fermented yuca flour) and handcrafted products such as hammocks, clay pottery, canoes, walking sticks or hats. See Bolivia and López, *Informe...López*.

and wax candles.⁹⁵

Zeller Willinger was also one of the first commercial houses to establish its own cattle and agricultural *estancias*. By 1907, according to the subprefect of Iténez province Carmelo López, it owned 6,500 heads of cattle in Huacaraje and exported *charque*, suet, and other agricultural products to *barracas* on the Beni and Iténez Rivers.⁹⁶

In contrast, the Casa Suárez had the most impressive assortment of luxurious imported merchandise, such as Cuban cigars, Pernod, absinth, chartreuse, cognac, silk shawls and umbrellas, sherry and port. It also sold many Bolivian products such as *singani* (grape brandy from Chuquisaca and Tarija), Cochabamba wheat flour, local fresh cheese (presumably from Moxos), local lard and suet, hulled and un-hulled rice, local unprocessed tobacco, and the ubiquitous straw *sombrero de sahó*, which has become an icon of the *camba* male attire. Besides products from Cochabamba and Moxos, Suárez Hermanos also imported Panquehue cheese from Chile and San Rafael wine from Argentina, which proves that there was some trade with both the valleys and the Altiplano, possibly via Cochabamba and Santa Cruz.⁹⁷ For example, an important road stretched from the Argentine border along the Franciscan missions between the Chiriguano and other Chaco Indians and ended up in Santa Cruz de la Sierra.⁹⁸

Contemporaries criticized the aggressive behavior of Suárez Hermanos towards its creditors. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Suárez Hermanos became the most powerful economic force in the rubber regions of Bolivia by using its political

⁹⁵ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Ortón), 18 Dec. 1908, n°230.

⁹⁶ Bolivia and López, *Informe...López*, 6.

⁹⁷ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 30 July 1901, n°98.

⁹⁸ Langer, *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree*, 58.

leverage. Yet, the company had temporary financial troubles. Its many unpaid credits were a considerable burden and European creditors did not understand the company's practices. The Riberalta press, for example, announced that in 1901 Suárez Hermanos' London offices had temporarily stopped all payments. The main reasons for this temporary lack of liquidity were the unpaid credits given to the Orton Rubber Company (worth £585,000), and the fact that a shipment of rubber from Cachuela Esperanza to Liverpool, worth £200,000, had been delayed in the Brazilian port of Belem do Pará.⁹⁹ Despite this, by 1902 the Company seemed to be in good financial shape. Its London office announced that it had assets worth £214,696 and its liabilities were £128,552. Most of its liabilities were in credits through the *habilito* system.¹⁰⁰ During the next decades, the firm managed to gradually confiscate the property of most of its creditors and, thus convert its liabilities into tangible assets.

In conclusion, after an initial period of exploration, the Bolivian rubber industry became increasingly sophisticated and many of its companies consolidated. Initially, explorers and *siringueros* had sought rubber throughout the Bolivian lowlands. The most powerful rubber barons and their *casas comerciales* were eventually able to dominate the rubber industry through concentrating their operations in optimal areas and through their control of all aspects of rubber production. As the early rubber boom had moved westward from the mouth of the Amazon, by the end of the nineteenth century, the westernmost areas of production in the Upper Beni and Caupolicán and the towns of

⁹⁹ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 2 Oct. 1901, n°97.

¹⁰⁰ "Estado de la Casa Suárez" in *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 10 Jan. 1902, n°108.

Reyes, Rurrenabaque and Santa Ana del Yacuma were losing importance and the new “colonies” in the Northwest became highly specialized in rubber production. These areas attracted settlement from throughout the Bolivian lowlands. Their culture, though, became a distinctive combination of Santa Cruz and Trinidad *camba* culture with European influence. By the 1900s, rubber production in the Northwest was becoming increasingly concentrated in a few hands. Many of the old pioneers lost their *estradas* to ambitious *casas comerciales* and, eventually, to Suárez Hermanos, which after “inheriting” the vast holdings of Antonio Vaca Díez’s Orton (Bolivia) Rubber company, became the dominant firm in the area.

Initially, competition was over rubber *estradas* or commercial interests. As the rubber boom advanced, labor became scarcer. Trinidad and the other Moxos towns ceased to be a source of indigenous labor and Bolivian rubber barons had to locate any available labor. This chapter has introduced some of Bolivia’s more important rubber barons and their relationship with the early rubber boom. Chapter 5 looks at the biographies of some of these men and the companies that they founded. It also looks at their business practices and organization during the mature phase of the rubber boom.

CHAPTER 5. BOLIVIA'S RUBBER BARONS, SLAVERS OR ENTREPRENEURS?

One of the most debated issues about the rubber industry has been the issue of labor. Like most boom economies, rubber extraction generated very harsh labor conditions. The most well-known cases of brutality with rubber workers are the cases of the Belgian Congo (1897-1910) and the Putumayo scandal in the Colombian/Ecuadorian/Peruvian border (1907-1914).¹ Worker conditions in the Asian plantations (whether in British-dominated Malaya, Ceylon, and the Malabar Coast, in the Dutch West Indies in French Indochina or, later, in the United States colony of the Philippines) were harsh, as rubber plantations produced both deforestation and the abandonment of agricultural land dedicated to produce food staples and led to widespread famines, epidemics and

¹ For contemporary documents on the Putumayo scandal, see Foreign Office Great Britain and George Babington Michell, *Report by His Majesty's Consul at Iquitos on His Tour in the Putumayo District* (London: Pub. by H. M. Stationery off., 1913); W. E. Hardenburg, C. Reginald Enock, and Roger Casement, *The Putumayo, the Devil's Paradise; Travels in the Peruvian Amazon Region and an Account of the Atrocities Committed upon the Indians therein* (London [etc.]: T. F. Unwin, 1912); Carlos Rey de Castro, *Los escándalos del Putumayo; carta abierta dirigida a Mr. Geo B. Michell, cónsul de S. M. B.; acompañada de diversos documentos, datos estadísticos y reproducciones fotográficas* (Barcelona: Impr. Viuda de L. Tasso, 1913); Norman Thomson, *The Putumayo Red Book with an Introduction on the Real Scandal of the Putumayo Atrocities* (London: N. Thomson & Co., 1913). For anthropological and historical approaches, see Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Stanfield, *Red Rubber, Bleeding Trees*. For a best seller on the Belgian Congo, see Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: a Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*.

dislocation of communities.² In the Amazonian context, there has been a debate about labor conditions in the wild rubber industry. The Putumayo atrocities received and have continued to receive lots of publicity and continue to be debated. Barbara Weinstein started the debate over Brazil's labor conditions. In her seminal work on the Brazilian rubber boom, she argued that *serengalistas* were exploited through the *aviamento* system and that rubber tappers were trapped in a closed web of exploitation.³ Recent scholars have argued that the system was not as closed as it would seem and that the highly mobile *serengalistas* had quite a bit of leeway to search for alternative buyers of their product. This mobility and the fact that many *patrones* did not monitor their rubber operations closely allowed alternative traders to ply the river of Amazonia exchanging goods for rubber at more advantageous prices (for the *serengalistas*).⁴ Both sides of the debate make valid points. Local conditions and the nature of the relationship with one particular *patrón* or *casa comercial*, or the isolation of a particular *siringal* and the extent to which it was exposed to outside influences (such as the presence of state institutions and the degree of law enforcement), were important factors and varied throughout the rubber boom.

The greatest challenge of the rubber industry was the recruitment of a suitable labor force. In theory, one reason why South Asian plantations were more profitable was

² See John H. Drabble, *Rubber in Malaya, 1876-1922; the Genesis of the Industry* (Kuala Lumpur; New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), and J. Norman Parmer, *Colonial Labor Policy and Administration; a History of Labor in the Rubber Plantation Industry in Malaya, c. 1910-1941* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by J.J. Augustin, 1960).

³ Weinstein, *Amazon Rubber Boom*.

⁴ Bradford L. Barham and Oliver T. Coomes, "Reinterpreting the Amazon Rubber Boom: Investment, the State and Dutch Disease."

because they had a manageable, cheaper, and readily available labor source. Yet, besides disrupting local peasant economies to ensure a ready supply of laborers for rubber plantations, European planters had to import large numbers of workers. Throughout South East Asia Indian, Chinese and even Japanese indentured workers provided much of rubber plantations' work force, regardless of the European affiliation of their colonial masters. Although wild trees formed the basis of the Amazonian rubber industry, labor also proved to be a major difficulty and Amazonian countries had to devise various schemes to attract labor to one of the world's most remote regions. In the Brazilian case, *serengalistas* could not compete with the resources of the São Paulo coffee planters, who were able to import and even subsidize large numbers of European workers. Yet, a particularly devastating cycle of the Nordeste's cyclic droughts, the *Great Séca* (1877-1913) roughly coincided with the outset of the Amazonian rubber boom and brought thousands of *Cearense* refugees to the Western Amazon, with the cooperation of both local and national authorities.⁵

Bolivia's labor situation was different. As discussed in chapter 2, most of Bolivia's population was concentrated in the western highlands. The dense indigenous and mestizo populations of the Altiplano and Valley regions could have been a potential source of manpower. However, during most of the nineteenth century haciendas and mining concerns were competing for this manpower. Bolivia's saltpeter boom (1830-1884) in the Atacama Desert absorbed any surplus labor, especially from the valleys of

⁵ In the Amazon, Nordestinos in general were called *Cereanses*, regardless of place of origin. This great migration extended into Bolivian territory and was to a large degree responsible for the separation of the Acre Territory from Bolivia. For a history of the Nordeste droughts, see Marco Antonio Villa, *Vida e morte no sertão: história das secas no Nordeste nos séculos XIX e XX*, (São Paulo: Editora Atica, 2000).

Cochabamba, which would have been a natural source of labor for the Bolivian Amazon. After the War of the Pacific (1879-1884) between Peru, Bolivia and Chile, all Bolivian saltpeter mines passed into Chilean hands but much of the work force became Bolivian or Peruvian. Ironically, before the war it had been mostly Chilean. Chile's saltpeter boom lasted until approximately 1920.⁶ Afterwards, the Bolivian northern highlands experienced a boom in tin production, which started in the 1880s. La Paz became the hub of Bolivia's tin exports and tin barons (Carlos Aramayo, Mauricio Hochschild and Simón Patiño) with strong international financial backing started to control the country.⁷ Tin mining also absorbed workers and, in any case, rubber barons could never compete with their *paceño* counterparts in terms of political power. Tin mining led to an unprecedented growth of road and railway construction, which linked western Bolivia with the Pacific, and thereby, with international markets. The fever of rail construction in Bolivia and Peru also absorbed large amounts of labor.⁸

As described in chapter 2, during the nineteenth century, the Liberal Reforms attempted to dissolve indigenous communities and tie indigenous populations to the land through the hacienda system. These reforms affected most of the Altiplano and valleys and even the Yungas of La Paz and some areas of Caupolicán. Furthermore, highland populations were not considered suitable for the tropical environment of the Amazonian

⁶ For a history of saltpeter and the War of the Pacific, from a Bolivian perspective, see Querejazu Calvo, *Guano, salitre, sangre: historia de la Guerra del Pacífico*. Also, Pinto Vallejos, "Desgarros y utopías en la pampa salitrera" and id., *Episodios de historia minera: estudios de historia social y económica de la minería chilena, siglos XVIII-XIX* (Santiago de Chile: Ed. Universidad de Santiago, 1997).

⁷ For a look at the tin boom, see Antonio Mitre, *Bajo un cielo de estaño: fulgor y ocaso del metal en Bolivia* (La Paz: Asociación Nacional de Mineros Medianos; ILDIS, 1993).

⁸ See Langer, *Economic Change*, chap. 2 for a discussion of Bolivia's mining economy. Also Mitre, *Los patriarcas de la plata*.

rubber forests. Although there was some migration from transitional areas (such as Cochabamba and the Yungas of La Paz), to the rubber forests, migration from the highlands (with the exception of bureaucrats and the military) was rare. Rubber barons had to rely on the highly dispersed and diverse populations of the Bolivian lowlands. Like elsewhere in Amazonia, the challenge of obtaining and keeping a suitable work force became the main preoccupation of Bolivia's rubber barons and they developed a set of strategies to achieve this.

Foreign visitors and "middle class" visitors from the highlands were struck by the brutality of the working conditions in Bolivia's rubber *barracas*. *Patrones* seemed to be the absolute rulers of their domains and physical punishment, extortion and even plain murder were applied liberally. Yet Bolivian historiography de-emphasizes this brutality and seems to indicate that Bolivia's rubber boom was milder than its Peruvian and Colombian counterparts. The Putumayo scandal would be unimaginable in Bolivia, they claim. Both British geographer Valerie Fifer and historian Michael Deprez have looked at international reactions to the Bolivian rubber industry. According to Fifer, in 1912, the British legation in La Paz consulted with Percy Fawcett about worker mistreatment on the Suárez estates.

The US minister also responded to slavery allegations in the Beni by saying that conditions were harsh, but that the relative scarcity of labor and the abundance of rubber made conditions there less so than on the Putumayo. In any case, neither diplomatic mission investigated further, alleging that the rubber districts were too remote to permit formal investigation. In 1913, a British diplomat travelled to Riberalta and Cachuela

Esperanza but Suárez's employees prevented him from entering his estates.⁹ These were not isolated incidents. Other countries had already been concerned with mistreatment of workers and, since Nicolás Suárez was involved in dealings with Peruvian rubber concerns and had Colombian and Peruvian citizens among his work force, there were diplomatic inquiries on the fate of their citizens. In 1914, the Riberalta press published an article in which it claimed that the Casa Suárez employed an unknown number of Colombians who were prevented from returning to their country and were administered fifty to sixty lashes when they attempted to leave. Their consul refused to intervene out of fear of the Casa Suárez's power. It is plausible that these Colombians had arrived to Bolivia because of the Putumayo scandal.¹⁰ As the British, US and Peruvian governments investigated labor abuses by the rubber industry on the Putumayo, many *caucheros* attempted to clear their record by getting rid of incriminating evidence. Throughout the rubber boom, Colombian and Peruvian *caucheros* had had many armed clashes, and it seems that the Peruvians had kidnapped many Colombians. Since Nicolás Suárez had an office in Iquitos and was in good terms with Peruvian *caucheros* it is possible that Peruvians offered him Colombian laborers.¹¹

Previously, the Peruvian consul was not so reticent and in 1895 had demanded the

⁹ Fifer, "The Empire Builders," 138-40. The US materials mentioned by Fifer are now housed in the American National Archives (College Park, MD), Microcopy NOM 644 roll #16. The title is Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Bolivia 1910-29 (824-50). The US minister in Bolivia H. Knowles dismissed an investigation because "it would take such a trustworthy person about three months to make such a trip and gather the material for a report and would probably cost no less than \$1,000 to \$1,200." La Paz, Bolivia, 28 Apr. 1913, Report #223. H. Knowles to Secretary of State, Washington, DC.

¹⁰ *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 10 Apr. 1914, n°168.

¹¹ See Stanfield, *Red Rubber, Bleeding Trees*, esp. chap. 7.

release of Peruvian citizens recruited in Arequipa by Albert Mouton, the French manager of the Maison Braillard.¹² In 1890, the Chilean government also alleged that Chilean prisoners of war from the War of the Pacific had been forced to work in Bolivia's rubber forests. Its enquiries were of no avail and an official investigation by the authorities of the Beni department concluded that they were probably deserters and that their neighbors did not know whether these workers were Chilean or Argentine, which means that the investigator did not actually interview the Chileans. Not surprisingly, they were working in *barracas* belonging to Napoleón Suárez, apparently a member of the Suárez clan.¹³ The British historian Michael Deprez mentions that the alleged atrocities of the Casa Suárez were published in *The Times* (London) and the papers of the London-based Anti-Slavery Society. Dailies in Lima and La Paz had also published stories about ill-treated rubber tappers in the Suárez Estates.¹⁴

The above paragraphs seem to suggest that rubber tappers were passive victims of a brutal system. Even though their work conditions were indeed harsh, rubber tappers had an ambivalent relationship with the rubber industry. The degree of "harshness" is very relative and is a complicated issue which can be analyzed from many perspectives. At times, they were exploited but at times, they took advantage of their particular

¹² Bolivia, Gutiérrez, and Paz, *Informe preliminar actos*, 30.

¹³ ANB/MI 1890, t.254, n°70.

¹⁴ *The Times South American Supplement*, (London), 30 July 1912; Anti-Slavery Society Papers, Section G311-312-313-315, Rhodes House Library, Oxford; *La Verdad* (La Paz), 11 Oct. and 4 Nov. 1913; *Las Noticias* (Lima), 29 Nov. 1913. All cited in Deprez, "Rise and Decline," 66. The above-mentioned Records of the Dept. of State cites an article "Salvaje en Bolivia" published in *El Comercio de Bolivia* (La Paz), 10 Apr. 1913, which claimed that one of the German administrators of Suárez Hnos in the Barraca Girona on the Tahuamanu River had shot two ring leaders, had whipped to death another two and had burned alive a fifth one in his own house. The newspaper predicted an imminent general uprising of the 8 to 10,000 tappers of the Casa Suárez.

situation and were able to exert considerable influence on the development of the rubber industry. Chapters 6 and 7 look at how rubber workers responded to their work in the rubber industry. However, it is important to note that most observers did not blame the rubber industry *per se* or Latin American states for abusive labor conditions in the Amazon. Their criticisms were often very personal and tended to concentrate on the highly visible rubber barons of the area. To many contemporaries, the likes of Suárez, Arana, or Firzcarrald, were personally responsible for undue hardship in the rubber forests. They epitomized everything backwards and “evil” in Amazonia. Local governments and foreign export and import houses were rarely criticized. Before looking at Bolivia’s rubber barons, it is important to place them in the context of international accusations of torture, terror and slavery. This chapter looks at the “oppressors” and their context, particularly as it relates to their labor practices. It starts by analyzing the background and *modus operandi* of the most important rubber barons and then it moves on to look at the history of Cachuela Esperanza, the headquarters of the most important rubber company in Bolivia. Cachuela Esperanza contrasts with the urban settlements discussed in previous chapters and the *barracas* that chapter 7 discusses. Cachuela Esperanza was neither urban nor rural; it was a European enclave in the middle of the jungle and it exposed many of the contradictions of the rubber barons. European fashions contrasted with private dungeons and daily whippings. To a certain extent, it was a feudal manor or perhaps a company town, outside the jurisdiction of the Bolivian state.

From Patronos to Rubber Barons

Chapter 2 has examined how many *cascarilleros* became involved in rubber after the collapse of the cinchona boom. It is not surprising that Bolivia's more successful barons were involved in the *cascarilla* boom. It provided a training ground for the rubber boom and, as seen in chapter 2, many of the features of the Bolivian rubber boom were based on the cinchona experience. Many scholarly works seem to think that Bolivia's rubber elite came from the Altiplano and that the fearless pioneers of rubber "crossed the Andes" into the unexplored and mysterious Amazonian jungles. Although there were a few exceptions, most *gomeros* came from Santa Cruz (or were sons of *cruceños* born in Beni) or from the tropical provinces of La Paz (Yungas and Caupolicán).¹⁵ This section discusses some of Bolivia's most important barons and look into their *mentalité* and, in particular into their labor practices and their relationship with indigenous peoples.

The most powerful Bolivian rubber barons have been subject of an endless stream of panegyrics, which endures to this day.¹⁶ As stated above, some of them had printing

¹⁵ Bradford Barham and Oliver Coomes, e.g., claim that Arana, Fitzcarrald and Suárez had a common Sierra background. Barham and Coomes, "Reinterpreting the Amazon Rubber Boom: Investment, the State and Dutch Disease," 48. The Peruvian Julio César Arana was born in the town of Rioja in the department of San Martín (848 meters of altitude) in the Peruvian *montaña*, which could be roughly equivalent to the Bolivian Yungas. Carlos Fermín Fitzcarrald was indeed born in the Northern Sierra. He was born in the village of Huari in the region of Ancash near some of the highest mountains of the Peruvian Andes. Nicolás Suárez was born in the *llanos* city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra and spent most of his childhood in Trinidad. The other two most prominent Bolivian *gomeros* had similar backgrounds. Antonio Vaca Díez was born in Trinidad of *cruceño* parents and Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra was also born in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Vaca Díez's father had been involved in the *cascarilla* boom and both Suárez and Salvatierra had lived in Reyes since the outset of the Bolivian rubber boom, and had been involved in the navigation of the Madeira River. John Melby also claimed that Nicolás Suárez "crossed the Andes" to work in the rubber industry. John Melby, "Rubber River: An Account of the Rise and Collapse of the Amazon Boom," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 22, no. 3 (1942): 459.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Arnaldo Lijerón Casanovas, *Antonio Vaca-Diez, genio industrial y geopolítico boliviano*, 1a ed. (Trinidad: Editorial RB, 1999). *Camba* historians are rarely critical of any of the rubber barons.

presses and newspapers and used them to boost their image and points of view. On the other hand, they were also involved in violent feuds with each other, and, as seen above, their enemies tried to create a “Black Legend” about rubber barons. Furthermore, their paradoxical personalities and the exotic locale of the Amazon have generated a sort of dark romanticism about their figures. In particular, Nicolás Suárez has become a romantic personage. His trips from his remote Cachuela Esperanza refuge to Paris and London, and the combination of pioneer of commerce, industry and civilization, the tragedies in his life, and his darker side, as outlined above, were irresistible to both Bolivians and foreigners. The New York editor of the specialized journal *The India Rubber World* felt compelled to do an idealized personal sketch of Nicolás Suárez in Cachuela Esperanza and summarized these aspects:

One of the most romantic figures in the Amazon basin, who is established above the Falls of the Madeira, is Nicolás Suárez. Of Bolivian birth and speaking only Spanish, he has for years practically controlled the carrying trade up and down the Madeira [...] If Suarez’s life history could be written, it would prove a very stirring life. He began as a trader of rubber dealing with savages whom no other had dared to even communicate with. Soon he and his brothers began to acquire great concessions. They pushed further and further into the interior, trading with the Indians, practically ruling them and avenging any insult or lack of faith terribly [...]. A born organizer, he is still a simple saving man of the people. But his nephews, liberally educated, living in Europe are genuine men of the world.¹⁷

Antonio Vaca Díez (1851-1897)

One of Bolivia’s precursors of the exploration of Bolivia’s northern frontier and of the Bolivian rubber boom was Antonio Vaca Díez. He was born in the city of Trinidad

¹⁷ Pearson, *Rubber Country*, 148-49.

in 1851 and was the son of *cascarilla* entrepreneur and army colonel Manuel Vaca Guzmán, who was one of the prominent *cascarilleros* of *cruceño* background established in Reyes around the 1870s. Unlike other pioneers, Antonio had studied medicine in the prestigious Universidad de San Francisco Xavier de Chuquisaca and, while in Sucre and, later in La Paz, he had become involved in the Liberal/Conservative power struggles and also become an active publisher of medical articles. During President Adolfo Ballivián's short presidency (1873-74), he had been his personal physician. While involved in the political struggles that surrounded Santa Cruz's brief federalist rebellion under the leadership of Andrés Ibáñez (1876-77), his liberal militancy brought the wrath of Conservative President *cum* dictator Hilarión Daza (in power from 1876-79) and, like many other Bolivians, he sought refuge in the remote Beni in 1876.¹⁸

Antonio Vaca Díez belonged to a family of notables. His family included members of the military, clergy and diplomatic corps. In the late nineteenth century, members of this group who were of *cruceño* background were indeed a select and very small group. He managed to attract some of his Sucre and Santa Cruz connections to the Beni such as Horacio Ríos, who had been an administrator of Bolivia's National bank. Vaca Díez's liberal discourse appeared in many contemporary leaflets and newspapers and, later, he used his newspaper *La Gaceta del Norte* to defend his positions and, as seen in chapter 3, harass his opponents. His political activities eventually led to his becoming the delegate for the Madre de Dios, Acre and Purús Rivers and Senator for the

¹⁸ According to his own testimony, he hastily left Santa Cruz with a group of eighteen potential employees when a friend had told him that President Daza had issued an order to deliver him handcuffed and shackled to the local Army barracks. He arrived at Reyes on Aug. 1876. Vaca Díez, *Intereses de la industria*, 28-29.

department of Beni in 1884, even though he arrived to Sucre too late for the opening of the Legislature.¹⁹ Like many other liberals, he censured the exploitation of indigenous peoples, sought to turn them into full citizens, and was an open critic of the mission system. Yet, in order to attract labor to his rubber estates, he was ruthless and was known for having a very efficient network of labor recruiters (*enganchadores*) who swept Santa Cruz, Moxos, Caupolicán and even Sucre for potential rubber tappers.²⁰ The Beni historian José Luís Roca also points to the fact that he fathered six sons only with his legitimate spouse the *cruceña* Lastenia Franco, which was indeed a rare situation in the Oriente and shows his almost bourgeois image.²¹

Vaca Díez could have not accomplished his initial successes without the help of the indigenous peoples of the Beni. In his writings, he always recognized that the discovery of the first *siringales* was due to the cooperation of different Tacana-speaking ethnic groups. Following time-honored practices, Vaca Díez offered the Araona and Caviña protection against their Pacaguara enemies. Besides protection, he offered medicine, iron tools and clothing in exchange for information about potential *siringales* and labor. According to his biographer, the Araona declared that “We love our *tata* [father] doctor because he gives us tools to work in our *chacos*; he feeds the many of us who come each year and has never done us any harm. We wish that he should become our chief that he should command us and defend us against the Pacaguara who are our

¹⁹ For his biography, see *El Dr. Vaca Díez, sus antecedentes, su obra, sus detractores*, ed. Dr. Vaca Díez (Cochabamba: Imp. y Lit. de “El Comercio,” 1897), and Lijerón, *Antonio Vaca-Diez*.

²⁰ Pastor Baldivieso found a *mozo* who had been brought to the Northeast, against his will and while he was a minor in 1884, along with 14 others from Sucre. *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 10 Apr. 1897, n° 17.

²¹ Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, 280.

enemies.”²² He also welcomed and encouraged explorers, whether Bolivian or foreign. He facilitated Edwin Heath’s transcendental exploration of the Lower Beni, for example, and he also encouraged the explorations of the Brazilian Coronel Labre by offering 1,000 bolivianos to the *paceño* Timoteo Mariaca to accompany him and to report on the territories of the Pacaguara and Caripuna.²³

According to contemporaries, his rubber operations in the Tahuamanu and Ortón were a model of organization. His military-like discipline favorably impressed General Pando who wrote, “it is only thanks to a severe and inflexible discipline that workers fulfill their duties. This result could not be achieved through leniency or tolerance. Even though some have criticized his tyranny, based on certain few cases, we believe that it is necessary in small work *centros* where the tapper is left to his own devices and where, besides, there is the imperative need to establish an almost military organization to keep in check the savages that live nearby.”²⁴ It should be noted that both Pando and Vaca Díez were prominent members of Bolivia’s Liberal Party, so the General was not only praising his organization from a military perspective. Other travelers had different opinions. The British explorer Percy Harrison Fawcett, for example, wrote that Vaca Díez “is said to have flogged men to death or by way of change to have tied their legs together and their hands behind their backs and fling them into the river.” The Italian Franciscan Francisco Pierini reflected, “He was certainly quite a character but he was also a great tyrant that made many poor people weep and he was also the cause behind

²² *El Dr. Vaca Díez, sus antecedentes, su obra, sus detractores*, 24

²³ Mariaca, ed., *Exploración del Río Acre*, 19.

²⁴ Pando, *Viaje a la región de la goma elástica*, 111.

many people's ruin."²⁵ The headquarters of the Orton (Bolivia) Rubber Company on the remote Ortón River were lavishly outfitted. The architecture of the *barracón* Ortón (See Fig. 19) impressed visitors. Ciro Bayo, a well-travelled guest, wrote that Vaca Díez's private residence was in the style of a Swiss chalet and to the *paceño* José Manuel Aponte it was "a magnificent mansion, it looks like the residence of a tycoon."²⁶ Nevertheless, Vaca Díez and his company were never *habilitadores* and depended on the supplies of others such as Santos Mercado and Nicolás Suárez to keep their rubber operations and ostentatious way of life. On Dec 16, 1898, for example, Santos Mercado and Company billed Sr. Vaca Díez for one box of Malmsey [Madeira] wine and three bottles of cognac. Three days later, he billed for two bottles of cognac, ten cases of Fino sherry, three cases of dry sherry, two cases of malmsey wine, three cases of Victoria brand quinine sherry, three cases of Bolivian wine, five cases of fine cognac, four bottles of cognac and four cases of sherry.²⁷ It is not clear whether Sr. Vaca Díez was Antonio or one of his seven sons, after all Antonio Vaca Díez had died in 1897.

In hindsight, his dependence on both local *habilitadores* and international credit became his downfall. His much-flaunted political connections were not very useful in the Amazonian frontier. Although he was one of the largest producers of rubber in the Bolivian Amazon, he could not achieve the degree of vertical integration that he needed to master the complex linkages that led from *barraca* to international markets. His rubber was shipped through Nicolás Suárez's transportation network and Suárez provided the

²⁵ Fawcett, *Exploration Fawcett*, 59; *ACFB* (Tarata), Año 11, n°121 (May 1919), 281.

²⁶ Ciro Bayo, *Ríos del oro negro* (Madrid: R.C. Raggio, 1920), 34; Aponte, *Revolución del Acre*, 10.

²⁷ Santos Mercado to Sr. Vaca Díez, 16 Dec. 1898 and 19 Dec. 1898 in ACS, *Varias Cartas 1892-1901*, n°26.

merchandise that was needed to ensure continuous rubber tapping. As well, he did not have his own capital and had to depend on far-flung European capitalists who were only interested in profits. During his lifetime, the price of rubber was high, but high prices could not cover his over-ambitious schemes to bring colonizers to the isolated Bolivian Amazon.

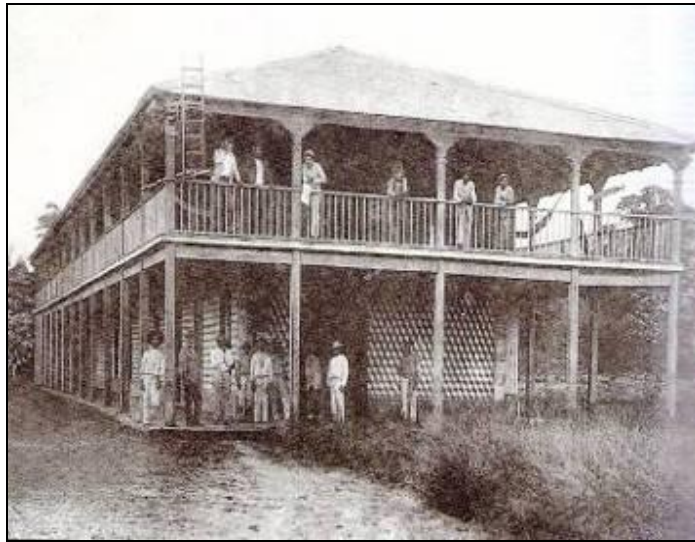


Figure 19. The Barracón Ortón, headquarters of Antonio Vaca Díez's operations in Bolivia, photographed c. 1910

Source: Photographed by Karl Blattmann. Reproducid from Centeno et al., *Imágenes del Auge de la Goma*, 32.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Antonio Vaca Díez became involved in much talked-of feuds. If we are to believe his detractors, part of the problem was his style. Like many other gomeros, he surrendered himself with an entourage of armed *capangas*.²⁸ Besides the usual Winchester-wielding thugs, Antonio Vaca Díez had a

²⁸ The term *capanga* comes from the Brazilian Northeast and it means a paid bodyguard or thug. Through the rubber boom, it has entered the vocabulary of Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando.

“praetorian” bodyguard of *tembetas* from Cordillera province.²⁹ The fact that they were in unfamiliar surroundings and were, therefore, easy to control, and had no local allegiances, and the warrior reputation of the Chiriguano, along with their exotic appearance, probably dictated his choice. His archenemy Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra denounced that, in 1893, Antonio Vaca Díez had assaulted his *barracas* with a force of ten canoes loaded with “two-hundred men with Winchesters.” He stole 4,000 rubber *bolachas*, 11 rifles and 30 tappers.³⁰ On another occasion, he was more subtle. In 1890, one of the first explorers of the Northwest and former business partner Timoteo Mariaca, a native of the La Paz Yungas, travelled to La Paz and Vaca Díez took advantage of his absence to take over his best *siringales*. Mariaca bitterly wrote, “Neither my patriotic efforts, nor my self-denial, nor the sacrifices and suffering that I have endured to found an establishment with houses, planted fields nor the presence of “barbarian” families has been enough to convince Don Antonio Vaca Díez to respect my property.”³¹

Vaca Díez liked to portray himself as the vanguard of progress, civilization and the rule of law in the frontier. Despite everything, confrontations between rubber barons were rarely bloody. Workers and Winchester bullets were simply too valuable to be wasted. There were a few volleys, much posing and, in the long run, verbal and written barrages were far more violent than the actual armed confrontations. In at least one case, the *mozos* refused to participate and returned their *anticipo*, alleging that their contracts

²⁹ The *tembeta* is a stone or wooden decoration under the lip. Chiriguano warriors from Cordillera province who use this decoration are known as *tembetas*.

³⁰ For a narrative of this episode, see Salvatierra and Rober[t]son, *Atentados*, 22-28.

³¹ Mariaca, ed., *Exploración del Río Acre*, 12.

specified that they had come to the Beni to tap rubber, not to be soldiers!³² In some circles, the Bolivian gomeros' massive imports of weapons caused alarm. In 1889, the President of Pará confiscated powder, rifles, bullets and shotguns that were being imported by Antonio Vaca Díez, Pastor Ardaya and Lucio M. Velasco. He alleged that these weapons were for military use and violated Brazil's treaties with Bolivia.³³ Many of Vaca Díez's enemies used similar arguments and continuously accused him of plotting to become "the king of the barbarians and that he needed an army of civilized people." During this period, many *mozos* refused to go to the Ortón and remained in Villa Bella arguing that he would enlist them either in his army or would sell them down the Madeira River.³⁴

Despite these attacks, he was indeed a pioneer. The establishment of the first *barracas* on the Bolivian Amazon was full of hardships and needed strong leadership. Contemporary reports stressed the difficulties that several "Great Floods" caused. In 1886, the Trinidad press reported that there had been two consecutive years of great floods that had compounded the effects of smallpox and measles.³⁵ The Great Flood of 1889 caused malaria epidemics and food shortages and led to many workers abandoning the rubber industry. On the other hand, others, with good reason, blamed both food shortages and malaria epidemics on the sudden appearance of immigrants in previously

³² The *anticipo* was a cash wage advance offered by a recruiter to work in the rubber industry. Roca and Salvatierra, *Acontecimientos*, 20.

³³ Consulado de Bolivia en la Provincia del Amazonas, Agencia Aduanera to Ministro de Hacienda, San Antonio [del Madeira], 18 Oct. 1889. Signed by Carlos Torrico (ANB/MH 1890, t.208, n°59).

³⁴ *El Dr. Vaca Díez, sus antecedentes, su obra, sus detractores*, 50.

³⁵ *El Correo del Beni* (Trinidad), 4 Jan. 1896, n°45.

uninhabited areas.³⁶ In the early years of rubber extraction *siringales* were “possessed” by planting some banana trees and carving the *patrón*’s name in a wooden cross. In most cases, these bananas were the only available food and most *mozos* were unable to survive in the jungle without food imports. In the early years, Vaca Díez had to retrieve the arrows that “savages” had left behind and give them to his Tacana workers to hunt and fish for food. Besides mass desertions, these conditions also caused at least one assassination attempt by his *mozos*.³⁷ One of the letters written by his *cruceño* business partner Santos Mercado on the Abuná River stressed that fevers (malaria or yellow fever) had caused the death of two people and he had sixty-nine cases of fevers and some of diarrhea, as a result, he had not been able to open any *estradas*.³⁸

Although his political rhetoric advanced the idea that its citizens should own the Bolivian rubber industry and most Bolivians see him as a patriot, he was heavily dependent on foreign capital and markets and he resented government interference. He was openly critical of the arrival of the National Delegation at Riberalta, probably perceiving that it would undermine the authority of the department of Beni officials and his own authority. When *mozos* threatened to denounce their mistreatment on his *barracas* to the National Delegation, he allegedly said, “the Delegation has not come here to heal buttocks [referring to whippings] it only has come to look for money; there is only

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 July, 1893, n° 7.

³⁷ *El Dr. Vaca Díez, sus antecedentes, su obra, sus detractores*, 37. Apparently, Peruvian, Chilean, Brazilian and Bolivian *mozos* had conspired to murder him.

³⁸ *Internacional*, Abuná River, 26 July 1894. From Santos Mercado to Antonio Vaca Díez in ACS/Cartas Varias, 1892-1901.

one authority that rules in this river, and it is me.”³⁹ On another occasion, he allegedly retorted a *mozo* who had denounced him: “Listen you miserable wretch, I have brought you here to administer you an extra five hundred lashings but you should be thankful that my rage is gone. Who do you think you are to mess about with a powerful firm, when I am the only judge and authority?”⁴⁰

Following the example of many Latin American liberals, Antonio Vaca Díez eventually became convinced that neither the Beni, Caupolicán or Santa Cruz *mozos*, who had caused him so much grief, nor the local indigenous peoples, who were rapidly disappearing, could provide the labor to fuel the rubber industry that he envisaged. If the state of São Paulo, Argentina and Uruguay could attract European laborers to their countries, why could he not do the same thing? Borrowing heavily, he engaged in a reckless project to bring Europeans to the remote Ortón River.⁴¹ After visiting several European cities, he ended up recruiting five hundred potential colonizers in the Spanish city of Barcelona. They were a group of Spaniards, French and Italians. He added German and English technicians and departed from the port of Bordeaux with a chartered French paddle steamer (the *Paranaguá*) and three small steamers he had purchased to add to his flotilla in Ortón. The trip from Bordeaux to Pará and then to Iquitos was full of incidents. The accounts of a passenger in that trip, the young English bride of Fred

³⁹ *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 10 Apr. 1897, n°17. Signed by Pastor Valdivieso [sic].

⁴⁰ *Juicio criminal de Demetrio Zabala contra Antonio Vaca Díez y Paulino Caballero por flagelación*. [n.d.]. ACS/AJR, n° 31.

⁴¹ According to a witness, he had borrowed £340,500 in London. See Lizzie Hessel et al., *Lizzie: a Victorian Lady's Amazon Adventure* (New York; London: Parkwest Publications; B.B.C., 1987), 17. Some other debts included 9,000 Bs. to Ritchler & Co., 500,000 Bs. to Suárez Hnos. and 30,000 Bs. to Braillard et Cie. *El Dr. Vaca Díez, sus antecedentes, su obra, sus detractores*, 36-37 & 51.

Hassel, a German accountant who had been hired in London to take care of the Ortón's finances, present a bleak picture. According to her, of the four hundred migrants that made it to Pará only one hundred actually made it to the Ortón.

During stopovers along the Amazon River three quarters of the immigrants deserted or had been dispatched because, according to Lizzie's testimony, they were "vagabonds and not good at all" so "we are taking Indians from up river if we can get them." Another problem was that twenty-five first class passengers, who were dined and wined on the upper deck, occupied most of the ship. The rest were confined to below deck. Antonio Vaca Díez kept an armed watch to prevent them from stepping on deck and announced that anybody who tried to do so would be shot. According to Lizzie, the immigrants were "packed like cattle" and, due to the tropical climate and appalling hygienic conditions, the "smell was dreadful."⁴²

Bolivian historians have debated why Antonio Vaca Díez did not take the Madeira route and decided to go to Iquitos instead. They have argued that the Brazilians harassed the expedition or that there was a yellow fever epidemic on the Madeira River. This is possible, however both Nicolás Suárez and Antonio Vaca Díez were business partners of Fermín Fitzcarrald and he was probably anxious to test Fitzcarrald's newly discovered route that led from the Amazon River through the Ucayali and Urubamba Rivers to the Madre de Dios, thus avoiding the dangerous *cachuelas* of the Madeira River. This route had three short portages as opposed to more than three hundred

⁴² Hessel et al., *Lizzie: a Victorian Lady's Amazon Adventure*, 27, 41, & 33, respectively.

kilometers of treacherous *cachuelas*.⁴³ Indeed, there was supposed to be a meeting involving Nicolás Suárez, Fermín Fitzcarrald and Antonio Vaca Díez to discuss the development of their mutual interests in the Madre de Dios basin.⁴⁴ Vaca Díez's adventure ended with his and Fitzcarrald's death on the Urubamba River in 1897. According to Lizzie, the German captain of the steamer *Adolfito*, Albert Perl, lost control of his ship in the rapids of the Urubamba River when the rudder's chain broke and, as a result, Fitzcarrald, Vaca Díez, one steward and one engineer drowned. Of the original five hundred members of the expedition, only seventeen arrived at the Urubamba River.⁴⁵ Nobody knows the fate of the deserters of Vaca Díez's expedition, but the Riberalta press reported from time to time that some of the survivors of the expedition drifted to the city looking for employment. For instance, in 1898 the carpenter Florencio Pereira, the cook José Durand, and an unnamed Spanish woman showed up in Riberalta and the press described them as the remnants of "Dr. Vaca Díez's great expedition."⁴⁶

Contemporaries viewed Antonio Vaca Díez's death as a warning. In retrospect, José María Aponte described his death as if "it was like an omen predicting the general

⁴³ See e.g., Medardo Chávez, *Eldorado boliviano* (La Paz: Imp. Renacimiento, 1926), 146; Oswaldo Vaca Díez, *Conferencia dada por el Sr. Oswaldo Vaca Díez en el salón consistorial de la Junta Municipal de Villa Bella el 19 de Enero de 1910* (Trinidad: Tip. de "La Democracia," 1910). Also Fifer, "The Empire Builders," 332-33, and Ciro Tórrez López, *Las maravillosas tierras del Acre (en la floresta amazónica de Bolivia)* (La Paz: Talleres Tipográficos del Colegio don Bosco, 1930), 330.

⁴⁴ Both Nicolás Suárez and the Bolivian government were extremely concerned about Peruvian incursions into Bolivian territory. The Intendente Pastor Baldivieso, e.g., wrote to Nicolás Suárez suggesting that they should both go to the barraca "El Carmen" to see what Fitzcarrald and "the Peruvian gentlemen" were up to. ACS/ Correspondencia, From Pastor Baldivieso to Nicolás Suárez, 21 July 1896.

⁴⁵ Hessel et al., *Lizzie: a Victorian Lady's Amazon Adventure*, 66-67. The Riberalta newspaper *El Noroeste* (which belonged to Vaca Díez's rival Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra) exaggerated the incident and wrote that the boilers of the *Adolfito* had exploded and that all the people aboard except the captain had died. *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 26 Aug. 1897, n°37.

⁴⁶ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Ortón), 16 Mar. 1898, n°47.

ruin of the whole Beni.”⁴⁷ It was indeed the end of an era, but the Bolivian rubber boom had a few decades of life left. Nicolás Suárez and his family became the main rubber barons of the Bolivian Amazon and, as discussed in the previous chapter, managed to virtually monopolize all aspects of the economic life of the present departments of Beni and Pando and large tracks of Peruvian and Brazilian territories. Fitzcarrald’s death also benefited Suárez to a certain extent, as the Iquitos/Madre de Dios route did not threaten his virtual monopoly of the Madeira route and he was able to expand into the Acre and Madre de Dios regions. Moreover, he was able to benefit from large numbers of Fitzcarrald’s Peruvian labor force.⁴⁸

One of Vaca Díez’s pamphlets justified his autocracy under a veil of nationalism. Even though he claimed to want to nationalize the Bolivian rubber industry, he was the first Bolivian rubber baron to establish strong links with Europe’s emerging international capitalists. His pamphlet declared, “His ideal was to nationalize the rubber industry bringing to these beautiful and unpopulated regions a Bolivian population that knows preserves and defends these frontiers.” It also justified his autocracy by stating that he had a right to do so because “he was one of the first to reach the Ortón River and establish *barracas*, open paths and navigate rivers, to trade in and populate these regions

⁴⁷ Aponte, *Revolución del Acre*, 11.

⁴⁸ Despite initial mistrust, Suárez, Roca & Co., which was tapping rubber in barraca “El Carmen” on the Madre de Dios River, had made a deal with Fitzcarrald. According to the Riberalta press, Suárez & Roca had contributed £25,000 and Fitzcarrald had placed an unspecified number of Peruvian *mozos* under the orders of the Bolivian *mayordomo* Zoilo Mercado. *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 26 Aug. 1897, n°37. Suárez and Fitzcarrald had also established a joint agency in Iquitos called *Suárez y Fiscarrald*.

where he has ample rights to be respected and to deserve public deference.”⁴⁹ During his lifetime, Antonio Vaca Díez was a controversial character. While he was hailed as a hero and a pioneer, he was also feared as a potential threat to the stability of the rubber regions. There was always a tension between the myth of his heroic deeds and the reality of his autocratic behavior. This tension was heightened by the fact that he was extremely conscious of his public image. His public posts and his publications made him particularly visible and ensured that his point of view was always present. Despite his tragic end, Vaca Díez was a seminal character of Bolivia’s rubber boom. He had a province named after him and his descendants continue to be influential members of the political élite of the departments of Beni and Pando. Antonio Vaca Díez’s propaganda seems to have been successful, because Bolivian historiography seems to have forgotten his most negative traits.

Nicolás Suárez Callaú (1851-1940) and his Family

Most historians of the Amazonian rubber boom mention Nicolás Suárez and he dominates Bolivian historiography of the rubber boom. Like Antonio Vaca Díez, Nicolás Suárez Callaú was born in 1851. Since he is one of the main protagonists of the Bolivian rubber boom, and has appeared repeatedly throughout this dissertation, this is only a succinct biography of the Suárez family. Nicolás Suárez Callaú was born in the Barrio de San Roque, one of Santa Cruz de la Sierra’s oldest and more traditional neighborhoods

⁴⁹ *La libertad individual en el Beni, atropellos contra el Dr. Vaca Díez; arbitradierades del hijo de González Portal* (Cochabamba: Imp. "El Comercio," 1893), IX & X.

and was the son of Rafael Suárez and Dolores Callaú Vargas, both descendants of Santa Cruz's original Spanish settlers.⁵⁰ At the age of six, his father passed away and the family



Figure 20. Nicolás Suárez during the 1910s, sketched by Henry C. Pearson in Cachuela Esperanza
Source: Henry C. *The rubber country of the Amazon*, 49.

moved to the city of Trinidad to run a cattle *estancia*. As discussed in chapter 3, the Suárez clan eventually became one of the largest cattle owners of the city of Trinidad. The family was composed of eight children, two girls, Petrona and Lugarda, and six boys Francisco, Pedro, Gregorio, Antonio, Rómulo and, the youngest, Nicolás. It seems that Petrona stayed in Santa Cruz and two of the boys, Antonio and Pedro died during childhood.⁵¹ In Trinidad, the family combined ranching with trade and money lending. Nicolás Suárez's biographers, Bolivian and otherwise, have stressed the family's humble background and their frontier lifestyle. It should be noted, however, that, even though the

⁵⁰ "Certificado de óbito expedido por el Corregidor de Cachuela Esperanza, Alberto Letellier Gutiérrez en el año 1940" and "Testimonio de Tristán Balcazar párroco de la Iglesia de San Roque de esta ciudad [Santa Cruz de la Sierra] en el documento probatorio presentado a la Corte Suprema de Justicia en el juicio entre Nicolás Suárez y Hugo Boger en el asunto de sucesión de Francisco Suárez." ACS/AJR Documentos Cachuela Esperanza, n°3871-3946.

⁵¹ Deprez, "Rise and Decline," 22.

Suárez clan could not be classified as a member of the Santa Cruz elite, they were indeed part of the “white” minority of the city, who would have been offended if they were called *cambas* and who claimed direct descent from Spanish conquistadores. Despite limited economic opportunities in both Santa Cruz and Trinidad, the family was relatively well off, compared to the bulk of the population.

During the *cascarilla* boom, the older brother Francisco established a commercial house in Trinidad and, with Nicolás’s cooperation, started to import and export over the Madeira/Mamoré route. In 1871, after the fall of Melgarejo and thanks to his connections with the new Bolivian *caudillo* Agustín Morales (presidency 1871-72), he moved to London to become Bolivia’s Consul General and opened the first family company (F. Suárez & Company) that imported goods from Brazil and Bolivia and exported manufactured products. In London, Francisco was able eventually to establish strong links with Liverpool rubber manufacturers and to invest some of the family’s capital in English banks. He was also in an enviable position to monitor trends in the international rubber market, which he could convey to his brothers in South America. The company had offices in Santo Antônio (on the Madeira River) and in Pará and Manaus. Francisco died in London in 1897. Before that, he sold his business to his brothers Nicolás and Rómulo, who established a separate company called R. Suárez & Co. The third brother, Gregorio, became a moneylender in Manaus and facilitated the flow of capital and merchandise in what would become the most important Amazonian port. He was in charge of ensuring that the Suárez flotillas passed the Madeira River *cachuelas* and arrived to Manaus and Pará safely. Pedro Suárez, the second-oldest brother, was a

pioneer of the *cascarilla* trade and established himself in Reyes and Santa Ana del Yacuma where he died early. His widow, Cornelia Saravia, started “Saravia e hijos,” one of the first rubber companies in Bolivia. It started to tap rubber in the early days of the rubber boom in the city of Santa Ana del Yacuma and was one of the first rubber companies to operate in Riberalta. One of the sons of the couple, Pedro Suárez Saravia, studied and established himself in London and eventually became a classic Latin American *bon vivant*, squandering his fortune in fashionable European casinos and became Bolivia’s Consul General in London under the Presidency of Ismael Montes (1904-09 and 1913-17).⁵² Eventually, Rómulo Suárez was sent back to Trinidad to take charge of the family’s cattle *estancias*. As part of their *habilitador* business, the Suárez brothers had started to purchase large *estancias* in the plains of Moxos to supply rubber *barracas* with the ever-present *charque*. Rómulo managed this empire from the company’s headquarters in the Loma Suárez, a short distance from Trinidad. *Charque* and eventually fresh meat was exported to the Casa Suárez’s *barracas* (to create a degree of self-sufficiency) and to his many *habilitados* or *contratistas*, both in Bolivia and Brazil.

Thus, the Suárez family established a model of balanced vertical integration under the leadership of Nicolás Suárez. The firm’s control over all aspects of the supply chain was total. Through its fleet of canoes and steamers, it controlled the export of rubber to Brazilian ports and its exchange for merchandise to be distributed through the *habilito*

⁵² These biographical notes are taken from Fifer, "The Empire Builders," 124-130 and Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, 264-273.

system. By 1910, the Casa Suárez had achieved a monopoly over navigation within Bolivia's Amazonian Rivers.⁵³ This was in contrast to rubber barons in Peru and Brazil, who relied on European shipping companies. In Trinidad, it had cattle *estancias* that supplied *charque*, on-the-hoof cattle, rice and other staples for its *barracas* and the company stores. Moreover, the Suárez empire had offices in the most important links of the Amazonian supply chain, such as Riberalta, Cobija, Villa Bella, Santo Antônio, Manaus, Belem, Iquitos and, of course, London. Although Suárez Hermanos registered in London, it was not dependent on foreign capital; since their earliest days as *fleteros* and moneylenders, the Suárez brothers were able to generate their own capital. They invested in real estate in Trinidad, Riberalta and Cobija and owned shares in railways and mining concerns in Bolivia and abroad.⁵⁴ Later, they became the Northeast's bankers. They did not own a formal bank but everybody in Beni and the *Territorio de Colonias*, including the national government, knew that if they needed money Suárez Hermanos were willing to provide it, in exchange for high interest rates and strong collaterals. Cachuela Esperanza also had well-organized workshops that made sure that the steam engines of the small train and steamboats were maintained properly. As explained below, unlike Antonio Vaca Díez, Nicolás never accepted a political office, but he networked with Bolivia's most prominent liberals and, after 1899, became the government's lender

⁵³ By 1925, it owned six steamers, six motor launches, seven iron *alvarengas* (barges), and three wooden lighters, totaling a 233-ton fleet. "Patentes de navegación, 1925," in ACS/Conocimientos fluviales y guías de despacho.

⁵⁴ According to Deprez, the Suárez family had shares in the Southerland Reef Mining Co., the Anglo-Bolivian Mining Syndicate Ltd., the Aramayo Franck Mines Ltd, the South American Railways Traction Ltd., and the Colombian National Railway & Co., Deprez, "Rise and Decline," 60. Ironically, they never invested in railways in the Bolivian Amazon, which they probably deemed unprofitable and which would have competed with their fleets.

in the region.

Unlike Vaca Díez or Fitzcarrald, Nicolás lived to the ripe age of 89, a rare feat among South American rubber barons. However, true to his romantic reputation, he was surrounded by tragedy. In 1897, his older brother Francisco died in London at the age of sixty-four. This was followed in 1897 by the death of his twenty-year old partner from Santa Cruz, Constanza Roca. To commemorate her death he imported a marble column from Carrara, which still stands at Cachuela Esperanza. In 1909, while portaging supplies in the Madeira *cachuelas*, a party of Caripuna Indians killed his brother Gregorio and most of his crew.⁵⁵ According to most reports, Nicolás himself led a punitive party into their territory that slaughtered most of the Caripuna. Interestingly, his son Nicolás “hijo” claimed that the Caripuna had actually murdered Pedro, not Gregorio, but this might be an editor’s error.⁵⁶ Erland Nordenskiöld referred to his brother Rómulo as “The Great Exterminator” and described how he, from his headquarters in the Loma Suárez, terrorized his indigenous *mozos* by whipping them to death. Eventually his *mozos* had enough and managed to kill their tormentor.⁵⁷ It seems that this took place in 1908. After Rómulo’s death, Nicolás was the only surviving member of the Suárez-Callaú brothers.⁵⁸

Although he enjoyed the typical lifestyle of rubber barons and made regular trips to London, where he had two residences and where he educated all of his children and

⁵⁵ Hessel et al., *Lizzie: a Victorian Lady's Amazon Adventure*, 143.

⁵⁶ Nicolás [hijo] Suárez, *Anotaciones y documentos sobre la campaña del Acre* (Barcelona: Tip. La Academia, 1926), 11.

⁵⁷ Nordenskiöld, *Indios y blancos*, 77.

⁵⁸ A condolence letter for Rómulo’s death was sent on 1 May 1908. San Joaquín, 1 May 1908, Angel Lara to Nicolás Suárez, ACS/ Correspondencia.

nephews, Nicolás did not have a reputation for extravagance. According to most witnesses, he was cold and calculating and was not prone to flaunt his wealth. Unlike Antonio Vaca Díez, though, he did not feel obliged to follow bourgeois conventions with his personal life. According to José Luís Roca, he never married Constanza Roca but had one son, Nicolás with her. Afterwards he had Rómulo with Albertina Roca, Constanza's sister and Ricardo with an unknown woman. In 1909 he married Judith Arias, also from the department of Santa Cruz and had Esperanza, Rafael, Judith and Pedro. Pedro died of yellow fever at an early age.⁵⁹

Most narratives about Nicolás Suárez's life portray him as a shrewd businessman who was dedicated to the expansion of his empire and paid little attention to politics. Yet, a closer look reveals the obvious fact that such a meteoric rise could not have been achieved without political alliances. Unlike Antonio Vaca Díez, he did not become directly involved in national or local politics, but was able to control politicians in a more subtle way. Through his relationship with Constanza Roca, for instance, he was related to members of the liberal elite. He became a relative by marriage of the *cruceño* Mamerto Oyola who was a law professor at the Universidad San Francisco Xavier de Chuquisaca, a member of the Supreme Court and liberal senator for Beni department. Through him, he established contacts with the liberal elite and became acquainted with

⁵⁹ Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, 254-55. According to a judicial document, he married Judith on Apr. 1909 in Riberalta. It seems like they had some differences over property rights. ACS/AJR n°7, "Expediente de declaraciones para comprobar la existencia del matrimonio de Judith Arias de Suárez con Nicolás Suárez." Demandante: Judith Arias de Suárez, 11 de Feb. del 1922."

important leaders such as General José Manuel Pando.⁶⁰ His friendship with Pando continued after he became Bolivia's first Liberal President. Nicolás Suárez financed a European trip for Pando's sons Jorge and Ramón and used them as his legal representatives in La Paz. Jorge was also a representative in Bolivia's Congress. In a letter to Suárez, General Pando wrote that "Jorge will return [from Europe] in September to take his seat in the Chamber of Representatives and will always be willing to follow your orders. They both received with great pleasure the powers of attorney that you sent them and they fully understand that they have the obligation of making use of all their time and attention to the service of one of their father's best friends."⁶¹

In contrast to other *gomeros* such as Antonio Vaca Díez or Augusto Roca, he did not accept political appointments. For example, in 1899 he refused to be the National Delegate for the Madre de Dios and Purús, a post which had been presumably been left vacant after Antonio Vaca Díez's death.⁶² During the liberal period, wealth and politics were interlinked and economic power was a means to obtain political power. Prominent members of the mining oligarchies of the highlands (Carlos Víctor Aramayo, Simón Patiño, Mauricio Hochkschild) combined economic success with political influence). Still, his influence over the local and national government was unquestionable. To a certain extent, he was the National Delegation's *habilitador*, since most civil servants

⁶⁰ Mamerto Oyola to Nicolás Suárez, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 29 May 1894, Mamerto Oyola to Nicolás Suárez, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 10 July 1887, Mamerto Oyola to Nicolás Suárez, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 24 May 1886. ACS/N°48, Cartas "O.," 1899-1905.

⁶¹ Juan Manuel Pando to Sr. D. Nicolás Suárez, La Paz, 10 June 1901. (ALP/JMP 1901, n°14. Correspondencia geográfica.)

⁶² *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 1 Dec. 1899, n° 77.

stationed in the rubber areas relied on Suárez's credits to survive.⁶³ He also offered the government use of his launches, advanced merchandise and cash to cover living expenses until salaries were received and even "loaned" rifles to local authorities.⁶⁴ In addition, unlike some of his colleagues, he cultivated a good relationship with the government and never questioned its authority openly. Not surprisingly, the prefect of Beni department, who was also his relative, Mamerto Oyola, wrote that the Casa Suárez had always placed all its resources to help authority because he understood that "the goal of all societies is the rule of law, and it can be reached by strengthening law and order."⁶⁵ Subsequent chapters describes how this good relationship with "law and order" was ultimately extremely beneficial to Suárez and his enterprises.

In sum, Nicolás Suárez and his family became a rare occurrence in the history of the Bolivian lowlands. They were able to create an empire in one of the Amazon's more remote areas whose tentacles reached most of the Bolivian lowlands, most of the most important ports of the Brazilian and Peruvian Amazon and London, which was at the time the undisputed financial capital of the world. Nicolás Suárez has been often misunderstood and he has been portrayed as a backwoods trader who was not aware of

⁶³ In 1893, e.g., he had loaned 4,000 Bs. to the National Delegation using the revenues of the Villa Bella customhouse as collateral; by 1896, the government had only managed to return 2,635.20 Bs. Bolivia and Ballivián, *Diario del viaje Delegación Nacional*, 33-34. As late as 1915, the delegate Carlos Gutiérrez wrote that the National Delegation owed 204,912.58 Bs. to the Casa Suárez. *El Noroeste* (Cobija), 8 Dec. 1915, n°200. "Informe administrativo de la Delegación Nacional." Cap. 10.

⁶⁴ These types of patriotic "donations" were quite common. In 1881, e.g., Antonio Vaca Díez had donated one rifle, fifteen bullets and one hundred Bs. to the prefect of the Beni. ANB/MG 1881, Antonio Vaca Díez al Sr. Prefecto, Reyes, 4 Jan. 1881. In order to quell some Moxo disturbances, Suárez also loaned 15 rifles "to preserve constitutional order" to his relative Mamerto Oyola, the prefect of the Beni. Prefectura y Comandancia General del Beni to Ministro de Guerra, Trinidad, 9 Dec. 1883. Signed by Mamerto Oyola ANB/MG 1883, n°39.

⁶⁵ Mamerto Oyola and Ministerio de Gobierno Bolivia, *Informe que eleva ante el Supremo Gobierno el Prefecto del Departamento del Beni* (La Paz: Imp. de "La Industria," 1883), 21.

his fortune. This is very removed from the truth. Instead, through a methodic and ruthless manipulation of the peculiar world of rubber in Bolivia and through timely alliances with the Bolivian government and international capital he was able to become one of Amazonia's wealthiest individuals and, remarkably, his empire survived until the Bolivian Revolution of 1952 confiscated its last remains.

Cachuela Esperanza

Figure 21 shows the chapel of Cachuela Esperanza. If not for the palm trees, it seems that this chapel could be in North America or Northern Europe. The chapel shows one of the characteristics of the rubber boom, its desire to imitate and to re-create Europe in the Amazonian wilderness. Despite the primitive methods used to extract rubber and the reliance on coercive labor systems, Bolivia's rubber elites, like their counterparts in other Latin American countries, sought to emulate what they saw in Europe and North America, even though neither the climate nor the landscape were European. This chapel is very different from the wood and adobe mestizo baroque chapels of Moxos and Chiquitos. Most rubber barons were liberal and, in Bolivia, liberalism equated anti-clericalism, yet Cachuela Esperanza, like the ex-missions of the Bolivian lowlands, moved at the rhythm of the chapel's bell. It was, though, a "modern" chapel, not a colonial one.



Figure 21. Wooden Chapel in Cachuela Esperanza

Source: Photographed by the author in 1994.

In 1881, Edward Heath re-discovered and named Cachuela Esperanza, on the right bank of the Beni River, during an expedition to establish the link between the Beni and Mamoré Rivers.⁶⁶ In 1882, Nicolás Suárez repeated the trip from Reyes and founded a *barraca* on the site. The Cachuela Esperanza was strategically located below the confluence of the Beni and Mamoré Rivers, so all the river traffic from the Upper Beni to Brazil had to pass this point. Thanks to Heath's discovery, many *gomeros* from Reyes established *barracas* on the tributaries of lower Beni and in the Madre de Dios and Mamoré Rivers. Nicolás Suárez lived in Cachuela from 1882 until his death in 1940. After that, it continued to be an important link in the Suárez empire until the 1952 Revolution. During the Revolution, local *siringueros* looted it and removed many of its contents. All properties of the Suárez family were confiscated and Cachuela became a

⁶⁶ The *cachuela* had actually been “discovered” by Agustín Palacios in 1846. Later, the Italian Samuel Mancini had crossed it in 1864 and the Peruvian explorer Faustino Maldonado had crossed it before drowning in the Madeira River, in 1860. See chap. 3.

base of the Bolivian Navy for a few decades. At present, it is a ruined hamlet of a few hundred inhabitants, almost a ghost town.

Not surprisingly, the Suárez family built Cachuela following a strictly hierarchical order. Nicolás Suárez, his family and his European administrators lived in European-style residences, made of brick and tiles and fitted with imported furnishings. To house the workers, Suárez continued the mission tradition of *cuarteles* (rectangular multifamily dwellings), using bamboo and palm. Besides stores, offices and workshops, and private residences, Cachuela Esperanza boasted a church, a hospital, a theatre, and a luxurious guesthouse called the *Hotel Canadiense* built of imported Canadian pine! Like any *barraca*, the jail and stocks played a very important role. Eventually Suárez also imported a small train from England to carry rubber from one end of the *cachuela* to the other (See Fig. 22).⁶⁷

Many Bolivian travelers and administrators had misgivings about Cachuela Esperanza. The *cruceño* intellectual Medardo Chávez, for example, admired its electrical lighting and urbanization but commented that, in reality, it was not a town because Bolivia could not exercise its sovereignty within it. He felt that what Cachuela Esperanza lacked was “national authority,” which would “remove this hostile attitude [towards visitors] that one perceives and sees when arriving to this place.”⁶⁸ These comments underscored Suárez’s power and the fact that liberals had given him *carte blanche* on the affairs of Bolivia’s Amazonian frontier. Chapter 8 analyzes the role of the Bolivian state

⁶⁷ See Centeno, *Imágenes*.

⁶⁸ Chávez, *Eldorado boliviano*, 32.

in the rubber boom. Liberals were happy to leave many of the common government attributes to private individuals and corporations. As long as Nicolás Suárez took care of law and order, paid taxes, and was willing to provide credit during tough times, they were willing to leave him undisturbed. In a way, Suárez became the lowlands' equivalent of the highlands' infamous *rosca* (a tightly knit ruling clique). According to the Beni novelist Juan B. Coimbra, Villa Bella and other Amazonian towns wildly celebrated the 1900 Liberal victory over the Conservative Party.⁶⁹ After all, there had been a steady influx of liberal refugees to the Bolivian tropics. Bolivian liberals strengthened the power of local rubber elites but, in the long run, they did not go beyond that. They concentrated their nation-building schemes on the western half of the country and, even though they established the state's presence in the Amazon, they did not invest much money nor promote the construction of infrastructure. As a result, the power of the Suárez family survived the rubber boom and their virtual monopoly of economic and political power in Bolivia's Amazonian region and was not checked until 1953 when, because of Bolivia's National Revolution, the state confiscated all of its remaining properties because, under the new Agrarian Reforms, they were considered latifundia.⁷⁰

Cachuela Esperanza impressed other travelers, who were surprised to find such a place in the middle of the Amazon. Luigi Balzan, for example commented that, in 1890, Nicolás Suárez had treated him "with exquisite hospitality." In the 1910s, Joseph F.

⁶⁹ Coimbra, *Siringa*, 170.

⁷⁰ Despite this, Suárez's heirs kept a significant amount of property, see "Inventario general estimativo de los valores activos y pasivos de la firma Suárez Hnos., S.R. Ltda., Cachuela Esperanza, practicado el 16 de Julio de 1955, para determinar el capital de la socia fallecida Sra. Lutgarda Suárez de Schweiser, en cumplimiento de la orden de la Administración de la Renta de Trinidad de 17 de Agosto de 1956." in ACS/Cachuela Esperanza, *Inventarios Varios*.

Woodroffe found it “very charming” and commented on its manicured shrubs and flowers. According to Woodroffe, despite its European airs, Cachuela was still an Amazonian settlement. He wrote that “bones and skulls of cattle lie around, left where the beasts have been killed for food and fill the air with odors of their putrefaction, while half-starved, wild-eyed dogs belonging to the peons engaged here rush at strangers in a



Figure 22. Engine of British-built Train in Cachuela Esperanza

Source: Photographed by the author, 2004.

most objectionable manner.” The Amazonian jungle was not far away and according to Percy Harrison Fawcett, the Pacaguara used to watch the *barraca* from the opposite bank, aware that they were out of range of the *gomeros*’ rifles. The *gomeros*’ hysterical shooting reminded Fawcett of the “noisy bravado or dogs at night of a cat on a wall.” The *barraca*’s *chacos*, though, were located outside the urban area and managers sent peons to work on them as a punishment, with the danger of Pacaguara attacks.⁷¹

⁷¹ Balzan, “Da Villa Bella a Trinidad,” 70; Woodroffe, *Upper Reaches*, 202 and Fawcett, *Exploration Fawcett*, 92-93, respectively.

Besides rubber, Cachuela Esperanza's location brought profits to Suárez. The *cachuela* had an altitude of twelve meters and neither launches nor canoes could cross it without stopping. Suárez charged individuals for crossing the *cachuela* and had a virtual monopoly for transportation within the area. An ad in a local newspaper listed the following list of fees:

- Renting a canoe without crew, for a day or part of a day, 12.50 Bs. per day.
- Crossing passengers and their luggage, 3 Bs. One boliviano per additional passenger.
- 1 boliviano per head for helping cattle, mules and horses with a crew of four. During the first day, there will be no fee for pasture or corralling them. Note: The crew will only be provided when they are available and where their services have been required and can be withdrawn without prejudice to the interests of the company. In each case, the security of the passenger and his goods will be evaluated, especially if they do not have their own crew to facilitate their passage.
- Corralling for the night, 0.30 Bs. per head of cattle.
- Corralling during the day, (any quantity of cattle), 10 Bs. per day.
- Pasture for cattle, for a day and a night or part thereof, 0.80 Bs. per head for the first day.
- The following days and night, 0.50 Bs. per head.
- It is the responsibility of cattle owners to avoid damages to docks, *chacos* and orchards. They will be responsible for the payment of damages.⁷²

It should be noted that these fees were in place at the beginning of a slump in rubber prices. After this crisis, Nicolás Suárez started diversifying and concentrating on cattle production and the gathering of Brazil nuts. Moreover, by 1914 there was a large market for cattle in the cities of Riberalta and in the more densely populated Brazilian territory of Acre. Improved land communications also meant that cattle on the hoof had replaced, to a certain extent, the ubiquitous *charque*. Even though the Madeira Mamoré railway had

⁷² "Tarifas que rigen en los establecimientos y dependencias de Suárez Hnos." Riberalta, 24 Sept. 1914. Signed by Feliciano Antelo per Suárez Hnos. *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 6 Dec. 1914, n°181.

started operations in 1912, Bolivians continued to use canoes on their side of the *cachuelas*, so passage through Suárez lands became another source of profits.

In 1910, at the height of production, Suárez Hermanos undertook a census of its employees in Cachuela Esperanza.⁷³ The census distinguished between *jornaleros*, an euphemism for *mozos* under debt peonage contracts, and *empleados* or qualified workers, in either the offices or workshops of Cachuela Esperanza. The following charts show the birthplace or nationality of the members of these two categories. The census applied the term birthplace rather loosely. For example, some of the *mozos* were given ethnic labels such as Cayuvava, Movima or Araona, instead of birthplaces, probably because they did not recall their birthplace. Two of them were born in the Beni, probably meaning the lower Beni River, and in Ortón, meaning either the Ortón River or the Barraca Ortón. In order to simplify a myriad of hamlets and towns, their birthplaces have been grouped into several categories. Santa Cruz includes nearby towns like Portachuelo and the province of Cordillera. The traditional towns of the former missions of the southern savanna continued to be a source of laborers and include Trinidad, Reyes, San Pedro, San Ignacio, Santa Rosa, Reyes and the ethnic label Movima (probably from Santa Ana del Yacuma). The northern Moxos savanna includes El Carmen, Exaltación, San Joaquín and the ethnic category Cayuvava. La Paz includes the towns of Ixiamas and Tumupasa and, finally, Chiquitos is self-explanatory.

It is remarkable that, despite their demographic collapse, the towns of the southern Moxos savanna continued to be the main suppliers of *mozos*. Most of them

⁷³ “Censo de Cachuela Esperanza, 1910.” in ACS/Censos, 1910.

came from Trinidad, so this probably reflects the Suárez's long-standing influence in the area and the fact that his family owned large cattle *estancias* around Trinidad. On the other hand, Cachuela Esperanza was the main transportation hub of the Suárez Company and perhaps most of these Moxo were employed as rowers. Santa Cruz also continued to be a source of *mozos* and this was the case with most rubber *barracas*. The number of *mozos* from Chiquitos is also remarkable. Even though there was rubber in Chiquitos and it was relatively near the city of Santa Cruz, twenty per cent of Cachuela's *mozos* were Chiquitano. Additionally, even if they were physically closer, neither the towns of the northern savanna (San Joaquín, Exaltación and El Carmen) nor the *barracas* of the Northeast provided significant numbers of *mozos*. In the first case this probably reflects the fact that these towns had significant agricultural production (to supply rubber *barracas*) and that they were the seat of *casas comerciales* that absorbed most of the local labor as agricultural workers, rowers and muleteers. The inhabitants of the Northeast were probably concentrated in *barracas* that were more isolated. The fact that they were given ethnic labels probably meant that they were not very acculturated and that they were probably given the most menial jobs. *Mozos* from the department of La Paz were also not present in large numbers. There were two from the former Tacana missions of Tumupasa and Ixiamas but, again, most of them were also probably working in isolated *barracas* or in the *barracas* of the upper Beni because the Tacana were reputedly the best tappers during the Bolivian rubber boom. Finally, Peruvian and Brazilian *mozos* were probably working in remote *barracas* to avoid the intervention of their authorities and to prevent them from escaping to their countries of origin. It is

important to note that most of the *mozos*, regardless of their point of origin, had indigenous surnames.

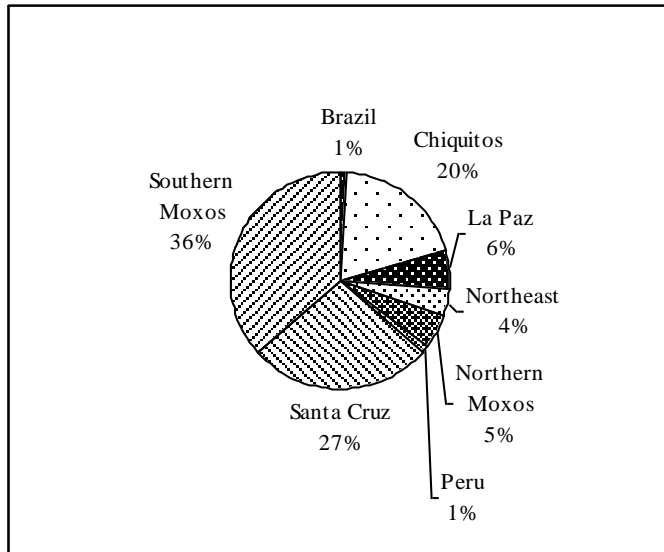


Figure 23. Jornaleros' Birthplace at Cachuela Esperanza, 1910

Source: "Censo de Cachuela Esperanza, 1910" in ACS/Censos, 1910.

The age of the *mozos* ranged from eighteen to sixty. As the following chart shows, only two were above sixty years of age. Most of them were between twenty-one and twenty-nine and between thirty and thirty-nine. This seems to indicate that *mozos* did not live for too long and that their prime was between twenty-one and twenty-nine. Unfortunately, we do not have records of life expectancy among indigenous peoples of the area before the outset of the rubber boom, but most sources indicate that it was higher than during the rubber boom. Their age could also indicate that few of the *mozos* in Cachuela were recent arrivals. They had probably been with the company for a few decades and were transferred to Cachuela Esperanza. It should be noted that there was no actual rubber tapping in Cachuela; it was an administrative center and most *mozos* were involved in tending *chacos* or in transportation. The relatively small amount of *mozos*

confirms this. As chapter 7 shows, many *barracas* had a higher population than Cachuela.

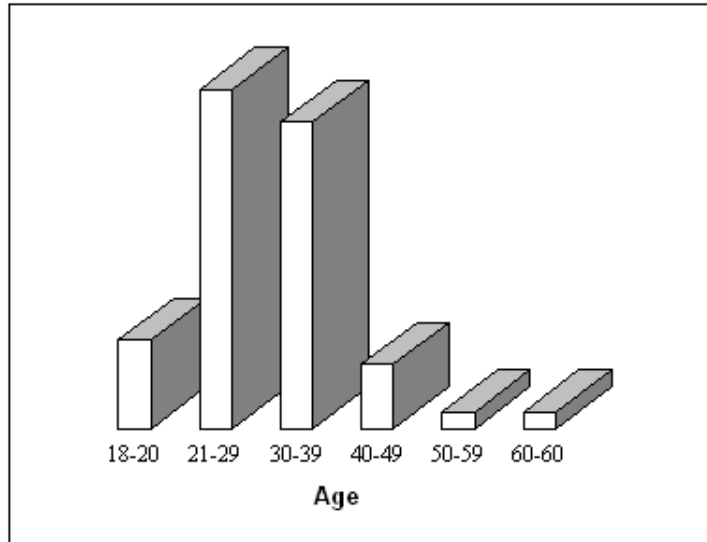


Figure 24. Jornaleros at Cachuela Esperanza, by age group

Source: "Censo de Cachuela Esperanza, 1910" in ACS/Censos, 1910.

The 1910 census has a list of thirty-five *empleados*. This category included administrators, one doctor and several members of trades such as cooks, carpenters, tin shop workers (*hojalateros*), probably manufacturing *tichelas* and *baldes*, and the generic category of *maquinista* or machine operator, which referred to skilled workers in the company's workshops. Cachuela Esperanza was famous for employing Europeans and the census reflects this. At the top of the occupational category were the administrators. Six of them were Swiss, two of them were German, one of them was English, and there were seven *cruceños*, one Peruvian, a Cuban, and one *cochabambino*. Although the census does not indicate hierarchy, the census included some Bolivians in administrative posts who were probably trusted relations of the Suárez clan. The cook was (surprisingly) English, the physician from Santa Cruz and the land surveyor German.

The *maquinistas* included seven Englishmen, one Frenchmen, one *cruceño*, one German and one Peruvian. Finally, the carpenter was Austrian and the *hojalatero* was Chilean.

The census also included women and children. In many *barracas*, women and children were expected to work for their upkeep. It is not clear whether this was the case in Cachuela. The census does not list occupation for women. The census lists sixty-seven, unlike in *barracas* that were more isolated, there does not seem to be a sex unbalance. The points of origin of the women are roughly the same as the men, with a greater preponderance of “local” women, that is born in the Northeast. The census also lists forty-three children aged from six months to fourteen. Fourteen of them are listed born along the Beni River (probably in Cachuela Esperanza) but the rest were born in Trinidad, Santa Cruz, Chiquitos etc. which seems to indicate that many *mozos* travelled with their children and women to Cachuela. The census does not specify marriage status, but most women seemed to be attached to a man and their children. Except in the missions and some towns, civil or religious marriage was extremely rare in the Bolivian Amazon, so the status of “spouse” was probably only *de facto*. Yet, indigenous women adopted their husband’s surname and, in some cases, used the customary “de” with their husband’s surnames. Of course, we do not know whether this was an imposition of the census takers or an actual practice of the workers. The census seems to presume patriarchy, but it is difficult to assess whether this was an imposition or a real situation.

The Cachuela Esperanza census reflects the ethnic hierarchy of Cachuela Esperanza. Whereas *mozos* were almost exclusively indigenous and came from the traditional sources for rubber labor, Chiquitos, Moxos, Santa Cruz and Caupolicán,

cruceños and Europeans formed the top echelon of skilled workers and administrators.

Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra and other Gomeros

The images of Antonio Vaca Díez and Nicolás Suárez have often overshadowed the many other *gomeros* who were involved in Bolivia's rubber boom. Thanks to the testimony of the Spanish adventurer/writer Ciro Bayo, we have a first-hand depiction of one of the least-known rubber barons, Gonzalo Nicanor Salvatierra. As mentioned above, he was Antonio Vaca Díez's archrival. Ciro Bayo became Salvatierra's accountant for eighteen months in his Barraca San Pablo, on the Madre de Dios River, and was able to gain Salvatierra's trust. We know little about Salvatierra's birth, but we do know he was another *cruceño*. In the 1870's he was trading in the lower Madeira and Purús and later, like many Bolivians, he established himself in the town of Reyes. Along with Antenor Vásquez, Félix and Angel Arteaga, Claudio Farfán, and Manuel Vaca Guzmán (Antonio Vaca Díez's father), he was among the first pioneers of rubber tapping on the Beni River. Later, he established himself on the Madre de Dios River near the territories of Augusto Roca and Antonio Vaca Díez with whom he had conflictual relationships.⁷⁴

According to Ciro Bayo, Salvatierra was almost illiterate. Yet, he financed the newspaper *El Noroeste* to counteract the influence of Antonio Vaca Díez's *La Gaceta del Norte*. San Pablo, his remote *barraca* on the Madre de Dios River, was impressive. His house spanned a whole block and the rubber tappers' huts and the *barraca*'s storehouses

⁷⁴ Pedro Suárez S., *Fronteras de Bolivia en el Departamento del Beni* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: n.p., 1892), 4-5.

lined up along a straight street. His storehouses were well-stocked, *Ciro Bayo* described that there were “white clothing for women and men, piles of caps and Panama hats, sandals and boots, hammocks, foldable chairs, stacks of rifles, machetes and axes, shelves with bottles of European wine, beer and liqueurs, all kinds of tinned foods, a whole pharmacy, and much more in large quantities. Many of the boxes had not been yet opened and they were marked with the shipping labels of many important European export houses.”⁷⁵ Part of *Salvatierra’s* success can be attributed to his decision to deposit all his profits in London banks. He was thus able to weather the many rubber price fluctuations and to minimize investment in his Bolivian operations. In addition, he solved his labor problems by mostly using local “savages,” thus avoiding the costly recruitment of *mozos* through the *enganche* system. He had a full time French Indian hunter, *Don Pablo*, who specialized in capturing “savage yet tame Indians” with a force of *cruceños* heavily armed with Winchesters and machetes and an *Araona* witchdoctor as an ally. Although *Salvatierra* was a widower and was in his sixties, he has been described, as “the Sultan of the Jungle.” While the captured male *Araona* worked as tappers “for a pair of pants, a shirt, sugar cane alcohol and a stew of cassava, plantains and *charque*,” he kept a harem of pubescent *Araona* females, whom he guarded zealously.⁷⁶ His sexual appetites, though, went beyond the *Araona*; some *mozos* also accused him of the sexual assault of a female minor in *Riberalta*.⁷⁷ *Salvatierra’s* frugality involved other aspects beyond labor. He was one of the few rubber tappers who kept

⁷⁵ *Bayo, América desconocida*, 299.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁷⁷ “Reconocimiento solicitado por Rosa Claire contra don Nicanor G. *Salvatierra* por abuso de menor.” *ACS/AJR*, n°32 (1886).

large plantations. His Araona labor force cultivated rice, yuca, maize, coffee and sugar cane to keep costs down and thus achieve a degree of vertical integration within his enterprise. Salvatierra was also the only Bolivian rubber baron who attempted to introduce rubber tree plantations.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, we do not have any information about how his rubber plantations fared. Most likely, they were a failure, as they were elsewhere in Amazonia.⁷⁹ Despite all of this, Salvatierra was not able to diversify on the output end and depended on the Casa Suárez's network to transport his rubber to markets and to import merchandise. Most of Salvatierra's *siringales* ended up in the hands of the Casa Suárez, following the firm's rise in the 1910s. It seems that he sold his rubber concessions on the Abuná River to the Casa Suárez. This led to boundary disputes between the Casa Suárez and the Société Picollet and Alfred W. Barber & Co. In 1917, the Casa Suárez blamed Salvatierra for these disputes and urged him to clarify the limits of his former *siringales*.⁸⁰

More powerful *patrones* eventually displaced many of the first *cascarilleros* who had turned to rubber extraction. The story of rubber in Bolivia, though, was not only one of violence and confrontation. Some of the *patrones* from the Yungas and Caupolicán, for example, were remarkable for their humane treatment of indigenous peoples. This was probably due to a lack of capital. Most of them were ruined *cascarilleros* who could not pay professional labor recruiters to contract *mozos* in distant regions and did not have

⁷⁸ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 6 May 1922, n° 9.

⁷⁹ If the hevea tree is concentrated in plantations in Amazonia, it is prone to a host of diseases and parasites. This is not the case if the tree is allowed to grow in its natural isolation. Throughout history, Brazil has attempted to produce hevea plantations. See Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber*.

⁸⁰ Cachuela Esperanza, Apr. 1917, from Nicolás Suárez to Sr. Ministro de Colonias. ACS, n° 24, 120.

access to many weapons. In addition, they probably lacked the “Indian hunting” traditions of their *cruceño* or Brazilian counterparts. The *yungueño* Timoteo Mariaca for example, wrote a memoir of his experiences in the rubber fields and explained how he gained the good will of the Pacaguara by peaceful means. Besides Mariaca, following the example of Antonio Vaca Díez, many other *gomer*os from the tropical areas of La Paz such as Fidel Endara, and Teodoro Ramírez “have lived and live among barbarians and from their labor.”⁸¹ Not surprisingly, some of these “good *patrones*” did not do very well, compared to their more ruthless rivals. As mentioned above, Antonio Vaca Díez took advantage of one of Timoteo Mariaca’s trips to La Paz, to steal his *barracas*.

After Vaca Díez’s demise, Bolivian rubber concerns became more concentrated. It is difficult to assess the working capital of these concerns because, as discussed in chapter 3, much of a rubber company’s capital was concentrated on passive assets such as its tappers’ debt. Moreover, Bolivian legislation in the rubber areas did not tax property or income and did not require a declaration of assets. Table 9 lists Bolivia’s main rubber concerns in 1911 and clearly shows how Suárez and his two companies were leaving behind all other foreign and domestic rubber concerns. Suárez Hermanos by itself produced fifty per cent of Bolivia’s rubber. To simplify matters, this table only indicates total rubber sales, omitting its classification. After Antonio Vaca Díez’ demise, many of the Bolivian *siringueros* had disappeared. The Casa Suárez controlled the total exports of the Bolivian rubber industry (more than 50% of Bolivia’s total exports), followed by

⁸¹ See Mariaca, ed., *Exploración del Río Acre*. Citation from Pastor Baldivieso. *El Noroteste* (Riberalta), 20 Mar. 1887, n°14.

Table 9. Export Totals for Bolivia's Top Rubber Producers in 1911 (in kg)

Company	Yearly exports
Suárez Hnos.*	849,362
Braillard & Co.	247,849
Alfredo W. Barber	120,237
Guillermo Demmer	94,289
Arnold & Co.	54,917
Zeller, Willinger & Co.	33,691
R. Wichtendahl & Co	25,550
Societé Picollet	23,600
Carlos M. Barbery	22,875
Octavio Reis & Lavor	18,254
Suárez Hnos. & Co. Ltd.*	17,027
Nicanor G. Salvatierra	15,892
Bolivia's total exports	1,643,576

Source: Bolivia. Ministerio de Guerra y Colonización, Delegación Nacional en el Territorio de Colonias del Noroeste, and Araúz. *Informe... el Sr. Rodolfo Araúz*, 47.

*During his lifetime, Nicolás Suárez and his family incorporated many companies. Although nominally different, these two companies were controlled by the Casa Suárez.

French and German-owned firms. The only other *cruceño* exporters who had managed to survive were Carlos M. Barbery and Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra. A Brazilian company, Octavio Reis & Lavor, also managed to extract rubber within Bolivian territory, even after the Acre War. The fact that the above-listed exporters controlled 93% of Bolivian rubber exports and that only 7% of Bolivia's total rubber exports belonged to other producers is also remarkable and demonstrates how after the early rubber boom, production tended to concentrate in a few hands.^{82v}

The success of these companies was due to the degree to which they achieved vertical integration. Suárez Hermanos was able to almost control all aspects of rubber production and commercialization and, in the long run, was Bolivia's most successful

⁸² Ministerio de Guerra y Colonización Bolivia, Delegación Nacional en el Territorio de Colonias del Noroeste and Rodolfo Araúz, *Informe que eleva al Ministerio de Guerra y Colonización el Delegado Nacional en el Territorio de Colonias Sr. Rodolfo Araúz* (La Paz: Imp. Velarde, 1912).

rubber enterprise and one of the most successful enterprises in the whole Amazonian area. It outlasted the rubber boom and continued to monopolize almost all economic life of the Bolivian Amazon until the 1950s. The degree of vertical integration that the Suárez clan achieved did not take place elsewhere in the Amazon basin. Even though there were some foreign firms present, the Bolivian rubber industry had a national character. Neither the Brazilian nor the Peruvian rubber industry, were able to achieve this. Both depended heavily on foreign merchants and their capital and on foreign navigation companies. Suárez Hermanos, through its branch in London, was even able to control the marketing of raw rubber in Europe.

The other rubber barons analyzed above achieved varying degrees of success. Antonio Vaca Díez, for example, established the first model for Cachuela Esperanza. His *barracas* on the Ortón River provided the first successful model for large rubber *barracas*. In the Ortón, he established a *casa matriz*, (head office) which was responsible for the administration of rubber extraction and exports. It served as a transportation and administration hub. In addition, Vaca Díez was the first rubber baron to import European administrators and technicians. In Ortón, these European immigrants oversaw the administrative aspects of rubber production, but they also maintained the steam engines of his fleet and manufactured simple tools and equipment in their workshops. However, Vaca Díez was not able to achieve full control of transportation or the import of merchandise through the *habilito* system. On top of that, his enterprises relied too much on foreign capital and on local credit. It was his reckless attempt to attract European immigrants at his own expense, nonetheless, that led to his downfall and premature death.

After his death, Nicolás Suárez was able to take over his properties because he controlled what had been the weak links in Vaca Díez's enterprises. Suárez dealt with foreign creditors, used Vaca Díez's *barracas* to cover his *habilito* advances, obtained cheap Peruvian laborers and even convinced the Bolivian government to ratify his actions. Nicanor Salvatierra was a veteran of the early rubber boom. His strategy was to achieve, as far as possible, self-sufficiency in food, to minimize dependence on *habilitadores* such as Suárez Hermanos, and to minimize the business of providing costly *anticipos* to *mozos* that had to be brought from relatively distance places. Because of these strategies, he was also able to survive until a ripe age. Notwithstanding, he also failed to control the transportation of rubber and supplies to and from Brazil and his *barracas*. He ended up selling a substantial number of *barracas* to Suárez Hermanos.

Labor scarcity in Bolivia meant that murdering indigenous people randomly (as documented in the Putumayo area) was counterproductive, since they were the main source of labor for rubber *barracas*. Ultimately, though, the concentration of rubber production in a few hands and a high degree of vertical integration prevented wide-ranging massacre. Unlike Peruvian *caucheros*, for example, who operated more or less as independent operators, Bolivian rubber enterprises had a tight control of their employees and were able to dictate and enforce company discipline and random acts of violence were severely punished. Despite the isolation of Bolivia's rubber *barracas*, Bolivian rubber barons had a more direct control of their scarce labor force than their Brazilian or Peruvian counterparts. Chapter 7 analyzes the mechanisms that they used to keep their work force under control. Although there were indeed isolated cases of

slavery, most of the accusations of slavery referred to arrangements that were indeed oppressive, but were at the time legal in Bolivia. Although all aspects of Bolivia's rubber industry were difficult to control, rubber production ultimately rested on a rubber firm's ability to attract suitable workers. Bolivia's rubber regions were very isolated from the rest of the country and lacked a "natural" labor pool such as the Brazilian *Nordeste* or Peru's *montaña*. The potential labor force of the nearby Yungas or Cochabamba was engaged elsewhere under better conditions. As explained above, national and international entities attempted to find a Putumayo in Bolivia. Even though working conditions were harsh, it seems that such abuses did not take place in Bolivian territory. This can be partly explained by the fact most Bolivian rubber was harvested from *hevea* trees that required a relatively settled labor force. Highly mobile gangs of *caucheros* committed most of the atrocities in the Putumayo. *Castilloa* trees had to be cut down to extract *caucho* and yielded more latex, albeit of a lower quality, than *hevea* trees. *Caucheros* could make quick profits and did not have to stay in an area for long.

Moreover, the fact that the rubber industry was under the direct control of authoritarian rubber barons also meant that conditions varied from rubber *barraca* to rubber *barraca*. Antonio Vaca Díez, for example, was harsh with his *mozos* but cultivated a close relationship with the Araona unincorporated Indians. Since he was a pioneer operating in unexplored territories and vulnerable to indigenous attack and environmental factors, this was wise. Nicanor G. Salvatierra, on the other hand, used professional Indian hunters to capture Araona by using the time-honored practice of killing the warriors and kidnapping the women and children. These women and children

could be easily acculturated and had to work for the bare basics. Nicolás Suárez's violent encounters with the Caripuna probably colored his view of non-incorporated indigenous peoples. Since he had the resources to do so, he preferred to recruit *mozos* from the former mission towns of Moxos, Chiquitos and Caupolicán and the towns of the department of Santa Cruz. He also employed relatively large numbers of Peruvians, Brazilians and even Colombians, who were used to the Amazonian rubber industry. Since he was the most high-profile rubber baron, he was most often accused of using slavery, but none of these charges could ever be proven.

This chapter analyzed the lives of some of Bolivia's most prominent rubber barons. Although each of them had a unique personality, they had very similar backgrounds. Most of them considered themselves "white," had been involved in the *cascarilla* boom, and had moved from the Madeira River to the upper Beni River in the early days of the rubber boom. With the exception of the *paceños* from Yungas and Caupolicán, they were all *cruceños* and heirs to a long history of exploration and exploitation of the Bolivian lowlands. The relationship among them was at times conflictive and there was keen competition for supremacy. Nicolás Suárez ended up becoming the most successful rubber baron in Bolivia, through a combination of business acumen and political skills. His headquarters at Cachuela Esperanza became a European enclave within the Bolivian Amazon. It was like a company town where he ruled over the lives of hundreds of employees with little interference from outside forces, such as the Bolivian state. He established a rigidly hierarchical order where "white" *cruceños* and Europeans were at the top and mostly indigenous or mestizo *mozos* were at the

bottom. This chapter has looked, then, at the *patrones* and their worldview. The following chapter examines the indigenous population of the Bolivian lowlands and at how they responded to the pressures of the rubber boom.

CHAPTER 6. THE RUBBER BOOM AND THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE LOWLANDS

One of the most unfortunate aspects of the *camba/colla* divide is the assumption that people of the lowlands are mostly white and that the indigenous population is non-existent. Until the 1980s, awareness of the lowland indigenous population was scant. Neither the state nor the Andean indigenous political movements paid much attention to the many ethnic groups of the larger half of the country, the lowlands. The indigenous population of the lowlands has been subject to many misconceptions and stereotypes. In the political discourse of the country, for example, it is quite common to hear that Bolivia's indigenous peoples are Quechua, Aymara and Tupi-Guaraní (even though there has never been any Tupí within Bolivian territory). Although there are indeed tens of thousands of Guaraní-speaking peoples in Bolivia, they are not the only non-Andean ethnic group. Another common stereotype is that they are all *selvícolas* or jungle-dwellers. As explained in chapter 2, many lowland indigenous peoples, especially in the Moxos plains, engaged in intensive agricultural practices and large-scale hydraulic projects. The *selvícola* label also assumes that they were all hunters and gatherers and, therefore, nomadic "tribes." The ecological variety of the Bolivian tropics led to many types of societies and to many survival strategies, and the nomadic hunter and gatherer

was indeed a minority that, to a certain extent, had been forced to do so by the encroachment of European civilization. Different environments produce different societies and usually ethnic diversification is a result of environmental diversity. It is not surprising that, despite centuries of encroachment, the Bolivian lowlands contain a large number of societies within a relatively small territory. This section looks at the ethnic landscape of the Bolivian lowlands during the rubber boom. Although it concentrates on the Amazonian basin, it also makes some incursions into the Andes and Chaco when necessary, since one of the most striking aspects of Bolivia's lowlands is the ecological and ethnic continuum that exists among some of South America's most important macro cultural and ecological regions: Amazonia, the Andes and the Chaco. Of course, the classification of such a diverse group of ethnic identities is problematic. What criteria should be used, geographical, cultural or linguistic? All of these approaches are flawed. For example, the linguistic aspect has to consider that many languages are virtually unknown and linguistic analysis has to rely on colonial or early nineteenth-century materials that are no longer valid. The rapid rate of language extinction and the fact that members of a single linguistic group may have different ways of social organization are also important factors to consider. Moreover, traditional maps that show the "territory" of a particular group are misleading. Many of these territories are multi-ethnic and, since the Inca conquest, there has been a constant shifting of indigenous populations. In sum, any classification is faulty.

An outstanding feature of the Bolivian lowlands is that it includes most of Amazonia's language families. These families are Pano-Tacanan, Arawak, Tupí-

Guaraní, Macro Gê and Chapacura (the important Carib and Tucano linguistic groups are not present). The Bolivian lowlands also include a large number of isolated languages, but this might be due to the lack of proper comparative linguistics research. Supposed language isolate families are Leco, Mosetén-Chimán, Yuracaré, Movima, Cayuvava, Canichana and Itonama. The status of one of the most spoken lowland languages, Chiquitano, is under debate; some linguists consider it an isolate and others a Macro Gê language.¹

Figure 25 shows the approximate location of Bolivian lowland languages today. The present existence of some of these languages such as Toromona, Cayuvava, Canichana, Baure, Itonama and Jorá is highly improbable. Moreover, the map assumes that ethnicity and language are equivalent. A great deal of cultural dislocation, has taken place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so it is more appropriate to describe socio-linguistic groups, rather than linguistic groups. The Tacana, for example, are a case in point. Since colonial times, some Tacana speak Quechua and others speak Tacana proper, but the map does not distinguish this. Nevertheless, this linguistic classification is helpful in locating historical ethnic groups. Another consideration is that many of these groups exist across national boundaries. The same ethnic group often receives different names on the other side of the border. The historical term *guarayo* (explained below) is a case in point. In Bolivia, it has been used to refer to the Guarayo

¹ For differing classifications of Bolivian lowland languages see Adelaar, *Languages of the Andes*; R.M.W. Dixon and Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald, *The Amazonian Languages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Raymond G. Gordon, Jr., ed., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 15th ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2005); Dick Edgar Ibarra Grasso, *Lenguas indígenas de Bolivia* (La Paz: Ed. Juventud, 1982).

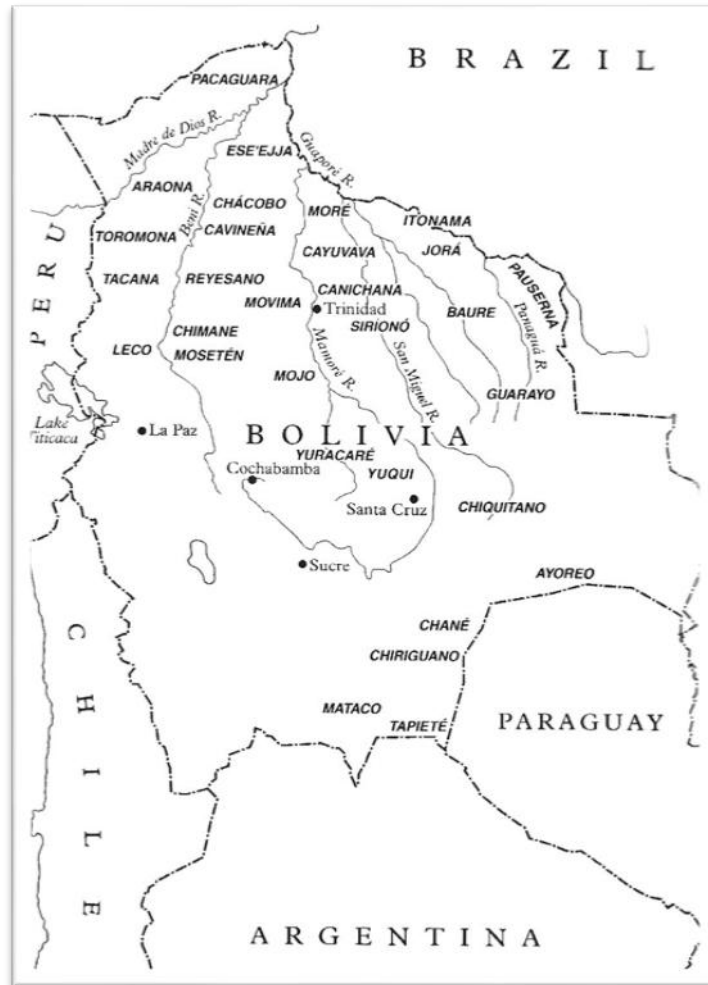


Figure 25. Present Ethno-linguistic Groups of the Bolivian Lowlands

Source: Adelaar, *The Languages of the Andes*, 414.

(Guarayú) located at the present border between the departments of Santa Cruz and Beni, to the Ese'ejja, located on both sides of the present boundary between Peru and Bolivia and to the Pauserna, located between the Paraguá and Iténez River, across Mato Grosso. In Peru, the term Huarayo is strictly applied to the Ese'ejja and their Tambopata River relatives. Paraguayans, on the other hand use the term Huarayo to refer to the Chiriguano.

As was the case in the highlands, many colonial terms continued to be used

during the nineteenth century. At its most basic level, contemporaries described independent Indians of the lowlands as *salvajes* (savages) or *bárbaros* (barbarians). In addition, they often used local terms such as *chuncho*, *guarayo* or *choroti*, which are mostly synonymous. Missionaries also used the religious terms *gentiles* (gentiles) or *infieles* (infidels) to stress the fact that the Roman Catholic Church had not baptized them. In Bolivia, Peruvian terms, such as *racionales* (acculturated Indians and mestizos) versus *mansos* (tame, i.e., incorporated Indians who retain their ethnic identity) and *aucas* (wild, tribal people) are rare.² On the other hand, General Pando distinguished between *salvajes* and *bárbaros*. To him, a savage was an Indian who “did not know about civilization,” whereas a barbarian was an Indian who was “unwilling to be civilized.”³ In reality, these terms were mere semantics. Many mission Indians became temporarily or permanently “barbarian” and many “savages,” such as the Araona or Chácobo were particularly “tame” towards mestizos and whites.⁴ Contemporaries, though, did not consider these complexities and tended to frame Bolivia’s “Indian problem” within Argentina’s Domingo F. Sarmiento’s (1811-1888) infamous dichotomy of the struggle between civilization and barbarism.⁵

In 1885, during the first stages of the Bolivian rubber boom, the Franciscan José Cardús published a book on the ethnic groups of the Bolivian lowlands, based on his

² These terms are explained by Anne Christine Taylor, "The Western Margins of Amazonia from the early Sixteenth Century to the Early Nineteenth Century," in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of South America*, ed. Frank Salomon and B. Schwartz Stuart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 194-95.

³ Pando, *Viaje a la región de la goma elástica*, 104.

⁴ According to Ciro Bayo, the Araona were “tame but savage.” Bayo, *América desconocida*, 302.

⁵ See Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Rufino Blanco-Fombona, *Facundo; civilización y barbarie en la República argentina* (Madrid: Editorial-América, 1916).

experiences in Bolivia. The main aim of the book was to document Franciscan missions and to describe the many groups of “savages” throughout the lowlands. Cardus’ book included a map that located the main Franciscan missions in Bolivia and potential neophytes among independent groups. Although the geographical location of ethnic groups is accurate, the friar missed some important ethnic groups, such as the Caripuna, the Ese’ Ejja and the Leco and grouped the many ethnic groups of Moxos (Moxo, Baure, Itonama, Cayuvava, Canichana, and Movima) into two categories, Mojo and Baure. In addition, his map located the missions among the Tacana (Tumupasa, Ixiamas or San José de Uchupiamonas) or the Guarayú (Yotaú, Ascención, San Pablo, Urubichá and Yaguarú). He assumed that the missions (whether colonial or postcolonial) superseded ethnicity. Indeed, during the rubber boom many groups were known as Tumupasas, Migueleños, Ignacianos and so forth, reflecting the missions where they had originated. Nevertheless, Cardús’ map portrayed a relatively accurate picture of the main ethnic groups that existed in Bolivia’s lowlands and is a useful tool. During the rubber boom, the simple division into Christianized Indians and “savages” proved to be too narrow. As the many indigenous groups of the lowlands reacted before the onslaught of the rubber industry, these categories became increasingly blurry.

This chapter provides an overview of the indigenous peoples of the Bolivian lowlands and looks at how they interacted with the Amazonian rubber boom during its different phases and across the different regions of the Bolivian lowlands. As the rubber boom progressed and exploited “virgin” rubber strands, it required increased numbers of workers. To obtain these workers, recruiters scoured most of the Bolivian lowlands.

This led to significant population shifts that transferred Indians from Caupolicán, Moxos, Chiquitos and even the Chaco frontier to remote rubber forests. Furthermore, these population movements had an international dimension. In the 1870s, many Bolivians, along with their Moxo Indians, moved to the area between the Madeira River and Manaus and, by the end of the nineteenth century, Indians from Peru and Brazil also migrated to Bolivian territory. This chapter also analyzes indigenous migration patterns during the rubber boom. In addition, it also examines how different ethnic groups reacted to the economic, social and cultural dislocations that the rubber boom brought. These reactions ranged from flight to open rebellion to accommodation. Several variables such as the environment, the degree of state presence, distance from rubber *barracas* or major trade routes, leadership, or the existence of intermediaries, dictated what strategies indigenous groups used. The temporal factor is also important. Many indigenous groups accommodated their strategies to changing circumstances. Conversely, indigenous groups also frequently employed a variety of seemingly contradictory strategies at once. Indigenous reactions to the rubber boom can be categorized as rejection, acceptance of certain aspects of the capitalist system as expressed by the rubber boom, and eclectic responses, that implied both acceptance and rejection of certain aspects of the rubber boom. An analysis of these reactions is necessarily informed by the availability of sources. Since there is a dearth of sources for many indigenous groups, this chapter emphasizes only the most known ethnic groups.

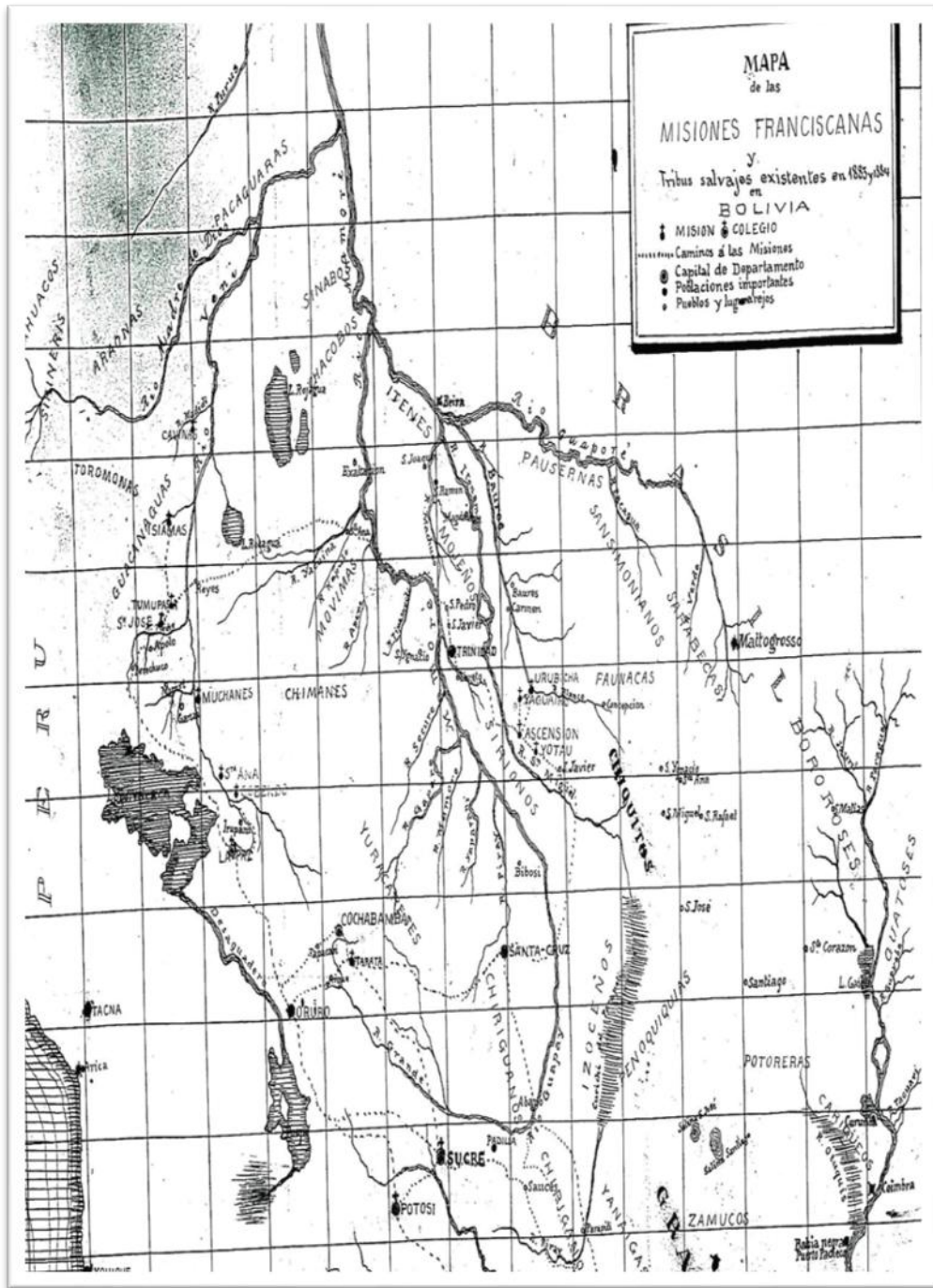


Figure 26. Map of Missions and Ethnic groups in Lowland Bolivia in 1883-84
 Source: Cardús, *Misiones franciscanas*, n.p.

Running Away

Previous chapters have provided a chronology of the Bolivian Rubber Boom. It started along the Madeira River in the 1870s and then it gradually moved westwards. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it had swept across most of the lowlands. Lack of rubber within a particular indigenous group's territory did not immunize it against the boom's effects. Besides geography, the most important challenge Bolivian rubber barons faced was the procurement of a suitable work force. Despite quixotic attempts to import European immigrants, most of the labor force of the rubber *barracas* was indigenous, and most of it came from within the Bolivian lowlands, ranging from peoples of the Andean Piedmont, who had been in close contact with Andean civilizations, to the Cordillera Chiriguano, near the isolated Chaco. All these peoples had contacted Europeans at different times. Going back to Cardús' typology, some of them had become neophytes during the colonial period (notably the Moxo and the Chiquitos) and some of them had recently been "reduced." This typology, though assumed that missions were static and that, once Indians were baptized, Indians were Christians indefinitely. As this section shows, not only "savages" rejected the rubber boom violently. Indeed, the Moxo, who were considered among the most Christianized Indians of Bolivia, were also the protagonists of many of Beni's most violent uprisings.

As in the colonial period, the easiest way to avoid oppression was to flee. Running away from rubber *barracas* was indeed a difficult task, but running away from territories that were rich in rubber or within the transportation routes of the rubber industry was much easier. Indians ran to inaccessible areas that had difficult terrain or

that were of no interest to whites. The most successful runaways came from a variety of cultures. The Yuracaré and the Chimán, for example, fled missions and became nomadic. Many Moxo and Movima fled white encroachment in their towns and, finally, the Toromona, who were already mostly nomadic, simply continued their life in inaccessible areas.

The Yuracaré are an isolated linguistic group from the Andean Piedmont. Unlike their neighbors, they seem to have never fallen under Inca domination; neither their culture nor their language exhibit Andean traits. Moreover, they had very limited agriculture and relied mostly on hunting, gathering and collecting, but this may have been an adaptive response to encroachment.⁶ The lack of Andean links is because their territories around the deep rivers that form the Mamoré River (the Chapare, Chimoré, Ichilo, Sécuré and Yapacaní Rivers) were very inaccessible. On the other hand, according to Erland Nordenskiöld, they had important contacts with the Chiriguano invaders and, through them, with other Chaco groups.⁷ Nonetheless, the Chiriguano could never absorb them or enslave them, as they did with other groups of the eastern Andes, such as the Arawak-speaking Chané. Yet, the Yuracaré had a deep fear of their Guaraní-speaking northern neighbors, the Yuqui and Sirionó, who were near invisible

⁶ One of the Yuracarés' most important resources was the *chonta* palm (*Bactris insignis*), also called *tembé* in eastern Bolivia or peach-palm in the West Indies. Besides providing extremely hard wood for arrows, the *chonta* produces highly nutritious fruits that can be stored for a long time and can be easily transported. See J. Esteban Hernández Bermejo, J. León, and Programa Ethnobotánica 92, *Neglected Crops: 1492 from a Different Perspective*, FAO Plant Production and Protection Series, no. 26 (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1994), 211-221.

⁷ See Erland Nordenskiöld and George Ernest Fuhrken, *An Ethno-geographical Analysis of the Material Culture of Two Indian Tribes in the Gran Chaco* ([Göteborg]: Elanders boktryckeri aktiebolag, 1919); for the Guaraní invasions of Eastern Bolivia see his classic Nordenskiöld, "Guaraní Invasion." According to the historian Francisco Pifarré, the Yuracaré spent long periods in the Cordillera among the Chiriguano, they traded coca, feathers and *chonta* palm to make arrows. Pifarré, *Historia de un pueblo*, 51-2.

non-agricultural hunters and gatherers in the deepest rainforests. To the Yuracaré, they possessed dangerous magic.

The Spanish encountered the Yuracaré relatively early, when they founded the cities of Santa Cruz de la Sierra (1561) and Cochabamba (1571). They used these two cities as a base to reach Moxos, first to look for El Dorado and later to evangelize the indigenous peoples of the Moxos savannas. Eventually, the Jesuits abandoned the Cochabamba route and concentrated on the Santa Cruz route, which linked their Moxos and Chiquitos missions. As a result, the Yuracaré were left relatively alone during the early colonial period. Their settlements in the present department of Santa Cruz, around the Ichilo River and in the headwaters of the Piráí River, were abandoned in the early eighteenth century and the Yuracaré retreated to the tropical areas between the present-day Cochabamba and Beni departments. In 1793, the Franciscans established the missions of San Carlos, Buena Vista and Santa Rosa [del Sara], and in 1796, they established the Colegio de Tarata with the specific mandate to reduce the “infidels” of the Cochabamba tropics into missions. In the early 1800s, they established the missions of San José de Chimoré and San Francisco del Mamoré, which were soon abandoned. The Yuracaré refused to be missionized and responded by burning the missions and running into the forest. The first phase of the missionary effort ended in 1821. During the republican period, there was a second Franciscan attempt to missionize the Yuracaré, which lasted most of the 1840s and 1850s.⁸ During the cinchona boom, the Yuracaré

⁸ “Informe de Fray Juan Hernández, Colegio de San José de Tarata,” 12 Apr. 1804. ANB/M y Ch, 115 (1866).

were used occasionally, like the Leco and Mosetén, to operate *callapos*, but their territories did not contain much cinchona or rubber. On the other hand, Bolivian governments used their labor to build roads and to transport their correspondence. In 1860, for example, locals suggested that the central government should appoint an officer to supervise the area, since important cargo and government correspondence was regularly lost due to the negligence of the Yuracaré crews who had been left without a missionary or “any authority.”⁹

In the late nineteenth century, with the introduction of steamers, traffic increased between the ports of the Chapare River and Guayaramerín and Riberalta. This caused increased communication between the Chapare and the city of Cochabamba and a new influx of mestizo and Quechua settlers entered the region to cultivate coca. They started to use Yuracaré labor under debt peonage contracts.¹⁰ Since the Yuracaré could neither pay their debts to the *patrones* (whether in the Chapare or in Beni), nor wanted to withstand the rigors of mission life, they retreated further into the headwaters of the Mamoré, which were one of Bolivia’s most inaccessible areas, and into the Chimán forest, between San Ignacio de Moxos and San Borja. Despite their early contact with the Spanish they were considered among the more “savage” Indians of Bolivia until the government of Bolivia sponsored another Franciscan effort to settle them in the 1920s.

⁹ Junta Municipal del Chapare to Supremo Gobierno, 30 Dec. 1861, (ANB/MI 1860, n°37, t. 171).

¹⁰ Liberals implemented a new code to regulate missions in 1905. Article 10 specifically ordered that mission Indians could work outside the mission and that missionaries could not interfere with outside contracts. Honorable Congreso Nacional Bolivia, *Nuevo Decreto reglamentario referente al servicio de las misiones de infieles en Bolivia con un apéndice histórico geográfico sobre las existentes en la República* (La Paz: Taller Tip. y Lit. de J.M Gamarra, 1906). For more details about the relationship between missions and the Bolivian state, see next chapter, also García Jordán, *Cruz y arado*, 394-7.

The Masetén-Chimán, who lived north and east of the Leco, belong to an isolated language. During the colonial period, they were often called Rachi, Magdalenos or Muchanes and raided coca plantations and settlements from the La Paz Yungas to as far as the town of Mizque, in the present department of Cochabamba.¹¹ One of the Franciscans who visited them at the confluence of the Beni and Cotajes Rivers during the nineteenth century, wrote that they were virtually self-sufficient: “they have abundant agriculture and fish and very few fevers, they produce peanuts, yuca, green chilies, papaya, cotton, beans, plantains and bananas.”¹²

Their territory was vast and extended from the Upper Beni River, the La Paz Yungas, and Apolo, to the Chapare and some areas of the Cochabamba and Santa Cruz Yungas. At present, most Masetén live west of the triangle where the departments of La Paz, Beni and Cochabamba meet, in the former Franciscan mission towns of San Miguel de Muchanes, Santa Ana de Huachi, and Covendo (founded in 1804, 1815 and 1842 respectively). Like the Leco, they were in close contact with Andean cultures. In the late eighteenth century, according to Alfred Métraux, many of them spoke Aymara and there seems to be Aymara influence in their language.¹³ The difference between the Chimán and the Masetén is that the Masetén were concentrated in missions during the colonial period and the nineteenth century and the Chimán were not.¹⁴ They ran away from missions and settled further east in the Bosque de Chimanés and in the Maniquí and

¹¹ Métraux, *The Native Tribes*, 17.

¹² “Expediente seguido por el Padre Franciscano Bernardo Ximénez Bajarano solicitando auxilios para las nuevas conversiones de indios en las márgenes del Río Beni.” ANB /M y Ch, n°463, 1892.

¹³ Métraux, “Tribes of the Montaña and Bolivian East Andes,” 509.

¹⁴ Ducci and Pifferi, *Diario*, 167.

Apere Rivers. The conversion of the Masetén was a daunting task, since they were extremely reluctant to be concentrated in missions. According to the Franciscan Rafael Sans, they deserted their missions thirty times!¹⁵ To boot, they killed their missionaries Father Herrero in 1824 and Father Reynaud in 1862.¹⁶ Like elsewhere in the Americas, population concentration in missions resulted in the spread of disease. By the late nineteenth century, smallpox epidemics had reduced the Masetén population by two thirds and periodic epidemics continued to ravage their settlements well into the twentieth century. In the 1890s, for example, an official Bolivian Geography textbook reported that the indigenous population of Covendo was 560, Santa Ana de Huachi 129 and San Miguel de Muchanes 205.¹⁷ According to Father Ducci, in 1877, a smallpox epidemic had killed most of the population of San Miguel and, as a result, the mission had been abandoned for a few years. The Mission of San Miguel de Muchanes had been abandoned in the 1870s. Erland Nordenskiöld, who visited the Masetén missions in 1913, reported an extremely high fertility rate along with an extremely high infant mortality rate and short life expectancy. The main culprits for these deaths were whooping cough (*pertussis*) and smallpox; Aymara tradesmen apparently introduced the latter. Nordenskiöld censured the missionaries for their lack of attention to the Masetenes' health and was appalled by the fact that so many Indians were dying of smallpox, when vaccination was available.¹⁸ Traditional Masetén territory was the ideal

¹⁵ Sans and Bravo, *Memoria histórica*, 117.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 89. Also mentioned in José Cardús, *Misiones franciscanas entre los infieles de Bolivia, descripción del estado de ellas* (Barcelona: Librería de la Inmaculada Concepción, 1886), 290.

¹⁷ Leigue Moreno, *Nociones de geografía*, 26.

¹⁸ Nordenskiöld, *Exploraciones y Aventuras*, 177.

habitat for prime *cinchona calisaya*, so they participated in the cinchona boom. Like their Leco neighbors, they were very able boatmen and were engaged in operating *callapos* down the tributaries of the Beni River. The Franciscan missions offered some insulation from the worse abuses of the rubber boom. The friars contracted Masetén crews to merchants and *gomeros*, but they demanded their return to the missions after the trip. They returned on foot, since it was exceedingly difficult to row or tow the *callapos* upstream and, presumably, this return trip offered the Masetén opportunities to leave the discipline of life in the missions, and to conserve their ancestral survival skills, at least temporarily.

Runaways from the missions eventually settled in the Bosque de Chimanes that extends from the heights of the Serranía de Masetenes and Eva Eva towards the plains of Moxos, near San Borja and San Ignacio de Moxos. Almost inaccessible rain forests cover this area and, therefore, it became an ideal refuge for runaway neophytes. The Chimán continued their slash-and-burn agriculture and complemented it with hunting, fishing, and gathering. One of the advantages of the Bosque de Chimanes was that it did not contain significant rubber resources and that it was far from the main rubber routes. The nearest town of San Borja is located in the Moxos savanna and was a major cattle center. The Chimán could not compete with the equestrian skills of the local indigenous populations (Moxo and Maropa, also called Reyesanos or Borjeños), but they started to trade with the mestizo and indigenous peoples of the savanna, probably continuing traditional trade networks. When Nordenskiöld visited them, the Chimán “savages” were almost the only agriculturalists in the area. He claimed that he had never eaten so well in

Bolivia and he contrasted the rich diet of the Chimán with the monotonous diet of rice and *charque* that he found in the rubber *barracas* and in mestizo towns. The Chimán sold bananas, plantains, yuca, onions, coffee, cacao, new cocoyam or *malanga*, pineapples, papayas, cotton, sweet potatoes, chilies, calabashes, watermelon, *achiote* (*bixa orellana*), tobacco, sweet peas, eggs and chickens to the indigenous and mestizo inhabitants of the area in exchange for textiles, tools and other manufactured conveniences, remarkably mosquito nets. Occasionally they found work in some of the cattle *estancias*.¹⁹

Needless to say, the terms of exchange did not favor the Chimán and, whenever there were disputes, they responded by burning their huts and retreating to the rain forest, where they became nomadic hunters and gatherers. According to Nordenskiöld, their health was much better than it had been in the missions. Even though they were exposed to leishmaniasis (*espundia* in Quechua and Bolivian Spanish) and intestinal parasites, they did not suffer from malnutrition or the massive epidemics that were so common in the missions. The fact that they lived in small family groups that were highly mobile and that they spent most of their time in montane forests may also explain why malaria was not a significant disease among them. The varied diet that they had, rich in proteins, vitamins and starches, may have also contributed to this.²⁰

The usefulness of the Bosque de Chimanes as a refuge was not lost on other ethnic groups. When the Moxos rebelled in 1888 (see below), they also retreated to the

¹⁹ Ibid., 158-9.

²⁰ Ibid., 162.

Bosque de Chimanes and it became one of the destinations of the periodic millenarian movements of the peoples of the Moxos savanna.²¹ The southern neighbors of the Chimán, the Yuracaré, also moved northwards and settled among the Chimán. According to Nordenskiöld, the belligerent Yuracaré, along with mestizos, became “parasites” of the Chimán. They were completely dependent on Chimán agricultural products to survive and coerced the Chimán to provide them in exchange for ridiculously low compensation.²² Because of this, the Bosque de Chimanes became another multiethnic territory of refuge. Ironically, the Chimán “nomads” became the main food providers for both mestizos and indigenous peoples.

The cinchona boom had a direct impact on the Mosetén. Like their Leco neighbors, they became crews in the *callapos* that descended from the Andes to the lowlands. Unlike other Indians, they were concentrated in Franciscan missions, which offered both protection and economic opportunities. At some point in the mid nineteenth century, many Mosetén left the missions to pursue their traditional life elsewhere and became the Chimán.²³ During the early rubber boom, the Mosetén continued to work in the *callapos* that plied the upper tributaries of the Beni River but, thanks to the missionaries’ zeal, were not recruited to work as rubber tappers. Their relative isolation

²¹ The Trinidad authorities were optimistically hoping that the harshness of the Bosque de Chimanes would eventually defeat the “civilized” Moxos and that they would return to work as rowers and agricultural hands. Yet, to date the Moxos continue to share the Bosque de Chimanes with the *Chimán* and the Yuracaré, and, unfortunately, with semi-legal logging companies. Prefectura y Comandancia General del Beni to Sr. Ministro del Interior, Trinidad, July 1888, signed by Francisco Marañón (ANB/MI 1888, t.239, n°75).

²² Nordenskiöld, *Exploraciones y Aventuras*, 164.

²³ These processes of reconstituted ethnicities are similar to what Richard White discusses for North America’s Great Lakes region in the 18th and early 19th centuries. See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge; New York: The Cambridge University Press, 1991).

also insulated them and their Chimán relatives from coercive labor in mining or haciendas. As the rubber boom moved from the upper Beni River northwards, it concentrated on recruiting labor from other indigenous groups and the Chimán and the Mosestén were left relatively alone.

The Movima were one of the language isolates of the colonial Moxos missions. The Jesuits concentrated them in the missions of Reyes (1710) near the Beni River, Santa Rosa (1715), at the juncture of the Yacuma and Mamoré and Santa Ana (1719) on the Yacuma River. During the nineteenth century, like their Maropa or Reyesano neighbors, they worked on cattle *estancias* and were considered very able equestrians. In the early days of the cinchona and early rubber booms (before the discovery of the Lower Beni River route), they were also involved in carrying rubber from Reyes on the Beni River, to Santa Ana del Yacuma, using “amphibious” oxcarts. From there, rubber was transported to the Mamoré in *batelotes*. According to José Luís Roca, who was born in Santa Ana del Yacuma, during the rubber boom the town became an important supplier of foodstuffs for the *gomeros* and *cruceño* immigrants became *fleteros* and *estancieros*. The influence of both booms and the growth of *estancias* led to a rapid acculturation of the Movima as they intermarried with the *cruceño* immigrants. Pastor Baldivieso, though, reported that there were more Movima than Maropa.²⁴ Father Zacarías Ducci, however, commented that, unlike their Maropa neighbors, the Movima’s religious spirit was seriously lacking

²⁴ “Informe que presenta al Sr. Ministro del Gobierno Nacional el Intendente de la Delegación Nacional en el Noroeste, Teniente Coronel Pastor Valdivieso.” Riberalta 1895 (ANB/MI Delegación Nacional en el Noroeste t.284, n°15), 3.

and they had become as impious as the whites of the area.²⁵ By the beginning of the twentieth century, according to Erland Nordenskiöld, there were no traces left of Movima culture.²⁶ The rubber boom led to a dispersal of the Movima. To pursue opportunities or to run away, the Movima moved away from the savanna northwards as far as Lake Rojoaguado, a very inaccessible area, where they lived with the Chácobo and Cayuvava, and eastwards to the Bosque de Chimanes, where they met with Yuracaré, Moxo and Chimán runaways.

All the groups mentioned above had some exposure to missions, whether during the colonial period or afterwards. Despite more or less profound Christianization, these peoples responded to threats by running away to remote areas and, in many cases, by becoming relatively nomadic. Despite running away, these groups kept some links with national society, whether through missions or through mestizo settlers or traders. On the other hand, the Toromona (also called Guacanagua), who were a Tacana-speaking group that presumably originated in the Franciscan missions west of the Beni River, responded to encroachment during the cascarilla boom, by retreating to the inaccessible forests between the Madre de Dios and Beni Rivers and the uplands near the present Peruvian/Bolivian border and became peaceful “wild Tacana.” They survived by attempting to avoid all contact with the Creole world.²⁷ Since these forests were in the uplands, they did not contain valuable rubber; they were also removed from trade routes

²⁵ Ducci and Pifferi, *Diario*, 100.

²⁶ Nordenskiöld, *Exploraciones y Aventuras*, 231.

²⁷ Métraux, “Tribes of the Montaña and Bolivian East Andes,” 440. According to Cardús, they lived between the Carabaya range (in Peru) and the Madre de Dios and the Beni Rivers and were “very peaceful.” Cardús, *Misiones franciscanas*, 291.

and have remained unexplored until the late twentieth century.

Further east, the Pano-speaking Chácobo lived on the left banks of the Mamoré and along the Lower Beni, on the Ivón River and north of Lake Rojoaguado. Missionaries were never able to incorporate them. Father Cardús commented that missionaries had invited them to become Christians several times but the Chácobo had declined the offer. He added, “I am sure that any barbarian or savage Indians who witness the sad conditions in which the Christian Indians of Moxos live, will never leave the jungle or exchange the freedom of their wild life for the civilized life of such Christians.” Despite this, the Chácobo went regularly to the Cayuvava (speakers of a language isolate in the Northern Moxos savanna) town of Exaltación, where they obtained iron tools and fishing hooks.²⁸ They also kept feral cattle, which they considered their property.²⁹ According to Erland Nordenskiöld, their *malocas* were extremely comfortable and were far superior to any rubber *barraca*. They also had large plantings in the middle of the jungle.³⁰ Even though they entered into trade with *gomeros*, they flatly refused to work for them and willingly accepted runaway Cayuvava among them.³¹ Their territory did not contain significant amounts of *hevea* and, as the rubber boom progressed and absorbed other Pano neighbors, they withdrew from major rivers and took refuge in the inaccessible jungles around Lake Rojoaguado. Nordenskiöld, who visited them in the early twentieth century, commented that the rivers that led to their territory were extremely dangerous, teeming with piranhas, alligators,

²⁸ Cardús, *Misiones franciscanas*, 291.

²⁹ Keller, *Amazon and Madeira Rivers*, 42.

³⁰ Nordenskiöld, *Indios y blancos*, 109.

³¹ Armentia, *Diario de sus viajes*, 127.

electric eels and stingrays. The surrounding forests were also flooded most of the year and he could only cross them through a combination of swimming and opening paths with machetes.³²

As the rubber boom swept through the Bolivian lowlands, many indigenous groups continued to run away, a strategy that both Andeans and Amazonians had used since colonial times. Whether running from missions, from forced labor, or from the cascarilla and rubber booms, only certain groups were able to do this successfully. During the rubber boom, the two most important factors that led to successful flight strategy were a certain distance from rubber strands or major rubber trade routes and the presence of inaccessible areas. Some areas, such as the Bosque de Chimanes or the uplands along the Peruvian and Bolivian borders, were ideally suited to facilitate flight and, as a result, became areas of refuge for many ethnic groups. Cultural factors were also important. In order to ensure their survival in these inaccessible areas, indigenous groups had to abandon part of their material culture and in, some cases, also had to abandon many of the practices that they had adopted through decades of exposure to missions. Ill-defined international borders seemed to facilitate running away. As had been the case with the Chiriguano, who fled missions and debt peonage to engage in free labor in Northern Argentina's plantations, many Amazonian groups fled to the wilderness of Peru to pursue an itinerant existence, or took refuge in the cities and towns of Brazil's Amazonian region.

³² Nordenskiöld, *Indios y blancos*, 88-89.

Armed Resistance

Many indigenous groups resisted encroachment of their territories militarily. Their responses to the rubber boom ranged from occasional raids to obtain food and supplies to full-fledged warfare. In many cases, indigenous groups were able to resist because the Amazonian environment gave little military superiority to Europeans and Creoles. Many European tactics and weapons did not do particularly well in the Amazonian environment.³³ Bows and arrows, for example, were superior to cannon and muzzle-loading arms. They were faster, more accurate, more portable, and were unaffected by the heat and humidity that soon neutralized poorly made gunpowder. With the exception of the Moxos savanna and the Chaco, horses were also not very useful in the Bolivian lowlands; they could not cross flooded and densely forested areas easily and were prone to many tropical diseases. As the rubber boom advanced, this initial advantage decreased. Powerful rubber companies purchased repeating rifles, revolvers and steam watercraft. As *barracas* multiplied along the major Amazonian waterways, so did private armies often composed of indigenous peoples. Like elsewhere in the Bolivian lowlands, the presence of the state was sporadic. The state only dispatched regular troops occasionally to quell major rebellions or to escort its civil servants. The organization of local militia units was also rare. Consequently, most of the fighting against indigenous peoples was carried out by *gomeros* and their charges. On the other hand, prolonged campaigns were also rare. The rubber areas did not experience anything resembling the

³³ According to Langer, this was also the case in the Chaco frontiers. See, Langer, *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree*, 40-44.

Chiriguano wars or the campaigns against the many indigenous groups of the Chaco. The war between *gomeros* and Indians was a prolonged and grinding affair, stressing hit-and-run tactics, massacres and the capture of prisoners. This section deals with some of the most important warrior societies that managed to temporarily halt the expansion of Creole settlement in Bolivia's lowlands.

During the 1880s, rubber pioneers moved northwards from the relatively familiar areas of the Upper Beni, near the towns of Rurrenabaque and Reyes and the missions west of the Beni River, to the unknown wilderness extending from the Beni River and its tributaries towards the Madre de Dios River and across the Peruvian border along the Heath and Tambopata Rivers. This expansion led to clashes with *guarayo* groups who were mostly Tacana-speaking Ese'ejja (Cardús seemed to have included them among the Guacanagua, another name for the Tacana-speaking Toromona). Many of these so-called *guarayos* had run away from missions and had declared themselves sworn enemies of both the missionaries and their neophytes. Their knowledge of their enemies' culture led to a very effective war against them. Father Sans commented that they had a "very refined craftiness" and that they knew Spanish and that they hurled "very ugly" insults in Spanish before and during their attacks.³⁴ According to Father Cardús, their attacks had killed forty people in a few years and he gloomily predicted that the missions of Ixiamas and Cavinás would disappear in a few years and that both the rubber *barracas* of the Madidi and the settlements of Tumupasa and San José de Uchupiamonas would follow.³⁵

³⁴ Sans and Bravo, *Memoria histórica*, 103.

³⁵ Cardús, *Misiones franciscanas*, 205.

He was correct, about a decade later, in 1897, the Riberalta newspaper *El Noroeste* announced that the Cavinás had abandoned their mission, had settled along the right bank of the Beni River and were “almost extinct.”³⁶

As Cardús predicted, the *guarayos* continued to attack rubber *barracas*. General Pando also predicted that Ixiamas would disappear unless firm measures were taken against its attackers. He wrote, “It is not an easy task to attack them in their villages and to pursue them in their forests. It will be only with the help of good dogs and the skills of men used to the bush and a suitable combination of forced marches that we will be able to surprise and dominate them.” On the other hand, echoing the writings of many positivist writers, he optimistically predicted that “disease and the extinction of game will, not too far from now, finish off those savages who are not willing to be reduced and this will leave room for the industries that can advantageously be established in those regions.”³⁷ The need to obtain iron tools to work in their *chacos* motivated Ese’ejja attacks. As the *gomeros* retaliated, most of the *guarayos*, kept to the uplands, where there was no rubber and where they had an advantage over the *gomeros*. According to the English physician John William Evans, their attacks took place during the dry season, when the waters were low and they could move easily.³⁸ Many of the *barracas* of the Madidi River retaliated in a ferocious way. The French manager of the Barraca Mirltonville, owned by the French commercial house Devés Frères became noteworthy

³⁶ *El Noroeste*, (Riberalta), 26 Aug. 1897, n°37.

³⁷ “Informe que el jefe de la exploración de los ríos del Norte de Bolivia eleva al conocimiento del Supremo Gobierno en cumplimiento del contrato celebrado en Mayo del 1892,” Rurrenabaque, 12 Aug. 1893, signed by José Manuel Pando. (ALP/JMP, 1891-97, n°2), 32.

³⁸ Evans, “Expedition to Caupolicán Bolivia, 1901-1902,” 614.

for committing massacres in many of the *guarayo* villages. In one occasion, thirty *mozos* armed with rifles and machetes attacked a village and massacred 120 Indians, including women and children. According to contemporaries, they killed five-year-olds by smashing their heads against tree trunks. This prompted a propaganda campaign against foreign *barracas* spearheaded by the Franciscans and to regulations concerning armed attacks against non-contacted indigenous peoples.³⁹ Despite this, the Ese'ejja survived and they were "pacified" in the 1910s; some of them continued their itinerant life and some of them settled in rubber *barracas*.⁴⁰

Many contemporaries assumed that the Iténe were closely related to the Ese' Ejja and that, thus, there was a continuous *guarayo* nation extending from the Madre de Dios to the Iténez River that posed a threat to the prime rubber forests of the Northeast. These *guarayos* were, however, members of the Chapacura, one of the least known linguistic groups of the Amazon. Formerly, Chapacura groups extended throughout the upper and lower Madeira (almost up to Manaus), Mamoré and Iténez Rivers, the Paraguá River and, inland, towards the Cerro de San Simón and Chiquitos (in the department of Santa Cruz), and the Parecís Highlands (between the State of Rondônia and Mato Grosso). At present, the only remaining members of this group in Bolivian territory are a few dozen Moré (also called Iténe or Iténez), who live around the confluence of the Iténez and Mamoré

³⁹ Narrated in ACFB (Tarata), 11 Mar. 1918, n°119-20, 295-97. Also commented by Pando in "Informe que el jefe de la exploración de los ríos del Norte de Bolivia eleva al conocimiento del Supremo Gobierno en cumplimiento del contrato celebrado en Mayo del 1892," Rurrenabaque, 12 Aug, 1893, Signed by José Manuel Pando. (ALP/JMP, 1891-97, n°2), 5, and Manuel Vicente Ballivián in Bolivia and Ballivián, *Diario del viaje Delegación Nacional*, 41.

⁴⁰ Erland Nordenskiöld visited the Upper Madidi in 1910 and found that they tapped rubber for a Sr. Pareja in exchange for tools and fabric. Nordenskiöld, *Exploraciones y Aventuras*, 412.

Rivers. Their language is considered virtually extinct. In Brazil, the Kabixí of Mato Grosso are also virtually extinct, the historical Pakáasnovos or Wari live in Rondônia, mixed with the Oro Win. The historical Wanyam or Huaynam of Rondônia are also extinct. Erland Nordenskiöld visited these groups in the 1910s and reported that they were still relatively unacculturated. In 1914, though, they were starting to exchange rubber for iron with the Brazilian *seringueiros* of the area. They also occasionally raided travelers and had wars among themselves and their neighbors, especially Tupí groups such as the Caripuna and the Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau.⁴¹ Farther south, in the limits between the department of Beni and Santa Cruz, the Chiquitano absorbed most Chapacuran groups (San Simoniano, Kitemoka and Napeca).

Among all the “savage” groups of the Bolivian lowlands, few matched the fearful reputation of the Moré or Iténe. Like many other Chapacura, they were often accused of cannibalism. There is evidence that the Wari, Waynam and Kabixí practiced both endocannibalism and exocannibalism and that the Moré practiced endocannibalism.⁴² They were known as “los bárbaros de la Horquilla” (pitchfork), referring to the form that the confluence of the Mapucho and Iténez Rivers forms. Even though they had not been exposed to missions, they accepted many neophyte refugees (especially Cayuvava) and attacked travelers to obtain iron tools.⁴³ According to Father Jesualdo Macchetti, they murdered the Brazilian consul to Trinidad while he was travelling along the Iténez

⁴¹ Nordenskiöld, *Exploraciones y Aventuras*, 288-310.

⁴² See Beth A. Conklin, *Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

⁴³ Nordenskiöld, *Indios y blancos*, 127-8.

River.⁴⁴ Like other *guarayo* groups, they attacked rubber *barracas* and cattle *estancias*; yet their specialty was to attack boats during the night. They also attacked the relatively large towns of the area, Magdalena, San Joaquín, San Ramón and El Carmen, and went even as far as attacking the Brazilian Fort of Principe da Beira (built around 1776), on the right banks of the Iténez, garrisoned by members of the Brazilian Army.

As early as 1874, local authorities demanded a military presence in the area. This led to a project to build a fort along the Bolivian side of the Iténez River to be called *Fuerte de la Horquilla*. The creation of the fort was legislated, but its construction never materialized. The rubber boom aggravated conflicts with the Iténe and, as had been the case with the Ese'ejja, there were violent confrontations between *gomeros* and the Iténe.

The Cayuvava had been part of the Moxos Jesuit missions and had been involved in the rubber boom since the early times and, before the discovery of rubber on the Iténez River (in the late 1880s), like many other Moxos peoples they had been recruited to work along the Madeira River. Therefore, only women and children stayed in Cayuvava settlements and became the primary victims of *guarayo* attacks. In 1887, one hundred Iténe attacked Barraca Santa Rosa, owned by Andrés Arze. The Iténe shot three hundred arrows and left a dead woman and several wounded. Local authorities reminded the central government that they paid taxes through renting *estradas* and exporting rubber and, again, demanded a fort at the confluence of the Mapucho and Iténez Rivers. This fort would protect rubber *barracas* along the banks of the Machupo, Itonama, Blanco, San Simón and San Martín Rivers; that is all the rubber producing areas around the

⁴⁴ Macchetti, *Diario del viaje fluvial*, 5.

border between the departments of Santa Cruz and Beni.⁴⁵ The indifference of the central government forced many *gomer*os to take matters into their hands. The local newspaper of the town of Magdalena, *El Iténes*, reported frequent expeditions to punish the Iténe. In 1901, for instance, after the Iténe had attacked a *barraca* near Magdalena during the night and killed a woman and her two children, the town sent a “commission” of twelve armed men to punish them.⁴⁶ Indigenous violence had a deep effect on the settlement patterns of the rubber industry. Although the Iténez area was rich in rubber, during the early twentieth century rubber production concentrated on the Northeast, which was under the firm control of rubber companies. The Iténez continued to be a frontier area where rubber production was secondary. Mestizos and whites preferred to settle in towns to engage in agriculture, ranching, and traditional crafts to supply the rubber industry. In the Northeast, in contrast, most of the population was concentrated in isolated *barracas* and *centros*.

Other *gomer*os tried peaceful means and attempted to attract them with gifts, as they had done with the Araona. For example, in 1901 Balbino Maciel reported that he had encountered a hostile group of Iténe in the San Miguel River and that he had given them all the objects that his party had. To his surprise, eighty to one hundred warriors showed up in his *barraca* bringing food to pay for the goods and then they returned to their settlements.⁴⁷

As discussed in chapter 4, rubber in the Iténez region was of the highest quality

⁴⁵ Presidencia Junta Municipal de la provincia Magdalena, to Ministro del estado en el despacho de Gobierno, 13 Oct. 1887. Signed by Tomás V. Villavicencio. (ANB/MI 1887, t.237 n°63).

⁴⁶ *El Itenes*, (Magdalena), 14 Dec. 1901, n° 31.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 24 Sept. 1901, n°28.

and the Iténez River is Bolivia's most navigable river. The area had the potential of becoming one of Bolivia's most productive areas. Yet, rubber was discovered relatively late and a combination of indigenous attacks, government neglect and jurisdiction conflicts between the departments of Santa Cruz and Beni managed to make the area a no-man's land until the intervention of the Bolivian army in the 1930s. Despite its apparent advantages, indigenous resistance had a profound effect on the development of the area. Unlike other areas of the Bolivian lowlands, neither local authorities nor rubber barons were able to subdue the Iténe. In 1937, the *cruceño* Justo Leigue Castedo, following the tenets of *indigenismo*, reduced the last Iténe in a new secularized "mission," with the help of the Bolivian Army. Today, less than one hundred Moré live near the confluence of the Iténez and Mamoré Rivers, and are among the last representatives of the once numerous Chapacura linguistic group.⁴⁸

The Spanish adventurer Ciro Bayo was one of the few foreigners who visited the area during the rubber boom and witnessed the prolonged war between *gomeros* and the Iténe, he commented on the brutality of this war:

What ideas have the whites not put into practice to exterminate these barbarians? They have hunted them, have leveled their *malocas*, have hung bottles on trees containing smallpox scabs so that the disgusting disease can be spread to the Indians through touching or smelling them and they can be wiped out, they have used the bait of some jugs of sugar cane alcohol full of poison so that they can die like rats. Many Indians have thus perished in agony, but their companions attack again, craving revenge and with renewed fury.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ See, Julio Leigue Castedo, *El Iténez Salvaje* (La Paz: Ministerio de Educación y cultura, 1957).

⁴⁹ Bayo, *América desconocida*, 284.

The Tupí-Guaraní family of languages is one of the more widespread in South America. At present, Tupí-Guaraní languages are still widely spoken in Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Argentina and French Guyana.⁵⁰ In Bolivia, some Guaraní moved towards the eastern borders of the Inca Empire and, after absorbing the Arawak-speaking Chané, became the historical Chiriguano (See chap 2). Another migration route went northwards through Chiquitos and was apparently stopped by the Moxo. The Guarayú (historically called Itatín) settled along the border between the present departments of Santa Cruz and Beni and were incorporated into Franciscan missions by the nineteenth century. It seems that other groups (such as the Pauserna) split from this group and became highly dispersed hunters and gatherers. During the colonial period, the Sirionó lived from the fringes of the Chaco to the western border of the present department of Santa Cruz and Cochabamba and in the so-called Monte Grande, between Santa Cruz and Beni. According to Allyn MacLean Stearman, the Yuqui are a Sirionó splinter group that was pushed into the Chapare area.⁵¹ The now extinct Jorá and Pauserna (or Pauserna-Guarasugwé) lived along the Iténez River and seemed to be related to the Sirionó.

Most Guaraní can be considered classic warrior societies. Their migrations and the fact that they kept slaves meant that they incorporated many ethnic groups into their

⁵⁰ For the Guaraní migrations, see Nordenskiöld, "Guaraní Invasion," and Alfred Métraux and Société des américanistes de Paris, *Migrations historiques des Tupi-Guaraní* (Paris: Maisonneuve frères, 1927). For a look at the interaction between the Guaraní and the Inca Empire, see Alconini, "The Southeastern Inka Frontier against the Chiriguano: Structure and Dynamics of the Inka Imperial Borderlands," and Julien, "Kandire in Real Time and Space: Sixteenth Century Expedition from the Pantanal to the Andes." The concept of Kandire was first advanced by Clastres, *La terre sans mal: le prophétisme Tupi-Guarani*. There are some parallels between the concept of Kandire and the Moxos' search for the Loma Santa. Both groups were in contact during the sixteenth century, so it is quite possible that the Moxos adopted Guaraní concepts.

⁵¹ Allyn MacLean Stearman, *Yuqui: Forest Nomads in a Changing World*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1989).

society. It is difficult to ascertain, therefore, whether present Guaraní speakers are Guaraní or whether the Guaraní acculturated them. The fact that they moved to many different environments also produced a wide array of cultures. The Chiriguano, for example, created highly productive agricultural societies based on the cultivation of maize, peanuts, squash and beans (probably using Chané know-how), whereas the Sirionó and Yuqui eventually became extremely “primitive” hunters and gatherers who lost knowledge of agriculture and even the use of fire.⁵²

The rubber boom had a direct effect on the Guaraní groups of the Iténez region who were lumped with other area “savages,” such as the Iténe or Moré. According to Erland Nordenskiöld, by the end of the nineteenth century the Pauserna were regularly hunted and sold in Beni and Santa Cruz. In the 1890s, the *cruceño* explorer Cristian Suárez Arana incorporated some of them into his *barracas* on the Verde and Paraguá Rivers.⁵³ The Franciscan father Presciotti unsuccessfully tried to start a mission among

⁵² There has been a lively debate about the Sirionó. In the 1950s, the anthropologist Allan R Homberg considered the Sirionó as one of the world’s most backward people and blamed the Sirionos’ “constant hunger” for their cultural backwardness. Allan R. Holmberg, *Nomads of the Long Bow; the Siriono of Eastern Bolivia* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1950). Isaac theorized that the Sirionó had been victims of de-acculturation but did not go beyond Holmberg’s ethnographic data, Barry L. Isaac, "The Siriono of Eastern Bolivia: A Reexamination," *Human Ecology* 5, no. 2 (1977). Later anthropologists theorized that they were a classical model of cultural regression. The Sirionó had abandoned their Guaraní material culture and reverted to a simpler hunter and gatherer culture in order to survive white encroachment. Ann Roosevelt has stated that the Sirionó, Yora and Yuqui had abandoned maize agriculture recently and could be described as impoverished recent refugees. See Anna C. Roosevelt, "Ancient and Modern Hunter-Gatherers," in *Advances in Historical Ecology*, ed. William Balée (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 204. This position had been confirmed by Allyn MacLean Stearman, who has conducted field work among both the Yuqui and the Sirionó, see Allyn MacLean Stearman, *No Longer Nomads: the Sirionó Revisited* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Press, 1987); Stearman, *Yuquí: Forest Nomads in a Changing World*.

⁵³ Velarde and Bolivia, *Informe...Velarde*, 15.

them in 1907.⁵⁴ When Nordenskiöld encountered them in the 1910s they were exchanging rubber for shirts, hats and the women were wearing the *tipoy* (a feminine garment prevalent in lowland missions).⁵⁵ Ciro Bayo also wrote that they exchanged their labor for cattle and *cachaça*.⁵⁶ They originally came from the right bank of the Iténez and took refuge in the left bank of the Iténez and the Paraguá Rivers. By the 1960s, they had been reduced to a few dozen and the Bolivian army, with some Creoles of the area was responsible for destroying the last remains of their culture. The German anthropologist Jürgen Riester chronicled their last days.⁵⁷

There is little information about the Jorá, but they seemed to be northern relatives of the Sirionó. In the nineteenth century, the Sirionó were considered to be useless as labor and, as a result, they were shot on sight. The explorer Edward Davis Mathews succinctly presented the prevailing view: “for these irreclaimable sons of the forest there is no taming method other than the rifle and the bullet, and it is no use trying to shrink from the fact that they must be removed out of the way for the opening up of commerce.”⁵⁸ Sirionó attacks became a matter of worry in a large area of the Bolivian lowlands. The fact that they were highly mobile and that they were very adapted to the forest, made them difficult to follow. Moreover, they dared to live within one hundred kilometers of Santa Cruz de la Sierra and Trinidad. During the rubber boom, they moved

⁵⁴ Bolivia and López, *Informe...López*, Anexo n°1, Delegación de la Prefectura del Beni, May 1, 1906 to Sr. Prefecto y Comandante del Beni, Trinidad, signed by José Domingo Arze., 63.

⁵⁵ Nordenskiöld, *Exploraciones y Aventuras*, 268 & 277.

⁵⁶ Bayo, *Grandes cacerías*, 241.

⁵⁷ Riester, *Los Guarasug'wé: crónica de sus últimos días*.

⁵⁸ Mathews, *Up the Amazon and Madeira Rivers*, 21.

northwards and, as a result, their territory covered large areas of three departments: Santa Cruz, Beni and Cochabamba.

The Monte Grande was a thick forest between Santa Cruz and Trinidad, and *gomerós* were forced to cross it to reach Trinidad and the Northeast and were, therefore, subject to Sirionó attacks. As early as 1866, the Beni prefecture complained about Sirionó attacks along the route from the port of Cuatro Ojos, on the shallow Piraí River near Santa Cruz de la Sierra, and Trinidad and suggested alternative routes through the deeper Chapare River or through Ascención de Guarayos.⁵⁹ In the province of Velasco, local authorities reported that the Sirionó were constantly attacking Santa Rosa de la Mina and San Ramón [de Chiquitos], and they requested forty to fifty soldiers to defend themselves.⁶⁰ Along the western end of the department of Santa Cruz, they were also constantly attacking the missionized Churapa Indians of Buenavista. Many indigenous groups of the area also despised the Sirionó. Besides the Churapa, the Guarayú, Yuracaré and the Chácobo had conflicts with them. In the 1920s, the Bolivian army forced the Sirionó to settle and forced them to work in army bases until they were incorporated into the Franciscan Mission of El Ibiato in 1936. A splinter group, the Yuqui, took refuge in the Chapare forest and was contacted in the 1980s.⁶¹

Since the colonial period, one of the most prevalent myths of the Amazon is the presence of cannibalistic, head-hunting “savages.” Neither of these practices was

⁵⁹ Prefectura del Beni to Supremo Gobierno, Trinidad, 17 July 1866. Signed by Anselmo Morant. (ANB/MI, n°42, t.18).

⁶⁰ Subprefecto de Velasco to Prefecto del Departamento [de Santa Cruz], San Ignacio, 18 June 1888. Signed by Augusto Toledo. (AUGRM/P, Supremo Gobierno Provincias 1888 3/120, Sub Prefectura de la Provincia de Velasco).

⁶¹ See Stearman, *Yuqui*.

prevalent during the rubber boom area. Indian attacks occurred because Creoles were encroaching on indigenous territory or to obtain tools and supplies. During the Bolivian rubber boom, *guarayo* attacks were successful for different reasons. First, *guarayos* were mostly composed of very mobile and small groups. Their mobility, along with their deep knowledge of their environment, hampered pursuit. With the exception of the Iténez, most *guarayos* were poor paddlers. The Ese'ejja, for example, used land routes and raided during the dry season. The *siringueros* and their auxiliaries dominated the waterways, but were sluggish around thickly-forested areas. As was the case with runaway Indians, the presence of rubber also played an important part in determining the success of armed attacks. At the outset of the rubber boom, the Ese'ejja were able to terrorize both Tacana missions and the pioneer *barracas* of the Upper Beni and its tributaries. This area was rich in rubber and was in the important travel routes that linked the department of La Paz with Riberalta, the Acre and the Madeira River. Therefore, powerful rubber concerns that could outfit private armies of professional "Indian hunters" and even prominent representatives of the Bolivian state (such as General Pando and Colonel Luis S. Muñoz) were able to organize modest military campaigns against them. On the other hand, the success of the Iténe, for instance, was because they operated in an area that was very isolated and removed from major travel routes, despite its high-quality rubber. Neither powerful rubber companies nor the Bolivian state were willing to intervene against their raids. Their tactics included night attacks and attacks on the narrows of the Machupo and Iténez Rivers. When pursued, they took refuge in the unexplored wilderness of the area or ran across the river to Mato Grosso. Finally, even

though the Sirionó were in one of the most traveled routes during the rubber boom (the routes from Cochabamba and Santa Cruz de la Sierra to Trinidad), they succeeded by “cultural regression.” They became nearly invisible hunters and gatherers and adopted one of the simplest material cultures in Latin America.⁶² During the rubber boom, *guarayo* attacks managed to, at least temporarily, halt the spread of rubber fever in the Bolivian lowlands. Indigenous tactics and the weaknesses of both the Bolivian state and rubber entrepreneurs preserved pockets of indigenous resistance until a more aggressive Bolivian state implemented policies to settle and “civilize” independent lowland groups in the 1920s and 1930s, long after the demise of the Amazonian rubber boom.

Between Integration and Flight

The Amazonian rubber boom brought havoc among many indigenous people and, as discussed above, many responded by flight or armed resistance. Conversely, other groups sought to take advantage of the economic opportunities it offered. Again, this stance was full of ambivalence. After all, many of the groups that attacked rubber *barracas*, did so to obtain material benefits. Although labor recruiters engaged many sources of labor throughout the rubber boom, their most “natural” recruits were indigenous peoples that were relatively familiar with the harsh environment of the rubber forests and that could be easily persuaded through various labor schemes. These labor schemes assumed a certain familiarity with the capitalist system and their main attraction to indigenous peoples was the advancement of cash or goods. The early rubber

⁶² For example, they walked backwards or climbing trees and vines to cover their tracks. Cardús, *Misiones franciscanas*, 283.

industry's *enganchadores* recruited among the indigenous peoples of Moxos and Caupolicán, who had been exposed to missions since colonial times and who had had various degrees of involvement with the cinchona boom. Later, when these sources of labor dwindled, recruiters sought to find similar conditions farther from the rubber fields and strove to recruit in Chiquitos, Velasco, and Guarayos and among the Chiriguano near the Chaco, who had also been exposed to the mission experience. This section will analyze the relationship of the Leco and Tacana (originally from Caupolicán) and several peoples of Moxos with the early rubber boom (See Fig. 27).



Figure 27. Migration Patterns during the Bolivian Rubber Boom
 Source: Adapted from Roux. *La Bolivie orientale*, 214.

Andeans call the eastern slope of the Andes, especially in Peru, the *montaña*. In Bolivia, there are the Yungas (which are tropical valleys) and, beyond the Yungas, there is a transitional zone that meets the first great Amazonian rivers. The culture of the peoples of this area is also transitional. During the Inca and colonial periods, they were

collectively called *chunchos*, which seems to be a generic term to cover any non-Andean groups east of the Andes. As explained in chapter 2, there were intense cultural and commercial links between the Andes and the Amazon, and these groups were the intermediaries of these important connections. According to the French historian Thierry Saignes, these movements went two ways. During the colonial period, for example, Andeans fled the *mita* and the *encomienda* and settled among *chuncho* groups. On the other hand, the hacienda and, to a certain extent, the gold mining operations of the Yungas incorporated many *chunchos*. He also suggests that many *chuncho* groups may have originated as an amalgamation of Andeans and several Amazonian ethnic groups, which would explain their extreme linguistic diversity and their fragmentation.⁶³

The cinchona boom employed many *chuncho* groups as rowers. Subsequently, they became involved in the early rubber boom, since they occupied an extremely important territory and were able to link the provinces of Larecaja and Caupolicán with the Beni department. Yet, their involvement with the rubber boom varied. The most involved and, therefore, more affected *chuncho* group were the Leco.

At present, the Leco are one of the most acculturated groups of the lowlands. During the Inca period, they were hunters and warriors and threatened the eastern frontier of the empire. This led to the construction of a series of fortresses along the Yungas, such as Iscanhuaya. The Leco threat continued through the colonial period. They regularly raided the coca plantations of the La Paz Yungas to obtain metal, clothes and other goods. Like other *chunchos*, at times they also showed up in Spanish settlements to

⁶³ Saignes, *Los Andes orientales*, chap. I & II.

trade quinine, feathers, monkeys, incenses and vanilla for metal tools, beads and cloth.⁶⁴ After several unsuccessful attempts, the Spanish friar Pedro Sáenz de Mendoza established a mission in the present town of Apolo in 1690, which spearheaded the establishment of other Franciscan missions in the Andean Piedmont. During the colonial period, there were many Leco revolts, which continued during the Wars of Independence. For instance, during the short-lived Larecaja *Republiqueta* (1814-16), the Leco *cacique* Santos Pariamo supported the rebel troops that were under the command of the priest Idelfonso de las Muñecas. According to d'Orbigny, after their defeat by Royalist troops the leader José Pacha was able to form an autonomous community in the thick of the jungle for fifteen years.⁶⁵

The Franciscan missions of Apolobamba were multiethnic and lasted until the 1800s. Alcide d'Orbigny, for example, wrote that there were three distinct ethnic groups living in Apolo. The first ones were traders (possibly Quechua-speakers) and there were two separate moieties. He did not use the term Leco and referred to the inhabitants of Apolo as Apolistas. There has been some confusion about these ethnic groups. Leco seems to be an isolated language that has also been called Lapacho, Apolista, Lapa Lapa or Rika and that has been heavily influenced by Aymara and Quechua. According to recent studies, though, there was another language, also called Apolista or Lapachu that was Arawakan and distinct from Leco.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶⁵ Orbigny, *Descripción geográfica*, 47-48.

⁶⁶ See Adelaar, *Languages of the Andes*, 475-6, 422-3. According to the *Handbook of South American Indians*, though, Leco, Chuncho or Lapa Lapa is distinct from Apolista or Lapacho. Alfred Métraux,

In any case, the language of the missions of Apolobamba was Quechua, which had been presumably introduced by the troops of the Inca Tupac Yupanki (1471-93), who tried to conquer the area, up to the Madre de Dios River.⁶⁷ Like elsewhere in South America, Spanish missionaries and conquistadors contributed to the further expansion of the Quechua language. The cinchona boom also involved many mestizo Quechua speakers from both northern La Paz and Cochabamba. Father Armentia wrote that all Leco were bilingual in Leco and Quechua and that all Indians of the Piedmont loved to borrow words from other tongues, which led to many variations in their languages.⁶⁸ By 1901, the English explorer John William Evans reported that the Leco spoke mostly Quechua and Spanish and that their own language was rapidly disappearing.⁶⁹

The Leco were superb boatmen and mestizos employed them in navigating the rapids of the tributaries of the Upper Beni River down to the port of Rurrenabaque. Their boats were rafts made of light balsa wood and the Leco used both paddles and long poles to negotiate the rocks and strong currents of the rapids. To the US journalist Charles Johnson Post, they were “a splendid lot of half-civilized people, tremendous of muscle and capable of prodigious feats of strength and endurance on their rivers. Ashore, sober

"Tribes of the Montaña and Bolivian East Andes," in *Handbook of South American Indians*, ed. Julian Haynes Steward (New York: Cooper Sq. Publishers, 1963), 505-6.

⁶⁷ For the Inca conquest of the chunchos see, e.g., Garcilaso de la Vega, *Comentarios reales de los incas [1609]*, (Montevideo: Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Previsión Social, 1963), 40; Miguel Cabello Balboa, "Orden y traza para descubrir la tierra de los chunchos y otras provincias," in *Obras* (Quito: Ed. Ecuatoriana, 1945 [1602-1603]); Cabello de Balboa, *Carta del P. Miguel Cabello de Balboa al Virrey Marqués del Cañete sobre la conversión de los indios chunchos*.

⁶⁸ Armentia, *Descripción de las misiones franciscanas*, 96 & 129.

⁶⁹ Evans, "Expedition to Caupolicán Bolivia, 1901-1902," 630.

and diffident, afloat in their rafts by right of an immemorial custom, they are always drunk and serenely confident in their intuitive shield.”⁷⁰ It seems like their acculturation started during the cinchona boom. As early as the 1850s the French/British botanist Hugues Algernon Weddell reported that they all carried trade guns and that they had stopped to paint their bodies.⁷¹

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Leco were under tremendous pressure. The rubber boom had brought in a large number of mestizo settlers who started to prospect for gold on the tributaries of the Beni and many haciendas started to produce tropical products such as coca, cocoa, sugar cane, and to raise cattle. There was a large demand for Leco labor. Although the Leco were mostly used to operate rafts, it seems that they were also subject to *enganches* to work as *siringueros* in northern Bolivia. When the 1893 National Expedition passed through their territory, it had a difficult time securing Leco crews to take them to Rurrenabaque because they had fled to the jungle thinking that the expedition would draft them by force and take them to the remote Purús River.⁷² General Pando also deplored that such superb rowers were so poorly paid. According to him, *fleteros* were merely intermediaries between traders and the Leco. The traders and *fleteros* made large profits by paying the Leco with alcohol and a few lengths of cloth.⁷³ In the early twentieth century, rubber companies established

⁷⁰ Charles Johnson Post, *Across the Andes* (New York: Outing Publishing Co., 1912), 159.

⁷¹ Weddell, *Voyage*, 446.

⁷² Comisión Expedicionaria al Oriente, Juan Luís Muñoz to Sr. Ministro de Estado en el Despacho de Gobierno y Colonización, Guanay, 5 June 1893 (ANB/MI 1893, t. 268 n°16).

⁷³ “Informe que el jefe de la exploración de los ríos del Norte de Bolivia eleva al conocimiento del Supremo Gobierno en cumplimiento del contrato celebrado en Mayo del 1892,” Rurrenabaque, 12 Aug. 1893. Signed by José Manuel Pando. (ALP/JMP, 1891-97, n°2).

in the provinces of Caupolicán and Larecaja complained to the Prefecture of the department of La Paz about the use of Leco labor (presumably for agricultural work) by the local townspeople. The manager of the Bolivian (Boston) Rubber Company in Sorata, for example, complained that townspeople did not pay Lecos for their labor but that his and Goytia's company were obliged to do so. He demanded that the prefect intervene to eliminate the "parasites that live off the labor of the Lecos."⁷⁴ Although linguists considered the Leco language a disappeared language, in the late twentieth century the Dutch linguist Simon van de Kerke found fifty speakers and is studying the language. At present, the Leco are located along the tributaries of the Beni River, especially in the tropical parts of the province of Larecaja (near the settlement of Guanay and on the Mapiri River) and also in the Kaka and Coroico Rivers near the provinces of Sud and North Yungas, all in the department of La Paz. There is another settlement near Atén, south of the town of Apolo

Chapter 3 explains how the late cinchona and early rubber boom co-existed in the boundaries of the Beni and La Paz departments for a few decades. Bolivians first found rubber along the Upper Beni River and its tributaries and many *cascarilleros* became *gomeros* in this area. Eventually, many of the future rubber barons such as Antonio Vaca Díez, Nicanor G. Salvatierra, Nicolás Suárez and many *paceños* settled in Reyes, Rurrenabaque and Santa Ana del Yacuma and started to extract and export rubber using both the Atlantic and Pacific route. Many members of the Tacana linguistic group

⁷⁴ Bolivian Rubber Co. to Juan M. Salles, Prefect of the department of La Paz, Sorata, 12 Aug. 1911, Illegible Signature (ALP/P-A, Correspondencia 1912).

inhabited this area and both booms had a profound effect on them.

At present, most members of the Tacana linguistic group are located within northern Bolivia. The Ese'ejja and Toromona, for example, have been discussed above, and rejected mission life. As elsewhere in the Andean Piedmont, some members of the missionized western Tacana ethnic groups are Quechua-speakers, or at least they speak a combination of Quechua and Tacana.

The Tacana ethnic groups were included among the *chunchos*. They had a strong relationship with the Inca Empire, although the nature of this relationship is under debate. Some sources claim that the Tacana resisted Inca invasion and others claim that they had a peaceful relationship. Like other Piedmont groups, they became intermediaries between the Andean and Amazonian worlds. Thierry Saignes has suggested that this relationship was established before the Inca Empire and dates back to the Mollo culture (c. 1250 AC).⁷⁵ Like many of their neighbors, the Tacana seemed to have a sophisticated slash-and-burn agriculture and they complemented it with fishing and hunting. The territory of the Tacana groups extended from the foothills of the Andes, near Leco territory, and the plains of northern La Paz to the Moxos savanna, near the town of Reyes. Northwards, they extended into the present boundary between Bolivia and Peru. An early twentieth century survey of Tacana “tribes” (based on colonial documents) revealed their strong Andean influence. One of them, for example was called the Saparuna (literally the people of the Inca (emperor) and another one the Marcani or

⁷⁵ Saignes, *Los Andes orientales*, 21-26.

people of the Marka (a type of Aymara community).⁷⁶ Furthermore, the spiritual leaders of the Araona are called *yanaconas*, which suggest that the “servants” of the Inca were considered of high status.⁷⁷

The history of the Tacana during the colonial period is similar to the history of other Piedmont indigenous peoples. During the late eighteenth century, the Franciscans founded missions among most of the indigenous populations of the area. The most important missions were San José de Uchupiamonas (1716), Tumupasa (1717), San Antonio de Ixiamas (1721), Jesús de Cavinás (1764), San Buenaventura (1770) and Santiago de Pacaguaras (1771).⁷⁸ These missions were multiethnic and incorporated different Tacana peoples as well as members of other linguistic groups. (Leco, Mosestén, Quechua and Pano). Like in other missions, Quechua became the *lingua franca* of San José de Uchupiamonas, whereas the Tacana language became the common language of Tumupasa, San Buenaventura and Ixiamas.⁷⁹ Some of the Araona were concentrated in the short-lived mission of San Pedro de Alcántara (1752-44) and others were incorporated into the mission of Cavinás and became known as Cavineña. Franciscans founded the mission of Santiago de Pacaguaras in 1771 on the banks of the Madidi River and they incorporated several Tacana and Pano-speaking groups. This may have contributed to increasing the linguistic proximity between Tacanan and Panoan

⁷⁶ Rudolph Schuller, "The Ethnological and Linguistic Position of the Tacana Indians of Bolivia," *American Anthropologist, New Series* 24, no. 2 (1922): 162.

⁷⁷ During the Inca period, a *yanacona* was, according to Brooke Larson, “a retainer who served the Inca emperor or a local ethnic lord as a life-long servant.” During the colonial period, it was changed to “an Indian servant, miner or agricultural laborer removed from his *ayllu* [Andean community] and bound to a Spanish overlord.” Larson, *Colonialism and Agrarian Transformation*, 405.

⁷⁸ Paul Rivet, *Les tribus du bassin du Purus, du Jurua et des régions limitrophes* (Paris: n.p., 1921), 98-99.

⁷⁹ Cardús, *Misiones franciscanas*, 291-93.

languages. Furthermore, other Tacana groups were incorporated in the Jesuit missions of San Borja (1693), on the Moxos savanna, and Reyes (1710), between the Beni River and the Moxos plains. In these missions, they co-existed with different ethnic groups from Moxos, especially the Movima, and, as a result, they became outstanding cowboys and shared the Jesuit “mission culture” of Moxos.⁸⁰ Eventually, they were known as Maropa, Reyesanos or Borjanos.

Most of the Tacana territories were rich in cinchona bark and, not surprisingly, the Tacana were drawn into the cinchona boom. Since most Tacana groups lived inland and were not able boatmen, they did not become involved in operating *callapos*, like their Masetén and Leco neighbors.⁸¹ On the other hand, they were familiar with the different ecological niches of their environment and were exceptional trekkers, guides, and porters. During the cinchona boom, porters from Ixiamas and Tumupasa carried loads of *cascarilla* weighing fifty to sixty pounds, across the Andes to Apolo and Pelechuco.⁸² The cinchona boom also brought new settlers to Tacana-occupied territory who founded new settlements such as Rurrenabaque, (on the Beni River, across San Buenaventura) and Puerto Salinas (on the Beni River, near Reyes). These settlements became links in the routes to ship *cascarilla* to both the Pacific port of Mollendo and the Madeira River and brought a need for Tacana labor.⁸³

⁸⁰ For a survey of Moxos missions, see Block, *Mission Culture*, 39.

⁸¹ They occasionally used small canoes but, according to contemporary sources, their skills could not be compared with those of their neighbors, and, e.g., they could not swim. Lucio del Rosal, “Nuestros salvajes” in *La Gaceta del Norte* (Riberalta), 29 June 1922, n°17.

⁸² Armentia, “Diario del viaje al Madre de Dios,” 10.

⁸³ According to the Italian botanist Luigi Balzan, all the workers in Rurrenabaque spoke Tacana and had been imported from Tumupasa. Balzan, “Da Reyes a Villa Bella,” 259.

Along with the *cascarilleros* and under the protection of the Bolivian government, came the missionaries. The Franciscan Colegio de Propaganda Fide of La Paz attempted to re-found the Franciscan missions in the province of Caupolicán. Under the combined pressures of runaways, *guarayo* attacks and *enganches* for the cinchona and rubber booms, the missions did not fare very well. San Buenaventura was located across the port of Rurrenabaque (on the Upper Beni River), a major transportation point for both cinchona and rubber, and by the 1860s, it was almost de-populated. In Tumupasa, most of the population refused to live in the mission and had their *chacos* far away from the mission center (possibly to avoid disease). In the 1890s, Father Ducci wrote, “their instruction is non-existent both in the social or religious aspect.”⁸⁴ San José de Uchupiamonas became a trading point in the route from Apolo to Beni and, as a result, it became, according to Father Sans, a Babel of languages that ranged from Quechua to Tacana to the many languages of the Moxos savanna.⁸⁵ The Franciscan José María Ciuret, who lived among the Tacana for several decades, summarized the relationship between him and his neophytes. According to Father Cardús’ report, Ciuret thought the Tacana had an “unsteady, rebellious and evil character.” They stole his chickens, killed his pigs and sheep, and refused to share any food with him. When they went hunting and fishing, he requested a share and they scornfully replied, “That if he wanted fish or game he should do like they do and go fishing or hunting.”⁸⁶ Father Armentia also described how the Tacana adapted themselves to the different environments they encountered in

⁸⁴ Ducci and Pifferi, *Diario*, 110.

⁸⁵ Sans and Bravo, *Memoria histórica*, 106.

⁸⁶ Cardús, *Misiones franciscanas*, 171.

their travels. He explained how the Tumupasa Tacana had learned to dance the *machetero* dance in Moxos, and that they had learned to play Andean wind instruments and dances in their travels to Pelechuco and Apolo. On the other hand, they spent months in the jungle among “savages” and when they returned to the mission they proudly painted their bodies “as if they had done a great deed.”⁸⁷

According to most sources, the Tacana became the *gomeros*’ most willing work force. The Franciscans’ lack of control over their neophytes and the *guarayo* threats made life in the rubber forests relatively attractive. It should be noted that Bolivian *cascarilleros* had first learned about rubber from the indigenous peoples around Cavinás (See chap. 3). Although the Tacana were not rowers, they were excellent *rumbeadores* and were used to locate rubber concentrations.⁸⁸ As mentioned above, their hunting and fishing skills were also valuable in the first rubber ventures. In some cases, they were able to achieve a certain degree of autonomy. Officers of the *National Delegation*, for example, reported that the Tacana from Tumupasa were the best workers in the Ortón River. A group of them, under the leadership of their cacique Gervasio Amutari, lived communally as *fregueses* (sharecroppers) of the *mayordomo* Olegario Villar. Even though they did not suffer physical abuse, they complained that the *mayordomo* took their rubber without weighing it and that he stole rubber from them while they were away from their huts.⁸⁹ The Tacana were also notorious for leaving without paying their debts. In

⁸⁷ Armentia, "Diario del viaje al Madre de Dios," 17-18.

⁸⁸ A *rumbeador* was responsible to find hevea strands in the middle of the forest, see chap. 3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 24 Apr. 1897, n°19.

some cases, they even demanded strong *anticipos* and ran away with them.⁹⁰ In addition, they often claimed to go hunting or fishing for the *barraca* and vanished into the forest. As a preventive measure, *patrones* often held their wives and children as hostages while they were away.⁹¹ As seen in the previous chapter, the *patrones* had control of the rivers but the Tacana, unlike other tappers, were able to desert using land routes. Because of the rubber boom, the Tacana abandoned their mission in the plains and forests of the left bank of the Beni River to populate most of the rubber areas of the Northeast. Some Tacana became relatively wealthy. For example, Fawcett mentioned that he found in the Rapirrán River (a tributary of the Abuná River, in the Acre territory) a Tumupasa Indian who had made a fortune in rubber.⁹² At present, Tacana communities are widespread. There are Tacana in Atén, near Apolo, in their traditional missions of San Buenaventura, Ixiamas, Tumupasa and San José, across the Beni River near Rurrenabaque, and in many areas of the department of Pando (between the Tahuamanu and Madre de Dios Rivers) and Vaca Díez province.⁹³ The deep involvement of the Tacana in the cinchona and rubber booms and the subsequent flight from their ancestral territories has prompted some anthropologists to argue for a Tacana Diaspora.⁹⁴ The survival of the Tacana is remarkable; unlike many other ethnic groups of the Bolivian lowlands, they were

⁹⁰ Comisión exploradora del Madre de Dios, Araona, 30 June 1885. Singed by Augusto Roca. ANB/MI 1885, t. 222, n°16.

⁹¹ Balzan, "Da Reyes a Villa Bella," 580.

⁹² Fawcett, *Exploration Fawcett*, 84.

⁹³ For two anthropological accounts of the present Tacana, see Laura Ann Bathurst, "Reconfiguring Identities: Tacana Retribalization in Bolivia's Amazonia" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2005); Sondra Wentzel, "Tacana and Highland Migrant Land Use, Living Conditions, and Local Organizations in the Bolivian Amazon" (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1989).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

exposed to many historical cycles. They survived the Inca Empire, Franciscan missions, and two boom and bust cycles. These historical cycles and their location in the middle of the trade routes between the Andes and the Amazon probably increased their resilience and their ability to deal with non-indigenous society. Nicolás Suárez, one of Amazonia's most powerful rubber barons, for example, recruited Tacana *mozos* in his military campaign against the Acre rebels and praised their military skills. He used Tacana archers from Tumupasa and Ixiamas to set fire to the thatched buildings of Bahía (later Cobija), in the Acre campaign.⁹⁵

The Moxo language is also called Mojo or Mojeño.⁹⁶ The Moxo continue to be one of the most numerous groups of the Bolivian lowlands. As David Block has shown, after being concentrated in Jesuit missions from the 1680s to the Jesuit expulsion in 1767, the Moxo, like other peoples of the savanna, developed a distinct “mission culture” which, with important transformations, has survived into the twentieth century. This culture did not include a *lingua franca* for the Moxos savanna. The Jesuits had been successful at imposing a regulated Guaraní in their Paraguayan missions and two Tupí-based *linguas francas*: the *lingua geral paulista* and the *lingua geral amazônica*, in the Portuguese colonies. They were also relatively successful in turning mission Chiquitano into a *lingua franca*. Why did they fail in Moxos? According to the historian Josep Barnadas, the Jesuits did initially attempt to impose the Moxo language. However, their attempts failed because there were just too many ethnic groups and languages and

⁹⁵ Suárez, *Anotaciones y documentos*, 7. See also chap. 8.

⁹⁶ Since most sources use Moxo, I will use the traditional spelling (like Mexico, Texas or Quixote). Moxo will be used for the Arawak ethnic group and Moxos for the geographical area, that is the Moxos savanna or the colonial province of Moxos.

because the Moxos' neighbors refused to abandon their languages. By the end of the Jesuit period, there were ten general languages in the Moxos missions. Moreover, many of the Jesuit missions were founded late in the eighteenth century, and there was simply not enough time to develop a linguistic policy before the Jesuits' expulsion.⁹⁷

The first Jesuit mission among the Moxo was Loreto (1682), followed by Trinidad (1687), San Ignacio (1689), San Xavier (1691), and Santa Rosa (1705). All these missions were near the Upper Mamoré River, with the exception of San Ignacio de Moxos which was located on the Apere River. Santa Rosa was abandoned in 1740. During the Jesuit era, the Moxo language was separated into Trinitario, Loretano, Ignaciano and Javierano. At present, most Moxo identify with one of these linguistic groups and, regardless where they are, they will say that they are, for example, Trinitarios, as opposed to Moxos or Mojeños, which further proves the Jesuits' failure to create a common identity, even among the Arawak people of Moxos.

After the expulsion of the Jesuits, the Moxos missions were placed under Spanish secular authority. Spanish governors attended to secular matters while *curas* appointed by the bishop of Santa Cruz attended to spiritual matters. Like elsewhere within the Spanish colonial empire, there were constant tensions between the secular and spiritual authorities because their areas of jurisdiction were not well defined. Spanish governors attempted to apply the Bourbon reforms to Moxos and met with numerous rebellions. Despite this, the Moxo retained their traditional leadership and were able to survive by producing cacao, and cotton, and taking advantage of the large cattle herds that thrived in

⁹⁷ "Introducción" by Josep M. Barnadas in Eder and Barnadas, *Breve descripción*, LII-LIV.

the savanna. During the first years of independence, Moxos was attached to the department of Santa Cruz and many *cruceños* continued to migrate to the Moxos towns. In 1842, President José Ballivián proclaimed the new department of Beni. The most important effect of this was the declaration of private property. Indians were declared citizens and, theoretically, could own private property in exchange for annual tax payments.⁹⁸

Ballivián's decree unleashed the full effects of liberal reforms on Moxos. Indian communal property was abolished and *cruceños* were able to buy large tracts of land. The abolition of communal property also led to a deterioration of traditional Moxo leadership. These changes started in Trinidad and spread to the rest of the former missions. Before the cinchona and rubber booms, the department of Beni relied on exports of cacao and cattle (which were state property) to Brazil, Santa Cruz and Cochabamba. It also had some revenue from the sale of ex-communal lands and vacant lands. These processes started an exodus of both the Creole and indigenous populations and, as a result, revenues dried up.

The demographic collapse of the Moxo population during the early rubber boom has been amply documented.⁹⁹ Yet the situation of the Moxo within their communities and in the rubber fields is quite complex. The town of San Ignacio de Moxos, for example, was far from the main routes to the Madeira River and, according to the Beni prefect Mamerto Oyola, had not been very affected by migration to the Madeira and

⁹⁸ The post-Jesuit period is discussed briefly in Block, *Mission Culture*, 149-173. For the text of the creation of the Beni department, see Manuel Limpías Saucedo, *Los Gobernadores de Moxos* (La Paz: Escuela Tipográfica salesiana, 1942), 3-4.

⁹⁹ See Block, *Mission Culture*, 165-66, and Van Valen, "The Ventriloquist Messiah," chap. 2.

Amazon Rivers. In 1883, it had 200 or 300 inhabitants and it produced 18,000 to 20,000 *arrobas* of cacao.¹⁰⁰ An 1886 report offered an analysis of the whereabouts of the indigenous population. Even though the 1842 decree abolished indigenous *parcialidades*, the document continued to list them.¹⁰¹ According to the *corregidor*, the indigenous population was engaged in the following activities:

- In tobacco fields: 9
- In tobacco fields and in the woodlands: 11
- In their *chacos*: 5
- Processing tobacco and tending cowherds: 14
- In Pará: 11
- As crews under contract with Sr. Ceballos: 7
- In Cuatro Ojos (Santa Cruz): 10
- Ran away to Trinidad (*prófugos*): 16
- In *chacos* belonging to *parcialidades*: 12
- Working for the cacique Sebastián Semo: 25¹⁰²

Even though San Ignacio was on the Apere River, far removed from the Mamoré or Trinidad, it had crews in Cuatro Ojos, which was Santa Cruz's main port on the Piraí River, and Pará. Seven were also under contract with Sr. Ceballos, to travel to an unspecified place. Others were working in collective *chacos* and a large number were working (probably for no pay) for the *cacique*. It seems that neither the *parcialidades* nor the *cacique* had lost their influence. Like in many other Moxos towns, it is quite possible that the *cacique* was in collusion with the *cruceños* to extract labor from the

¹⁰⁰ Oyola and Bolivia, *Informe...Prefecto del Beni*, 9.

¹⁰¹ The *parcialidades* were the moieties of a *pueblo*; they usually had collective herds and *chacos*.

¹⁰² "Razón demostrativa formada por el corregidor que suscribe el número de naturales que cada vecino tiene en concierto y en diferentes trabajos como también de los tripulantes que se hallan de viaje y por marchar en conformidad con la superior circular del 4 de julio último" in ALP/SGL 1886, c.3.

local Indians.¹⁰³ Another significant factor was the number of runaways to Trinidad, as in the colonial period, many indigenous peoples migrated to urban areas to employ their skills and get away from the constraints of forced labor.¹⁰⁴ The commercial movement to the Madeira, Manaus and even Pará also absorbed a significant number of Ignacianos. By the 1880s, the rubber trade from the Madeira River to Brazilian ports, started in the 1860s and 1870s, was in full swing and managed to attract Moxo Indians from even the most remote and traditional districts.

The cadaster of Trinidad also offers some insights into the Moxos' situation. As described in chapter 3, many prominent *cruceño* families had substantial cattle ranches near Trinidad. It seems that, at least in Trinidad, the "whites" had been able to monopolize cattle. The many indigenous owners listed in the cadaster were primarily dedicated to cultivating cacao and coffee or subsistence crops such as yuca, bananas, maize and rice. While a few "white" owners had several thousand heads of cattle, indigenous people had none or very few. Estéban Yumo, for example, owned 10 heads and José María Moye owned 80. In addition, indigenous properties were listed as "sin lindero," that is without boundaries and many of the Moxos had cattle "en mancomunidad," or jointly. Finally, only the indigenous property owners owned oxen. Several of them had oxen to till their fields and pull their carts, which further demonstrates that they were the only segment of the population engaged in agriculture

¹⁰³ Local oral histories gathered in San Ignacio de Moxos confirm that the *caciques* worked hand in hand with the *corregidor* and the *contratistas* to recruit labor for the rubber fields, see Jones, "Conflict," 113-14.

¹⁰⁴ Block, *Mission Culture*, 143-44.

and trading basic staples.¹⁰⁵ Twenty years after the start of the rubber boom, the *cruceños* were in firm control of Trinidad's economy.

One of the republican governments' main sources of revenue in the nineteenth century was the so-called *contribución indigenal* or indigenous tribute. In 1842, the Moxo had received citizenship and property rights in exchange for a head tax. Taxing them, though, proved extremely difficult. Very few had property deeds and, while they were away as crews, they did not pay their tax. The Beni prefect Mamerto Oyola recommended the enforcement of the *contribución* because, according to him, the Moxos indigenous peoples, unlike their Altiplano counterparts, did not have any interest in buying or renting state property. On the other hand, he observed, "the Indians of these regions do not pay any tithes or first fruits or parish fees" so they should pay their head taxes.¹⁰⁶ The Moxo found it easier to move away from white encroachment to vacant lands and start their *chacos* in the forest than purchasing property. Even when they had purchased properties legally, they were taken away by whites, who did not take into account that the Moxo were away rowing or working in the rubber forests and, with the collusion of local authorities, were declared *res nullius* and sold. According to the Beni prefect Fabián Vaca Chávez, this had been one of the main reasons why the Moxo migrated to Brazil, to be able to hold property guaranteed by the state.¹⁰⁷ The situation with cattle was similar. Taxes were paid on the number of cattle, not on pasturelands. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Moxos contained large herds of feral cattle.

¹⁰⁵ "Catastro de la capital Trinidad," signed by Miguel López in San Xavier [de Moxos] 27 Aug. 1886. (ALP/SGL c.3, d.67, 1886).

¹⁰⁶ Oyola and Bolivia, *Informe...Prefecto del Beni*, 11 & 14.

¹⁰⁷ "Informe del Prefecto del Beni Fabián Vaca Chávez." (ANB/PO (P), Beni 1912-13), 12.

According to Frank Keller, in the 1870s, “a set of adventurers from Santa Cruz” had initiated a “war of destruction” against Moxos cattle. They obtained them for one *peso* per head, slaughtered them and only used them for hides and tallow.¹⁰⁸ Despite this, a shortage of both horses and cowboys had soon led to the replenishment of the feral herds. Even with the establishment of large *estancias* in the 1880s, by 1901, the Trinidad press commented that “it is customarily admitted that herds are communal and belong to any person that knows how to use a lasso or has the intention of starting a *chaco*, even within a short distance of settled *centros* or in somebody else’s property.”¹⁰⁹ Ciro Bayo added that wild bulls were extremely dangerous, but could be shot at will, as long as a fee of one boliviano was paid to the nearest *capataz*.¹¹⁰ During the 1880s, ranching in Moxos provided little income and the rubber trade in the Madeira and elsewhere swept away most *patrones* and their indigenous charges. Many *cruceño patrones* started to use Moxo crews to export rubber and import merchandises through the Madeira route or started rubber *barracas*.¹¹¹

Eventually, Suárez Hermanos revitalized the Moxos cattle industry to supply the growing needs of the cities and *barracas* of the Northeast and Acre. During the 1880s, though, most Moxo were recruited to row through the treacherous *cachuelas* towards Manaus and Pará. While there, Brazilian observers noted the brutal treatment of Moxos Indians in the Madeira. Bernardo da Costa e Silva commented how a Bolivian *patrón*

¹⁰⁸ Keller, *Amazon and Madeira Rivers*, 153 & 158.

¹⁰⁹ *La Estrella del Norte* (Trinidad), 28 Sept. 1901, n°19.

¹¹⁰ Bayo, *Grandes cacerías*, 95-129.

¹¹¹ David Block estimated a population loss of 29 per cent from 1867 to 1882. in the Moxos towns. Block, *Mission Culture*, 165.

administered fifty lashes to a Moxo for having stolen his *cachaça* and how another one had requested rotten *charque* for his dogs and, instead, fed his Moxo crew with it.¹¹² However, during the early rubber boom the Moxo were able to practice, to a certain extent, their “mission culture.” According to the same author, every *barraca* had a cross and the Moxo celebrated the feast of the patron saints of their towns and Holy Week. They sang litanies in Latin and an elder even read from an old Jesuit manuscript. These prayers were accompanied with traditional flutes and drums and the typically Moxo *bajón*, a sort of large pan flute. It ended with the *machetero* dance, which is also a traditional Moxo war dance.¹¹³ Despite the *patrones*’ cruelty, it seems like it was also relatively easy to flee to Brazilian towns or, as we have seen above, to take temporary refuge among independent Indians.

The northernmost missions that the Jesuits built in the Bolivian lowlands were the missions of Exaltación (1709) and Magdalena (1720). The first was located on the lower Mamoré and was mostly composed of Cayuvava. The second (on the Itonamas River) was mainly an Itonama mission.¹¹⁴ These two ethnic groups were the last to integrate into what David Block has called the Moxos “mission culture.” They spoke isolated languages, which are today virtually unknown. North of these missions, there were many independent groups. During the nineteenth century both the Cayuvava and Itonama were notoriously prone to “backsliding” and integrating with their “savage” counterparts. Like in other cases, the knowledge of the dominant culture proved to be useful among

¹¹² Silva, *Viagens*, 198 & 219.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 264-67.

¹¹⁴ The foundation dates of the Moxos missions are based on David Block’s table found in page 39 of Block, *Mission Culture*.

independent Indians. According to the British engineer of the Madeira Mamoré railway Edward Davis Mathews, the headman of the Pacaguara independent Indians was a Cayuvava from the town of Exaltación. Father Machetti also noted that most “savages” were able to speak Cayuvava, since many Cayuvava settled among them until they could return to their villages. Other sources mention Cayuvava living among the Chácobo or reverting to “savage” life by themselves, without the assistance of independent groups.¹¹⁵

Despite this, many Cayuvava and Itonama integrated into the rubber boom as tappers or rowers. Luigi Balzan considered them the second-best rowers in the Beni and described them as “extremely robust people.” He added that the Cayuvava, Itonama and Baure crews were extremely expensive because they were afraid to be sold to rubber *barracas* and were reluctant to be contracted.¹¹⁶ Besides running away, the Itonama were able to use the judicial system in their favor. In 1901, for example, a *fletero* accused five Itonama of running away and breaking their contracts before the police in the town of Magdalena. They successfully defended themselves by arguing that the contract was only valid for their province, not for the Madeira *cachuelas*.¹¹⁷ Because of their proximity to the Iténez River, these towns were considered lawless and became a refuge for criminals. As late as 1900, for example, the Bolivian officer Elías Sagárnaga described Exaltación as “den of criminals,” yet he added that the so-called criminals lived in a town that produced large amounts of rice, tobacco and *charque*.¹¹⁸ Lawlessness and

¹¹⁵ Mathews, *Up the Amazon and Madeira Rivers*, 59; Macchetti, *Diario del viaje fluvial*, 35; Armentia, *Diario de sus viajes*, 27; Cardús, *Misiones franciscanas*, 288.

¹¹⁶ Balzan, "Da Reyes a Villa Bella," 66 & 71.

¹¹⁷ *El Ideal Beniense* (Magdalena), 15 Jan. 1903, n°126.

¹¹⁸ Sagárnaga, *Recuerdos*, 171.

violence did not seem to interfere with productivity, which was most likely in the hands of the indigenous population. Exaltación Indians were quite integrated into the market, and the criminal reputation of the area probably discouraged abuse, since nobody dared to take their surplus without paying for it.

Because of their isolation, the northern Moxos towns suffered devastating epidemics during the late nineteenth century. They had not been much exposed to European diseases and had not developed any immunity to many European diseases. Their sudden insertion into the rubber boom brought a large number of outsiders to an unprepared population. A smallpox epidemic, for example, hit the town of San Ramón in 1896 and it almost annihilated its inhabitants. The survivors ran away from the town and became nomadic.¹¹⁹ The area also contained the Baure. The Baure were Arawak-speaking peoples who lived in the northern savanna and, before Spanish colonization, had one of the most advanced hydraulic civilizations in the Moxos area. The Jesuits considered them the “more civilized” people of Moxos.¹²⁰ They were congregated in the mission of San Joaquín, founded in 1709, and Concepción founded in 1708.¹²¹ At present, the remains of the Baure are located in the towns of Baures, San Joaquín and El Carmen. Like their southern Arawak relatives, the languages of this region fragmented into former missions so that sources speak of Baure, Carmelitano and Joaquiniano. Because of their proximity to the Northeast, the Baure, like other ethnic groups of the northern Moxos savanna were deeply affected by the rubber boom.

¹¹⁹ *El Ideal Beniano* (Magdalena), 20 Dec. 1912, n°124.

¹²⁰ Block, *Mission Culture*, 18.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

The relative proximity of this area to the rubber forests of the northeast and the Iténez and the fact that the native labor had not been as depleted as in the southern savanna attracted a large number of *cruceños* who established haciendas and *estancias* to supply rubber *barracas*. European *casas comerciales* followed them and attracted many German immigrants. In 1907, the sub-prefect reported that there were a few *casas comerciales* in the area. The German house Zeller, Willinger and Company, for example, was established in the Itonama town of Huacaraje and dedicated itself exclusively to the production of *charque* and other products for the rubber industry. The same report recorded that the region produced large amounts of textiles, tobacco, hammocks, sugar, sugar cane liquor, rice, manioc, maize and cacao for the *gomeros*. Some of these products, such as the transformation of beef into *charque* or the transformation of yuca into starch and *chivé* (fomented and sun-dried yuca flour, similar to Brazilian *farinha*), involved a certain degree of manufacturing skill and show that the industries of the Moxos missions survived in the northern savanna.¹²²

Since the population decline had not been as severe as in the central Moxos towns, local caciques retained their power and took advantage of the economic opportunities that the rubber boom offered. Ladislao Cabrera, a politician and hero of the War of the Pacific, commented that the Cayuvava cacique of Exaltación, Gregorio Acurusa “governed despotically.” He added that he had an *estancia* near the town from which he employed or sub-contracted women, men and children as weavers, agricultural laborers and boatmen; they only received food and clothing from him. Like any *patrón*,

¹²² For a report about the economic activities of the Iténez, see Bolivia and López, *Informe...López*.

he used the whip liberally and was fond of saying that the prefect ruled in Trinidad and he ruled in his town.¹²³ Even though a few *caciques* such as Acurusa were able to achieve a certain degree of economic independence, they were eventually swept away by the rubber boom. The *cacique* class intermarried with the *cruceños* and foreigners that had *estancias* or worked for local *casas comerciales* in the area and became part of the local elite. In the early twentieth century, the *cruceño* journalist Juan B. Coimbra lamented that the traditional *caciques* had totally disappeared from the landscape of the Beni department, along with the use of native languages.¹²⁴ Writing about the town of Baures, he mentioned how many *cruceño siringueros* from the Madeira, such as, among others, Pastor Oyola, Manuel José Justiniano, Urbano Melgar and Arístides Antelo had “retired” there and had mixed with the descendants of the *cacique* Hipólito Ojopi. According to Coimbra, the *cacique* had married a member of the *cruceño* elite, Doña María Manuela Vaca and their descendants were “particularly superb examples of the mestizo race [...]. This race would later provide many noteworthy pioneers of the rubber industry, great benefactors of their village, artists and intellectuals.”¹²⁵

The Canichana today are also one of the most acculturated groups of Moxos and, like Movima, their language is virtually extinct. Historically, they lived on the Mamoré River, west of the Moxo. In 1697, the Jesuits built the mission of San Pedro on the Mamoré River. San Pedro was one of the wealthiest missions in Moxos and was renowned for its foundries. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in 1822 the Canichana

¹²³ Ladislao Cabrera, *Navegación fluvial de Trinidad a Villa Bella, diario de viaje por las cachuelas del Mamoré en el Departamento del Beni* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Imp. "La Estrella de Oriente," 1890), 5.

¹²⁴ Coimbra, *Siringa*, 79.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

organized an uprising when the Spanish governor Francisco Xavier Velasco murdered their *cacique* Juan Marasa. They responded by burning the governor and his followers in the mission church. This rebellion extended throughout Moxos and lasted until 1824, when an army detachment from Santa Cruz crushed it. One of the results of the rebellion was that San Pedro was burned to the ground and, consequently, Trinidad became the administrative capital of Moxos.¹²⁶ This rebellion displayed the relative power and wealth of the Canichana at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which was crucial in the Moxo rebellions of the 1880s, when the Canichana became the military allies of *cruceño* troops sent to quell an uprising).

Like the Moxo, the Canichana participated in the early days of the rubber boom and Bolivian *fleteros* employed them as crews to the Madeira and Amazon Rivers since the 1860s. Franz Keller reported their presence in Manaus, along with the Moxo.¹²⁷ Father Macchetti also used Canichana crews on his trip to the Madeira and commented on their “indifference and sangfroid” in the *cachuelas*.¹²⁸ The need for Canichana labor took its toll on San Pedro, Father Ducci, for example, observed in the 1890s that the population of San Pedro had been reduced to forty families governed by a *cruceño* governor and Canichana *alcaldes*. In twenty years, the population had been reduced by fifty per cent.¹²⁹ According to Pastor Oyola, a prefect of the Beni, their skills as carpenters and musicians were highly valued, on the other hand, the local white offspring,

¹²⁶ See Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, 152-3 Chávez Suárez, *Historia de Moxos*, 485-6, & Block, *Mission Culture*, 130-32.

¹²⁷ Keller, *Amazon and Madeira Rivers*, 35.

¹²⁸ Macchetti, *Diario del viaje fluvial*, 19.

¹²⁹ Ducci and Pifferi, *Diario*, 100.

according to him, became imbeciles.¹³⁰ San Pedro never recovered and, by the 1880s, it had a very small population and had become part of the private hacienda of José María Fresno, who was the Canichana's protector. He predicted that the town would disappear after his death and that the remaining Canichana would be forcefully taken to the Madeira River. His prediction proved true, as by the early twentieth century the mission of San Pedro had disappeared completely. A few Canichana lived at its former location, but the majority had moved northwards near the Machupo River, south of the towns of San Joaquín and San Ramón.

Despite the demise of their mission, the Canichana's combativeness did not diminish. When the Moxo of Trinidad rebelled and burned the city in 1887, the Canichana joined a punitive expedition of one hundred and fifty armed men. Their cruelty towards their traditional enemies was well known. According to a witness, the Canichana hunted the rebels into the *curichis* of the savanna and proceeded to slit the throats of every Moxo they found, including women and children. Their well-known military prowess proved essential to defeat the Moxo rebellion. He also added that they enthusiastically participated in looting Moxo settlements and returned home "very wealthy."¹³¹ This wealth was mostly grains, cattle, oxen and tools, so it was short-lived and relative.

The Leco, Tacana and the various peoples of Moxos had been exposed to Franciscan or Jesuit missions since colonial times. The breadth and depth of this

¹³⁰ Oyola and Bolivia, *Informe...Prefecto del Beni*, 8.

¹³¹ *Los Debates* (Sucre), 10 Nov. 1887, n°117. "Los Sucesos del Beni: Informe del Sub-corregidor...sobre los sucesos de la guayochería en el Beni." Signed by Miguel Antelo.

exposure varied, while the Moxo and other savanna peoples developed a “mission culture” that outlived the Jesuit presence in the area, the Leco and Tacana’s experience of missions were sporadic and, as was the case with many of the Piedmont peoples, they were able to combine the mission experience with periods of relative freedom. With the outset of the cinchona and rubber booms, even though these peoples were not completely acculturated, they had enough exposure to national society to respond to the lure of goods and cash *enganchadores* offered. In Moxos, many of the area’s indigenous authorities, who had been sanctioned by the colonial and republican governments, colluded with Creoles to extract labor from their charges and, in many cases, they integrated the newly-arrived *cruceño* elites. Initially, the rubber boom was beneficial to them, however, as it progressed they became increasingly acculturated and ceased to exist as indigenous authorities. The many tensions that the rubber boom unleashed in Moxos eventually led to a nativist rebellion that transformed the balance of power in Moxos forever.¹³²

The Guayochería, Rebellion or Flight?

In the 1880s, the pressure against the Moxo became unbearable. The rubber boom, Trinidad government officials, white *patrones* and indigenous *caciques* were competing for Moxo labor and the common Indians’ situation was becoming desperate. On top of that, there had been a series of serious floods and smallpox epidemics. The situation was particularly harsh in the city Trinidad, which was the epicenter of Moxo

¹³² In the Andes, a similar situation took place before, during and after the Great Rebellions of the 1780s. Many indigenous elites had been increasingly alienated from their peoples. For Chayanta see, for example, Sergio Serulnikov, *Subverting Colonial Authority, Challenges to Spanish Rule in Eighteenth-Century Southern Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

discontent. It was impossible to avoid *patrones*. According to one Moxo, who complained to the former *corregidor* of Trinidad, Pedro Semo, crews had planted maize and when they returned to harvest it, they found that birds had eaten it, because there was nobody available to take care of the fields. As a result, they were forced to purchase food from the whites at high prices. Furthermore, the prefect was taking people away from their *chacos* as crews for the Beni for a miserly 10 bolivianos, even if the current wage was twenty to thirty bolivianos. Other local authorities (indigenous and non-indigenous) were also using them as crews and to harvest in their haciendas. Anybody who did not have a *patrón* was instantly “recruited.” A Moxo Indian, Manuel Jesús, declared that he did not want to have any *patrones* and that he wanted to be a free man and earn lots of money rowing for cash and he invited his people to join him.¹³³

As early as 1882, the Beni prefect Marcelino Marañón reported that he was trying to attract a group of Trinitarios who had fled to San José de la Colonia, across the Mamoré River, back to Trinidad by convincing them that their constitutional rights would be respected and encouraging them to return to “civilized life.”¹³⁴ It seems that the movement of Trinitarios to the other side of the Mamoré was a gradual phenomenon and that it had started in the 1850s, even before the rubber boom. Trinitarios and other Moxo founded new settlements far away from white authorities with names such as San Lorenzo, San Francisco and Rosario. In 1887, the Santa Cruz press announced that a

¹³³ *Los Debates* (Sucre), 10 Nov. 1887, n°117. “Los Sucesos del Beni: Informe del Sub-corregidor...sobre los sucesos de la guayochería en el Beni.” Signed by Miguel Antelo, 1-2.

¹³⁴ Prefectura y Comandancia del Beni, Trinidad, 17 July 1882 to Sr. Prefecto y Comandante del Departamento de Santa Cruz. Signed by Marcelino Marañón. (AUGRM/Prefectura, Correspondencia, Provincias 1883).

caravan of Trinitarios had left the city of Trinidad in the early hours of March 7. They left their houses and traveled to the uninhabited areas near the Mamoré headwaters, toward the Chapare River. According to the newspaper, they had left Trinidad complaining about forced labor and the repression of their religious celebrations. The newspaper also stressed that this was different from other migrations (such as the emigration of the Churapa from Buena Vista, near Santa Cruz) because the Trinitarios were self-sufficient, had cattle, horses, and sheep, and were even capable of manufacturing their own sugar.¹³⁵ The white inhabitants of Trinidad considered this an insurrection, since the Trinitarios refused to work. They formed a “War Committee,” also called a Committee of Public Safety (following the example of the French Revolution), under the leadership of the prefect Daniel Suárez; not surprisingly, Nicolás and Rómulo Suárez were prominent members of the Committee.

On April 23, the same newspaper announced that the Indians of San Lorenzo del Sécuré had rebelled. They had insulted Don Miguel Antelo (who was the sub-prefect of the area), and ambushed an armed punitive force of thirty men using rifles and arrows. Only nine of the thirty men survived, most of the dead were *collas*. According to Miguel Ferrera, the author of the article, the Moxo had good horses and weapons and had sworn to “eliminate Trinidad’s white race.”¹³⁶ Later testimony claimed that the Moxo had actually attacked the punitive force because they had desecrated the church by cooking

¹³⁵ *La Estrella del Oriente* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra), 23 Mar. 1887, n°798.

¹³⁶ “Indios de San Lorenzo del Sécuré sublevados.” Signed in Loreto by José María Ferrera on Mar. 26, 1887. *La Estrella del Oriente*, (Santa Cruz), 23 Apr. 1887, n°808.

and sleeping in it.¹³⁷

The uprising lasted for a few months. In April 1887, the newspaper *La Estrella del Oriente* claimed that the Beni massacres had paralyzed commerce between the Beni, the Madeira and Santa Cruz.¹³⁸ In May 11, the Moxo rebels burned the port of San Antonio (on the Mamoré River, south of Trinidad), and threw all government correspondence into the river.¹³⁹ By June 14, a cavalry company under the command of Colonel César Moscoso left Sucre to go to Santa Cruz and the Beni. The Ministry of War did not take any further action because it did not receive any information of the cavalry company.¹⁴⁰ In June 15, *La Estrella del Oriente* reported that the rebels had burned Trinidad and that a force of 150 men (including the Canichana mentioned above), had marched in pursuit of the rebels.¹⁴¹ The prefect wrote that he had not solved the problem and was waiting for government reinforcements.¹⁴² In July, the Sucre force of one hundred finally arrived at Santa Cruz de la Sierra and, on July 7, there was an unofficial rumor that the uprising had been defeated.¹⁴³ By July 27, presumably after the defeat of the Moxo, the new prefect of the Beni, named by the President, José María Urdinea marched to Trinidad with fifty riflemen and deposed Miguel Suárez.¹⁴⁴ The Conservative

¹³⁷ Arteche, *Misión de los Padres*, 28.

¹³⁸ *La Estrella del Oriente* (Santa Cruz), 26 Apr., 1887, n°817.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 11 May 1887.

¹⁴⁰ Ministerio de Guerra Bolivia and J.M. Del Carpio, *Informe que el Ministro de la Guerra presenta al Congreso de 1887* (Cochabamba: n.p., 1887), 121.

¹⁴¹ Prefectura y Comandancia General del Beni to Sr. Prefeto y Comandante General del Departamento de Cochabamba, Trinidad June 1887. Signed by Daniel Suárez reproduced in *El Herald* (Cochabamba), 12 July 1887, n°1211.

¹⁴² Ministerio de la Guerra, Sucre 24 June 1887 to Sr. Prefecto y Comandante General del Beni. Signed by C. Arguedas in Bolivia and Del Carpio, *Informe...Del Carpio*.

¹⁴³ *La Estrella del Oriente*, (Santa Cruz), 2 July 1887, n°864 and *Ibid.*, 7 July 1887, n°867.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, July 27 1888, n°879.

government clearly thought that military intervention was necessary to quell a “racial war,” but also believed that the local authorities who represented mostly liberal rubber interests, such as Miguel Suárez, were responsible for the uprising. In 1888, rumors swirled that there would be another rebellion and the central government sent an additional force of fifty men from Santa Cruz, even though the President thought that the violent treatment of the Indians by local authorities had caused the rebellion. According to the Prefecture, many survivors took refuge in the Bosque de Chimanes and around San Ignacio de Moxos under the leadership of Prudencio Nosa.¹⁴⁵

Local and national authorities took the supposed Moxos uprising very seriously but, in the end, most of the responsibility for the violent repression fell on the vigilante position taken by Suárez and other rubber concerns with the complicity of the Beni Prefecture. Besides newspapers and official correspondence, other sources provide a more accurate picture of the event. The Sucre press published Miguel Antelo’s report and the prefect Daniel Suárez published a justification of his actions using the Suárez Company’s printing press. The central government also sent three Jesuits to investigate and they published a report.¹⁴⁶

These reports show that the Moxo’s movement was a millenarian movement led by the Itonama *choquigua* (shaman) Andrés Guayocho. Guayocho was a ventriloquist

¹⁴⁵ Prefectura y Comandancia General del Beni, Trinidad, July 1888, signed by Mauricio Marañón & Ministro de Gobierno y Colonización to Sr. Prefecto del Departamento del Beni, Sucre, 10 Nov, 1888, (ANB/MI 1888, t.239, n°75).

¹⁴⁶ *Los Debates* (Sucre), 10 Nov. 1887, n°117. “Los Sucesos del Beni: Informe del Sub-corregidor...sobre los sucesos de la guayochería en el Beni.” Signed by Miguel Antelo, Daniel Suárez, *Manifiesto del ex-prefecto del Beni ante la opinión pública* (Trinidad: Imp. Suárez y Hnos., 1887), and Arteché, *Misión de los Padres*.

who claimed that God spoke through him. Under his leadership, the Moxo attempted to re-create Moxo mission culture in new settlements. Miguel Antelo's report explained how many Moxos took whole families in ox carts and took all their religious images to San Lorenzo, the new rebel settlement, because they thought that God would speak there through Guayocho. In San Lorenzo, the Moxo danced the ritual *machetero* dance and participated in religious processions. The so-called insults to Miguel Antelo took place when he refused to pray with the *choquigua*. According to Antelo, the first punitive expedition took place between the eighth and twelfth of June. The expedition was a troop of *collas* (highlanders), *cruceños* and Canichana that, besides murdering at will, stole two hundred horses, two thousand heads of cattle, and took sixty ox carts with tools. They auctioned one hundred head of cattle in Trinidad and handed over two carts full of kidnapped boys and girls and several bags of cash to the local authorities. In San Lorenzo, they burned all houses, *chacos* and orchards. The local authorities gave Guayocho and his followers six hundred lashes and then proceeded to shoot them.¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile, according to Father Archete's narrative, while the Trinitarios were attending mass in the city of Trinidad, a mob of "white" citizens attacked them alleging that the cacique Nicanor Cuvene was going to lead another uprising. They removed the Trinitarios from the church and gave 500 to 600 lashes to the men and 200 to 300 to the women. As a result, nine men and one woman died, including the cacique and his

¹⁴⁷ Los Sucesos del Beni: "Informe del Sub-corregidor...sobre los sucesos de la Guayochería en el Beni." Signed by Miguel Antelo *Los Debates* (Sucre), 10 Nov. 1887, n°117.

wife.¹⁴⁸ To a certain extent, the *Guayochería* is comparable to the battle of Kuruyuki in 1892, where the Bolivian army and local supporters massacred thousands of Chiriguano and sold the survivors into slavery.¹⁴⁹ The *Guayochería* was not a full-fledged war comparable to other nineteenth century Indian wars, such as the campaigns against the Chiriguano, Yucatán's Caste War or Brazil's campaign against Canudos, but it displayed the extreme cruelty of local elites when threatened. It also showed that, despite liberal discourse, independent Bolivia continued to fear a general Castes War.¹⁵⁰ It can also be viewed as a struggle between "progressive" liberalism and "backward" conservatism. In this case, liberals repressed indigenous peoples while conservatives blamed liberals for the uprising. In an address to the National Congress, the Conservative President Gregorio Pacheco blamed the rebellion on the rubber barons and their mistreatment of the Moxo.¹⁵¹ Again, the fact that Nicolás Suárez was at the time openly involved in liberal politics is relevant here. After this event, Suárez stopped interfering with Trinidad's local politics and concentrated on his commercial activities in the Northeast.

Other scholars have stressed that mass migrations in search for the *loma santa* (the holy mound) have been a constant of Moxo history and may have pre-colonial precedents. Guayochó's history may be viewed as one episode of this migration history.

¹⁴⁸ Arteche, *Misión de los Padres*, 204-06

¹⁴⁹ See Isabelle Combès, "Las batallas de Kuruyuki. Variaciones sobre una derrota chiriguana," *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Études Andines*, 34, no. 2 (2005).

¹⁵⁰ For the Chiriguano wars, see Sanabria Hernández, *Apiaguaiqui-Tumpa, Saignes, Ava y karai*, and Langer, *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree*; for Yucatán, see the classic Reed, *The Caste War of Yucatan*; for Canudos, see Robert M Levine, *Vale of Tears: Revisiting the Canudos Massacre in Northeastern Brazil, 1893-1897* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

¹⁵¹ Gabriel René Moreno and Bolivia. Biblioteca y Archivo Nacionales, *Biblioteca boliviana. Catálogo del archivo de Mojos y Chiquitos* (Santiago de Chile: Impr. Gutenberg, 1888), 163.

The Moxo and other Amazonian indigenous groups use the search for the *loma santa* in periods of crisis. The *loma santa* is a place where food is plentiful and the Moxos will be able to follow their religion and traditions.¹⁵² The Guayocho event is also comparable to the millenarian movements of the Maya in the nineteenth century and Guayocho's ventriloquism is similar to the speaking cross of the Yucatec Maya in Chan Santa Cruz after the Castes War.¹⁵³ Finally, Anthony Wallace's now classic conceptualization of ethnic "revitalization movements" seems to be particularly fitting here.¹⁵⁴ The Moxos were a culture under serious threat and the *Guayochería* and the search for the *loma santa* can be viewed as desperate responses to these threats, very similar to the Ghost Dance of the North American Plains Indians in the 1890s, after the Wounded Knee Massacre.¹⁵⁵

In spite of the efforts of the Jesuit envoys, very few Trinitarios returned. Because of the *Guayochería*, the Moxo abandoned their mission towns and moved to remote areas, where they attempted to recreate their "mission culture." Ironically, the rubber boom had extended the Moxo influence as far away as the Madeira and had forced some of the most "settled" peoples of the Bolivian lowlands to seek new homes in the savannas and jungles. Many Moxo joined the Chimán in the Bosque the Chimanes and many

¹⁵² See Jürgen Riester and Bernd Fischermann, *En busca de la Loma Santa* (La Paz: Ed. Los Amigos del Libro, 1976); Lehm, *Loma Santa: Procesos de reducción, dispersión y reocupación del espacio de los indígenas moxeños*; Lehm, *Milenarismo y movimientos sociales en la Amazonía Boliviana: búsqueda de la Loma Santa y la Marcha Indígena para el Territorio y la Dignidad*; Jorge Cortéz, "Notas al diario del P. Gumercindo Gómez de Arteché" in *JHS Misión de los PP Astraín, Manzanedo y Arteché ca. 1888* (Trinidad: CIDDEBENI, 1989); Jorge Cortéz, "Los jesuitas y la rebelión indígena moxeña," *Historia y cultura* 17 (1990), and Van Valen, "The Ventriloquist Messiah."

¹⁵³ Victoria Reifler Bricker, *The Indian Christ, the Indian King: the Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

¹⁵⁴ Anthony F.C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropology* 58, no. 2 (1956).

¹⁵⁵ Alice Beck Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1989).

others moved southwards to the area between the Moxos savanna and the Chapare, where they formed part of multiethnic refugee communities. In 1893, the prefect of the Beni informed that, despite his efforts to bring them back to Trinidad, many of the 1887 rebels were at the Apere and Sécure Rivers (near the Mamoré's headwaters). Five hundred families under the leadership of Santos Noco were living outside the jurisdiction of the "political, ecclesiastical and judicial authorities" and "outside society in general." In an attempt to ingratiate himself with the Moxo, the prefect appointed Noco as official *cacique* and Noco responded by offering laborers for public works. Moreover, he suggested that the government should provide teachers and missionaries to prevent the Moxo from "becoming savages."¹⁵⁶ This was a victory for the Moxo refugees and they felt their relationship with the state was one of mutual recognition and reciprocity, similar to the relationship between Andean *ayllus* and the republican state. Santos Noco and the local and national authorities tolerated each other until the early twentieth century. In 1913, the prefect of Beni reported that a mission project under the leadership of the Franciscan Father Pierini had failed because Santos Noco had managed to obtain property titles for the Moxos' land and, therefore, they were full citizens, and could not be missionized as "savages."¹⁵⁷ Although the so-called rebellion of the Moxo failed, away from Trinidad the Moxo were able to retain some of their mission culture and autonomy. Local and national governments were reluctant to intervene for the fear that the Moxo would either rebel again or revert to becoming nomadic "savages." The fact that the

¹⁵⁶ Departamento del Beni Bolivia, *Informe que el Comandante General del Departamento del Beni presenta al Supremo Gobierno* (La Paz: Imp. "La Tribuna." 1893), 9, 13-14.

¹⁵⁷ *Informe del Prefecto del Beni Fabián Vaca Chávez* (ANB/PO (P) Beni 1912-13).

headwaters of the Mamoré and the Bosque de Chimanes were away from Creole settlement and did not have any *hevea* trees allowed the Moxo to “opt out” of the rubber labor market. The fact that the rubber industry had located other labor sources and that it began to use steam power is also important. After all, *gomeros* employed the Moxo mostly as rowers and they considered other Amazonian groups more suitable for tapping rubber.

Amazonian Victims of the Boom

The Tacana, Leco and different Moxo groups had various responses to the cinchona and rubber booms, but were, at least at the outset, willing to relocate to receive the theoretical material benefits that the rubber industry offered. As the rubber boom progressed, many integrated into the rubber cycle and were able to obtain some leeway because of the vital importance of their labor. However, the local Amazonian societies of the Northeast were treated very differently. They had not been exposed to missions or national society and, since they had low population densities and were organized in very de-centralized political systems, they were particularly helpless in dealing with the consequences of the rubber boom. Rubber barons did not bother with the formalities of the *enganche* system and they often ruthlessly hunted these Indians. As discussed above, many groups responded by war or flight, but many others attempted to cooperate with rubber companies, to obtain the few material benefits that they offered. Not surprisingly, the indigenous peoples that lived near prime rubber areas were virtually obliterated by the

rubber boom. This section will deal with the several traditional Amazonian societies that lived in the Northeast, such as the Araona, Pacaguara and Caripuna.

Even though the Araona had been one of the most numerous Tacana groups, the rubber boom had catastrophic effects on them. As seen above, many of the early rubber barons, notably Antonio Vaca Díez used the Araona to work in their *barracas*.¹⁵⁸ The Araona were culturally similar to Panoan groups, but were, according to Father Armentia, “very tame and humble.”¹⁵⁹ During the rubber boom, they adopted two strategies: some of them cooperated with the *gomeros* and others fled into the jungle. Ciro Bayo commented that they were extremely good workers and that, like many Tacana-speakers, they cultivated large plantations of yuca, cotton, bananas, plantains and sugar cane. They were also skillful weavers of fishing nets and hammocks. The fact that they relied on agriculture and concentrated in relatively dense *malocas* made locating and raiding their villages relatively easy. The Araona groups who incorporated into *barracas* peacefully were rapidly acculturated. The other groups did not fare better, as mentioned above; their peaceful disposition made them victims of Indian hunters.¹⁶⁰ At present, there are only two small Araona communities at the headwaters of the Manuripi River, in the department of La Paz and some dispersed families in former *barracas* of the department of Pando. They total less than one hundred

The Pano language stock is one of the most extended in Southern Peru. As

¹⁵⁸ Antonio Vaca Díez attracted the Araona peacefully by protecting them from their Pacaguara enemies. Nicanor G. Salvatierra, on the other hand, used professional Indian hunters to capture them. See chaps. 3 and 5.

¹⁵⁹ Armentia, *Diario de sus viajes*, 130.

¹⁶⁰ Bayo, *América desconocida*, 319.

mentioned above, most Pano speakers can understand each other's dialects. Because of this, one of the survival strategies that Panoan groups have used is to amalgamate in times of danger. Although there is a large number of Panoan languages in Peru and some in Brazil, in Bolivia the most important groups are the Chácobo and the Pacaguara. Historically there were also some Carípuna (who migrated to the Madeira River) and Sinabo (who became extinct during the rubber boom). The few Yaminawa who live on the Bolivian side of the Peru/Brazil/Bolivia border, in the department of Pando, are late twentieth-century refugees that entered Bolivian territory fleeing logging and colonization on the Peruvian side of the border. The rubber boom had a disastrous effect on all Pano groups and, at present, their numbers in Bolivia are extremely small. Following well-established cultural patterns, the Pacaguara integrated with the Chácobo and have, at present less than twenty members and their language is virtually extinct. Estimates of the Chácobo population vary and range from five hundred to one thousand.

The Pano groups in Bolivia are almost completely Amazonian and did not seem to have any contacts with the Andean world. During the colonial period, some of them were concentrated in the Mission of Santiago de Pacaguaras (on the Madidi River) where, as mentioned above, they lived along many Tacana-speaking ethnic groups. The mission of Santiago de Pacaguaras disappeared in 1840 and their members dispersed.¹⁶¹ Their exposure to missions was short-lived. They were enemies of the Araona and that they were allies of the Ese'ejja. The *paceño ex-cascarillero* Timoteo Mariaca reported that,

¹⁶¹ Cardús, *Misiones franciscanas*, 291.

before the rubber boom, “their population was immense.”¹⁶² Many Pacaguara were peacefully incorporated into the rubber *barracas* of the Yungas and Caupolicán *gomeros* of the Madre de Dios River. For instance, in 1880, Fidel Endara had several families working with him in Barraca Santa Ana and Timoteo Mariaca explained how he traveled to Riberalta to purchase tools, clothing and women’s trinkets for “my future Pacaguara friends and servants.”¹⁶³ They lived near the confluence of the Madre de Dios and the Genechiquía Rivers, on the right bank of the Beni River, on the upper Mamoré and up to the confluence of the Abuná with the Madeira. They were located near the most important rubber rivers of Northern Bolivia and near the most important trade routes to Brazil and Peru and felt the full impact of the rubber fever of the 1880s and 1890s. Despite their peaceful incorporation into the rubber industry, many fell to unknown diseases. The friar Nicolás Armentia, for instance, commented how only two boys and three women had survived disease in the once numerous settlement in the Jenejota River. By the 1920s the *cruceño* intellectual Medardo Chávez commented that most Pacaguara had died because of “catarrh” (probably influenza, bronchitis, pneumonia or other respiratory infections).¹⁶⁴ Culturally, the Pacaguara were very similar to their Araona and Chácobo neighbors. Their *malocas* were easily located and, like the Araona, they were peaceful towards the *gomeros*. Unfortunately, their territories were both rich in *hevea* and major Amazonian rivers crisscrossed them. This combination attracted Bolivia’s most powerful rubber barons. The headquarters of Bolivia’s most important

¹⁶² Mariaca, ed., *Exploración del Río Acre*, 14.

¹⁶³ Heath, *Informes*, 9; Mariaca, ed., *Exploración del Río Acre*, 14.

¹⁶⁴ Armentia, *Diario de sus viajes*, 127; Chávez, *Eldorado boliviano*, 17.

rubber concern, Cachuela Esperanza, for example, was located in the midst of the Pacaguara's traditional territory.

The origins of the Caripuna are controversial. According to most Bolivian sources, they were a Pano group. It seems that they used to live in the *cachuelas* area of the Beni and Mamoré Rivers (near the towns of Guayaramerín and Cachuela Esperanza) but moved to the Madeira *cachuelas* to take advantage of the rubber trade. The small Karipuná communities that presently exist in the northern part of the Brazilian State of Rondônia belong to the Tupí-Guaraní language stock. Most travelers commented on the fact that many of them had African or Caucasian features, probably due to mixtures with runaway slaves and captured white women. To complicate things further, the former Karípuna, found in the Brazilian State of Amapá (near Guyana), now speak a Karípuna Creole French. The linguists R.M.W Dixon and Alexandra Aikhenvald make a distinction between the Pano-speaking Karipuná, located on the Acre River and the Tupí-Guaraní Karipuna, found in the Taracaná River (Acre) and Rondônia.¹⁶⁵

In any case, both groups are virtually extinct and there are no Caripuna at present in Bolivia.¹⁶⁶ Since the Caripuna had strong links with other Pano groups in the Madre de Dios and Mamoré Rivers, their language may have been a mix of Pano and Tupí-Guaraní components. Incidentally, two of the *cachuelas* on the Madeira-Mamoré route Guajara-Mirím, and Guajara-Guasú (small and big fall, respectively) have Tupí-Guaraní names, but this may have been the result of Portuguese explorers introducing the

¹⁶⁵ Dixon and Aikhenvald, *The Amazonian Languages*, 132 & 120.

¹⁶⁶ As early as 1861, the Brazilian officer João Martins da Silva Coutinho, hoped that they would not “experiment the fruits of civilization” and recommended that they should be peacefully settled in “aldeias” to aid in the navigation of the Madeira River. Coutinho, *Relatório*, 53.

Amazonian *língua geral* to the area during the colonial period. After all, the Jesuit João Sempaio had established the *aldeia* of Santo Antônio das Cachoeiras in 1723, near the Madeira *cachuelas*. The Caripuna were a threat to *gomeros* since the early days of the rubber boom.. In 1893, for example, they attacked Barraca Buen Retiro, on the Madre de Dios River. According to Manuel Vicente Ballivián, they killed all the women and children and burned the *barraca* while the men were away tapping rubber.¹⁶⁷ The owner Santos Mercado organized an armed party of forty-five men that pursued them up to the Abuná River where he “exterminated a tribe of Caripunas with the loss of four members of the expedition.”¹⁶⁸ José Manuel Pando reported that the Caripuna tapped wild rubber and sold it to the Brazilians; they also acquired guns from the Ipurina (or Apurinà, an Arawak-speaking group), who lived along the Acre River.¹⁶⁹ As mentioned above, they also murdered Nicolás Suárez’s brother, and an unknown number of them died because of a punitive party, led by Nicolás himself.

Other travelers had different opinions about the Caripuna. It seems that, if the parties that crossed the *cachuelas* appeared powerful, they helped them to transfer merchandise on the portages. The Brazilian Bernardo da Costa Silva traveled with a Bolivian *fletero* who was on friendly terms with them and they helped them to cross the *cachuelas* in exchange for watered-down *cachaça*. The *fletero* justified the dilution to

¹⁶⁷ Sub-Delegación Nacional en el Madre de Dios, Acre y Purús to Sr. Ministro de Colonización y Gobierno, Riberalta 22 Oct, 1893. Signed by M.V. Ballivián (ANB/MI 1893, t. 269, n°47).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Rio de Janeiro, 6 Aug., 1894, signed by José M. Pando, in “Informe que el jefe de la exploración de los ríos del Norte de Bolivia eleva al conocimiento del Supremo Gobierno en cumplimiento del contrato celebrado en Mayo del 1892.” ALP/JMP 1894, n°. 5, 1-2.

avoid harming the Caripunas' brains and his wallet!¹⁷⁰ The Italian Franciscan Josualdo Machetti also wrote that the Caripuna traded with his Cayuvava crew, exchanging spoons, combs, gourds, knives and shirts for wild pig meat.¹⁷¹ Their final demise was a direct result of the construction of the Madeira Mamoré railway. Their constant attacks on workers' camps and stealing of company supplies led to a war of extermination against them. Railway workers shot them on sight and the company went as far as electrifying fences during the night so that many of them died electrocuted.¹⁷²

Unwilling Enganchados, from Chiquitos to the Chaco

As the traditional sources of labor for the rubber industry, the ex-missions of Moxos and Caupolicán, gradually depleted, labor recruiters looked for similar sources of labor. Many of the most important rubber barons and their recruiters hailed from the department of Santa Cruz, so it is not surprising that they attempted to incorporate the indigenous population of the department into their rubber operations. After all, Chiquitos and the Chiriguanía were, along Beni and the Northeast, the “natural” areas of *cruceño* expansion and many members of the Bolivian rubber industry had important contacts and relatives in these areas. The indigenous peoples of Chiquitos and Cordillera had contact with missions since colonial times. To a certain extent, Chiquitos paralleled Moxos and had a similar “mission culture.” The Chiriguano had a long history of resistance to colonial encroachment and, at the end of the nineteenth century, were

¹⁷⁰ Silva, *Viagens*, 276.

¹⁷¹ Macchetti, *Diario del viaje fluvial*, 36.

¹⁷² See H. M. Tomlinson, *The Sea and the Jungle* (London: Duckworth, 1912).

subject to brutal wars of conquest. Although both peoples were quite unwilling to go to the rubber forests, the presence of regional and national governments and/or missions shaped the manner in which they were recruited, through legalistic *enganche* systems. Unlike their northern counterparts, it seems that the theoretical material advantages of the rubber boom did not appeal to these indigenous groups and both of them considered the long trek to the unfamiliar rubber regions as a no-return trip and almost like a death sentence.

Chiquitos in the department of Santa Cruz had been exposed to a long period of Jesuit missions. The landscapes of the Chiquitanía are varied and include uplands, forests the Chaco and the Pantanal. Cynthia Radding has described Chiquitos as a cultural crossroads between the Chaco, Amazonia, and the Andes and has stressed influences from the Río de la Plata and Mato Grosso indigenous cultures.¹⁷³ Unlike Moxos, Chiquitos did not have an advanced pre-Columbian hydraulic culture. When the Spanish arrived, they described small settlements in which people spoke many languages and were tropical agriculturalists. Like their Amazonian counterparts, they practiced slash and burn agriculture and cultivated maize, sweet and bitter manioc, peanuts, squashes, pineapple and tobacco. Hunting and gathering were secondary activities.¹⁷⁴

Despite enormous communication difficulties, the Jesuits established their missions using Paraguay as a base. Chiquitos was vital to the Spanish empire because it shared a border with Portuguese-held Mato Grosso and was very vulnerable to Paulista

¹⁷³ Cynthia Radding, *Landscapes of Power and Identity: Comparative Histories in the Sonoran Desert and the Forests of Amazonia from Colony to Republic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 44-45.

¹⁷⁴ Parejas and Suárez, *Chiquitos: historia de una utopía*, 28.

bandeirante raids. The Jesuits founded San Xavier (1681), San Rafael (1696), San José (1698), San Juan Bautista (1699), San Ignacio de Zamucos (1723), Concepción (1707), San Miguel (1723), San Ignacio [second foundation] (1748), Santiago (1754), Santa Ana (1755) and Santo Corazón (1760). Many of these missions were abandoned and re-founded in new locations. The friars established the missions of Santo Corazón and San Ignacio near the Gran Chaco; they were supposed to facilitate communications with Paraguay, and incorporated speakers of Zamuco languages (Ayoreo and Chamacoco).¹⁷⁵

Jesuit plans to create an indigenous *lingua franca* were more successful in Chiquitos than in Moxos. The Jesuits imposed the Chiquitano language on many indigenous groups and it became a *lingua franca* in the region. Only groups that had several thousand speakers were allowed to preserve their languages, but they were also expected to speak Chiquitano.¹⁷⁶ In the early nineteenth century, according to the German anthropologist Jürgen Riester, this process was still in motion and there were only a few speakers of other languages.¹⁷⁷ Most linguists have classified Chiquitano as a language isolate but others have classified it as a Macro Gê language. This divergence may be due to the differences between the Jesuit standardized language and the actual dialects of Chiquitano.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 67-71.

¹⁷⁶ For the ethnic composition of Jesuit missions in Chiquitos, see Roberto Tomichá Charupá, *La primera evangelización en las reducciones de Chiquitos, Bolivia, 1691-1767: protagonistas y metodología misional* (Cochabamba: Editorial Verbo Divino; Ordo Fratrum Minorum Conv.; UCB, 2002), 170.

¹⁷⁷ Riester, *Zúbaka = La chiquitanía*, 31.

¹⁷⁸ For example, Adelaar, *Languages of the Andes*, classifies it as a language isolate whereas Dixon and Aikhenvald, *The Amazonian Languages*, and Gordon, ed., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, classify it as a Macro Gê language. It should be noted that very few cultural differences existed between the Chiquitano and their non-Chiquitano neighbors.

The colonial history of Chiquitos, before and after the Jesuit expulsion, is similar to that of Moxos. The missions of Chiquitos, however, were closer to each other and were closer to the only Spanish city of the area, Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Therefore, the influx of “white” *cruceño* settlers took place earlier and was deeper in Chiquitos than in Moxos.¹⁷⁹

During the nineteenth century, Chiquitos had an economy based on tropical agricultural production and cattle *estancias*. For a while, it experienced a small gold rush that attracted British prospectors who settled in Santa Rosa de la Mina. By 1898, though, lack of technology, workers and capital had reduced gold production of “Bolivia’s California” to a trivial amount.¹⁸⁰ As seen in chapter 4, though, the northern province of Velasco became an important producer of *hevea*. Not surprisingly, a scramble for Chiquitano labor pitted Beni *gomer*os against Santa Cruz *gomer*os. In 1893, the prefect of Santa Cruz predicted that rubber would “destroy the indigenous race” because they were “obedient and submissive to death.” He instructed *corregidores* to force *enganchadores* to fill out a form before recruiting indigenous laborers. On the other hand, he imposed vagrancy laws on the San José de Chiquitos population; anybody who did not have a known occupation was handed over to *patrones* by force.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ For *cruceño* influence in the early Republican period, see Radding, *Landscapes of Power and Identity*, 279-292.

¹⁸⁰ Angel Mariano Zambrana, *Informe del Prefecto y Comandante General del Departamento de Santa Cruz*, Dr. Angel M. Zambrana (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: La Estrella del Oriente, 1898); Bolivia, “El Siglo Industrial (conferencia dada en el salón del Sr. Tomás A Saucedo el 31 de octubre de 1886 por el Sr. Saac),” enthusiastically used the expression “Bolivia’s California” based on reports by the “Antelo Brothers,” 9.

¹⁸¹ Juan Francisco Velarde and Bolivia, *Informe del Prefecto de Santa Cruz*, Don Juan Francisco Velarde *acerca de la visita de Chiquitos y Velasco* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Imp. de “La Estrella de Oriente,” 1894), 16; “Anexo 3, Prefecto de Santa Cruz visita a San José de Chiquitos (30 Oct. 1893).” In *Ibid.*, 2.

Chiquitanos preferred to work in Velasco because they were close to their towns and families. Yet, in 1886 the prefect of Santa Cruz wrote that many Chiquitano from Velasco and other provinces were forcefully sent to the Brazilian state of Amazonas and that, as a response, about three thousand Chiquitano had fled to Corumbá (in Mato Grosso) as refugees where they were living in absolute poverty.¹⁸² In 1895, the sub-prefect of Velasco also ordered the Corregidor of San Ignacio de Velasco to investigate the activities of two *enganchadores*, Francisco Landívar and José Ramos, who were ready to take a considerable number of Chiquitano to the Beni River.¹⁸³

As in the Northeast, the demand for labor renewed interest in incorporating “wild” Indians. In 1891, the Santa Cruz prefect organized an expedition to the Verde River and recruited Chiquitanos in San Ignacio de Velasco as auxiliaries. The Chiquitano refused to cooperate, fearing that the prefect would kidnap them to take them to the Madeira River. The authorities stressed the fact that they recruited them to explore the Verde River to no avail.¹⁸⁴ The incorporation of the Saraveca of the Río Verde seemed to have initially succeeded; however, the Saraveca tappers rebelled, burned their “discoverers” *barracas*, and caused 60,000 bolivianos in damages.¹⁸⁵ In a remarkable effort, the subprefect of Chiquitos, Angel Lara ordered that twelve children should learn

¹⁸² Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y de Colonización Bolivia, *Memoria que el Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores y de Colonización presenta al Congreso Ordinario de 1886* (Sucre: Tip. del Cruzado, 1886), 23.

¹⁸³ Subprefectura de la Provincia de Velasco to Sr. Corregidor del Cantón San Ignacio, 3 July 1895. Signed by Liberto Justiniano. (AUGRM, 4-135, Correspondencia Supremo Gobierno y Autoridades Administrativas).

¹⁸⁴ Bolivia, Departamento de Santa Cruz, and Ramón González, *Informe que el Prefecto de Santa Cruz, General Ramón González eleva al Sr. Ministro de Gobierno, Agosto 1891* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Imp. de “La estrella del Oriente,” 1891), 16.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

the nearly extinct Guarañoca language (a Zamuco language spoken by Zamucos who had been incorporated to Jesuit missions) from the last speaker of the language in Santiago de Chiquitos, a seventy-year old patriarch. Lara thought that, by learning this language, they would be able to attract and “re-conquer” other Zamuco who had returned to independence after the Jesuit expulsion.¹⁸⁶

In the disputes between the departments of Beni and Santa Cruz, the Beni prefect Mamerto Oyola believed that the rubber barons of Beni should recruit the Chiriguano and Chiquitano from the department of Santa Cruz, rather than the ethnic groups of Moxos, because the Moxos Indians were essential as rowers, whereas neither the Chiquitano nor the Chiriguano could row. In an 1883 report, he rhetorically asked:

If [the Moxo] are taken to the Madeira, who will transport our products to the interior of the Republic? Who will be the rowers in our commerce with the department of Santa Cruz? Will the death of these towns be preferred to bring life to the rubber industry? Nobody will be opposed to the Indians from Chiquitos or Cordillera going there because these Indians are not rowers that attend to commerce; instead, we would do them a favor because they would become more hard working and more civilized.¹⁸⁷

With the Moxo uprising, this issue was solved. Most Moxo opted out from the rubber industry and the introduction of steam lessened the need for Moxo rowers. Since many rubber barons came from Santa Cruz and had close links in Chiquitos and Velasco, many Chiquitano became rubber tappers in the Northeast and the department of Santa Cruz. Many migrated to Mato Grosso to flee rubber recruiters and the process of “whitening” Chiquitos accelerated. As with the Moxo, an indirect result of the rubber

¹⁸⁶ See Isabelle Combès, "Tras las huellas de los Ñanaigua, de tapii, tapieté y otros salvajes en el Chaco boliviano," *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Études Andines* 33, no. 2 (2004).

¹⁸⁷ Oyola and Bolivia, *Informe...Prefecto del Beni*, 7-8.

boom was that the Chiquitano culture and language dispersed.

The Chaco region lies outside of the scope of this project. Nevertheless, many Chiriguano were forced to work in Bolivia's rubber industry so there is a brief analysis of their links with the rubber boom. During the nineteenth century, the Chiriguano were not able to withstand the continuous wars that had pitted them first against Spanish colonialists and late to the advance of Bolivian Creoles on their lands. The battle of Kuruyuki (1892) pitted the last Chiriguano against a Bolivian army mostly composed of *cruceños*, who massacred thousands of Chiriguano. Following time-honored practices, many Chiriguano were granted to local *estancias* or marched to Santa Cruz to be sold to the highest bidder. Not surprisingly, *enganchadores* from Santa Cruz soon realized that the Chiriguano could be a potential source of labor for the desperate rubber fields of Bolivia's Northern frontier. Despite government regulations and the efforts of Franciscan missionaries, *enganchadores* managed to remove large amounts of Chiriguano from their homelands, not to be seen again.¹⁸⁸ In his chapter on Chuquisaca's Azero province, Erick D. Langer has explained that the Chiriguano developed a myth that claimed that a giant in the North ate everybody.¹⁸⁹

The Santa Cruz prefecture attempted to regulate the forced removal of Chiriguano, as it had done in Chiquitos. In 1896, the prefect of Santa Cruz Angel Mariano Zembrana complained that Santa Cruz had a shortage of laborers because they had been taken to the Beni. He added that 300 Chiriguano from Cordillera province had

¹⁸⁸ For an in-depth study of the Chiriguano missions see Langer, *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree*.

¹⁸⁹ Langer, *Economic Change*, 145.

been forcibly taken to Santa Cruz to “promote among them a love for work, and distracting them from the laziness and drunkenness that they usually display when they are among their own people.”¹⁹⁰ It is quite plausible that many of these Chiriguano ended up in the Beni rubber fields. A year earlier, the subprefect of Cordillera province, Bernabé Araúz, had written a report about an incident concerning the Chiriguano. His report stated that while he was taking thirty-two Chiriguano peons from the town of Caipipendi, under the leadership of their *Capitán* José Manuel Caturique, to do public works, another Chiriguano told them that they would be taken to work on the Beni River and that they should not go beyond the Guapay River. Because of this, they returned home and migrated to Argentina and Azero province (in Chuquisaca). He added that it was impossible to prevent this because they respected and loved their authorities and they were responsible for taking them into these strange lands.¹⁹¹ By 1904, migration to Argentina became uncontrollable. According to the prefect Rosendo R. Rosas, there were long caravans of Chiriguano going to the Argentine sugar cane fields attracted by salaries that were as much as three times higher than those of Cordillera province.

In Northern Argentina, the Chiriguano faced a more familiar environment than in the rubber forests. The Argentines also recruited them through their traditional authorities, so the Chiriguano were able to keep ethnic solidarity. In the rubber *barracas*, they faced a completely alien environment and were among members of other ethnic groups. On the other hand, it was impossible to return from the Beni forests to

¹⁹⁰ Angel Mariano Zambrana, *Informe del Prefecto y Comandante General del Departamento de Santa Cruz Don Angel Mariano Zambrana* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Imp. de "La Estrella del Oriente," 1896), 7.

¹⁹¹ Subprefectura de Cordillera to Sr. Prefecto del Departamento Lagunillas, 23 May 1895. Signed by Bernabé Arauz. (AUGRM/4-135 Correspondencia Supremo Gobierno Autoridades Administrativas, 1895).

Cordillera. The rubber industry's labor practices also prevented them from accumulating any wealth. The prospect of being recruited for the rubber industry was indeed a death sentence for the Chiriguano.

Cruceño enganchadores went deep into the Chaco to obtain labor for rubber. The sub-prefect Bernabé Aráuz also reported that a band of *cruceños* had attacked a tribe of Yanaigua *savages* (probably Ayoreo) who had attacked Izozog. According to local authorities the attack had been against local Izoceño Guaraní who were “neither nomadic nor savage and [...] had been previously subordinated to the authorities and Christians of the Isozó and were imbued with their civilization.” The purpose of the expedition had been to obtain workers for the Beni River. *Enganchadores* paid 400 bolivianos for each woman and 500 bolivianos for each man.¹⁹²

In the rubber forests, the Chiriguano acquired a reputation for violence. Since they were in an alien environment, running away was nearly impossible. Moreover, the Chiriguano had a tradition of fighting. As pointed out above, Antonio Vaca Díez used them as his personal bodyguards. In 1916, for example, the *mayordomo* Venancio Estívariz, of Barraca Conquista, on the Madre de Dios River, murdered the Chiriguano *mozo* Félix Chuma, because he had attacked him with a machete. According to Estívariz's testimony, Chuma had often said, “he was used to kill and that his rifle was not to hunt birds and that before coming to the Beni he had killed his *patrón* in Cordillera.”¹⁹³

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ ACS/AJR, n°4, Criminal, Venancio Estívariz por muerte a Félix Chuma.

The Last Labor Pool, The Guarayos Missions

The Guarayú were the most numerous group of Guaraní speakers in the Bolivian Amazonia. In the 1820s, the Franciscan Colegio de Tarata founded the missions of Ascención de Guarayos, San Pablo, Yaguarú, Urubichá and Yotaú among the Guarayú and stayed until 1939.¹⁹⁴ The Guarayú missions became the most prosperous missions in the Bolivian lowlands and, according to Erland Nordenskiöld's sources, their population had increased by 1,362 in twenty years.¹⁹⁵ This large population and their strategic location in the routes from Santa Cruz and Chiquitos to the Beni rubber forests led to an ongoing feud between the mostly Italian and Central European Franciscans and the rubber barons. Rubber barons wanted access to the plentiful Guarayú work force and many *cruceños* demanded access to their fertile lands along the Río Blanco. The prosperity of the missions meant that they exported large amounts of foodstuffs to the rubber fields.¹⁹⁶ The Franciscans also "loaned" Guarayú workers for public works and rowing. Ciro Bayo, for example, wrote that a crew of Guarayú had taken him to Villa Bella.¹⁹⁷

Despite this, it seems like many neophytes were unhappy with the rigorous discipline in the missions. In 1909, for example, the *mayordomo* of Barraca Porvenir, on the Tahuamanu River reported that a Guarayú crew was hiding in the area and that both

¹⁹⁴ García Jordán, *Cruz y arado*, 295.

¹⁹⁵ Nordenskiöld, *Indios y blancos*, 155.

¹⁹⁶ For a history of the Guarayo missions from their foundation to their secularization, see Pilar García Jordán, *"Yo soy libre y no indio, soy guarayo": para una historia de Guarayos, 1790-1948* (Lima: IFEA, 2006).

¹⁹⁷ Bayo, *Ríos oro negro*, 12.

Sr. Ojopi and Sr. Guerrero were arguing that they belonged to them.¹⁹⁸ A noteworthy aspect of the Franciscans in Guarayos is that they, like the Jesuits had done in the colonial period, organized armed neophytes against the Sirionó. Ciro Bayo witnessed a “crusade” against the Sirionó who were stealing the mission’s cattle. Under the leadership of the Franciscan father and the *cacique*, one hundred Guarayú armed with shotguns, machetes and bows and arrows marched out of the mission with a flag and drums. According to Bayo, when the Guarayú fought the Sirionó “they forget that they are Christians, and feel as savage as the others.” Despite the missionaries’ supervision, the Guarayú went back to their old ways and boasted “they had eaten Sirionó flesh.”¹⁹⁹

The Guarayú missions survived until 1939 when the pressures for secularization became too strong. As a result, the Guarayú became fully integrated to “capitalism” under debt peonage contracts and became impoverished *cambas*, in contrast to the once prosperous missions.

In sum, the history of the indigenous peoples of the Bolivian is extremely complex. There has historically been a diversity of cultures and languages. The rubber boom could be considered the second conquest of the Bolivian lowlands. Many of the indigenous groups that had been able to avoid the colonial experience were forced to encounter it during the rubber boom. The main players in this conquest were the church, the rubber barons and, to a lesser degree, the Bolivian state. The indigenous peoples themselves responded in creative and contradictory ways. Some of them retreated further

¹⁹⁸ ACS/Correspondencia Barraca Porvenir, 30 July 1909. Signed by Iván Lugones.

¹⁹⁹ Bayo, *América desconocida*, 245-51.

into the forest, others joined the rubber bonanza as rowers, tappers or even partners and others chose violent confrontation. The effect on most indigenous peoples was catastrophic and many ethnic groups were greatly reduced or disappeared altogether. In a replay of the first conquest, old diseases, like smallpox and measles decimated indigenous populations. On the other hand, population movement and the rudiments of urbanization facilitated the propagation of specifically tropical diseases like malaria, yellow fever and leishmaniasis affected every ethnic group equally. Despite this, many groups were able to survive as “savages” until the twentieth century. Also like in the first conquest, the role of missions was controversial. In some cases, like in the Guarayú missions, they were able to shelter neophytes from abuse. To many indigenous peoples, though, life in a mission was no different from life in a *barraca* and they preferred to work for *patrones* for a fictitious salary. Another aspect of the rubber boom is that it caused a great deal of population movement. The rubber areas attracted peoples from throughout the Bolivian lowlands and indigenous peoples from areas as different as the foothills of the Andes, the Chaco or the deep Amazon were congregated in rubber *barracas*. The next chapter analyzes the dynamics of this encounter.

Although this chapter uses a typology of indigenous responses to the rubber boom, it is very loosely applied. Indigenous peoples were very adaptable and quickly shifted their responses to changing situations. The Moxo, for example, were among the most “acculturated” indigenous peoples of the Bolivian lowlands. They had been exposed to Jesuit missions, were located near the administrative capital of Beni, Trinidad, and had limited exposure to the cinchona boom. At the outset of the rubber boom, they

were still concentrated in the former missions of Moxos. Many of them willingly enrolled as rowers and were happy to leave their *chacos* and communities to travel to Brazil in exchange for profits. As their situation at home and in the rubber areas deteriorated, they left their “settled” lifestyle and, according to contemporaries were willing to, despite centuries of mission exposure, become “savages.” During the rubber cycle, they employed several strategies ranging from acceptance, to running away to initiating millenarian movements.

The rubber boom radically altered the ethnic map of the Bolivian lowlands. Yet, it is nearly impossible to draw a physical map of the lowlands before and after the rubber boom. First, many areas of the Bolivian lowlands remained virtually unexplored. Moreover, many indigenous groups disappeared as such through disease or migration before their numbers could be recorded. Issues of ethnicity, territory and culture are also problematic. Radically different linguistic groups, for example, can have similar cultures. Territory is also relative since many peoples ran away, migrated, dispersed or amalgamated to avoid the rigors of the rubber boom. Ironically, many groups such as many of the peoples of the Moxos savanna or the Tacana expanded their “territory” by settling and remote and previously unknown areas, as their “territory” in their mission towns was taken over by Creole settlers. Despite this, the rubber boom was disastrous for most indigenous peoples of the Bolivian lowlands. It resulted in a decrease in numbers and in cultural and ethnic diversity. Peoples who were near rubber *barracas*, in particular, suffered rapid extinction through acculturation, disease or simple violence. It is, therefore, not surprising that the few indigenous peoples that have survived in the

present department of Pando and Vaca Díez Province have extremely low populations. Despite the supposed benevolence of the Bolivian rubber boom, adjacent areas in Peru and Brazil have more ethnic groups and more populations that are indigenous.

CHAPTER 7. LABOR AND THE BOLIVIAN RUBBER BARRACA

The previous chapter has looked at the indigenous population of the Bolivian lowlands. Although indigenous peoples formed the majority of the labor force in rubber *barracas*, they were not their only inhabitants. As elsewhere in the Amazon basin, one of the most striking aspects of the rubber boom was its multiculturalism. Recently “reduced” indigenous peoples lived with *cruceño* adventurers, German accountants, English mechanics, Japanese cooks and Brazilian ex-slaves. This multiculturalism, though, was rigidly hierarchical and every ethnic group had a clearly defined role within the extraction and export of rubber. Despite its generation of wealth, the Bolivian rubber boom did not produce large urban centers. As discussed in chapter 4, the city of Riberalta became the closest thing resembling a “boom town.” Yet, it kept an unmistakable frontier feel and was not very different from the large *barracas*. The *barraca* became the most prevalent institution in the Bolivian rubber boom. For a long time it was the only local institution, since the state and its administrative apparatus made a late and problematic entry into the rubber areas of Bolivia, and the *barraca* continued to

be the main form of settlement in the department of Pando and the Beni's Vaca Díez province well until the twentieth century.

This chapter starts by taking a closer look at Bolivia's *barracas*, their social and economic functions and at how they operated. When the first bureaucrats of the Bolivian State visited *barracas*, they equated them to feudal fiefdoms under the absolute power of the rubber *patrones*, beyond the jurisdiction of national laws. Their attempts to intervene in the rubber *barracas* brought mixed results, but their reports provide a rare glimpse on how these *barracas* operated. This chapter further delves into how debt peonage and enganches were carried out and how *mozos* and *fregueses* lived and adapted to both oppression and an often-alien environment. It also analyzes how rubber workers responded to a difficult environment.

The Bolivian Rubber Barraca

The few urban centers of Bolivia's Amazonia served as trading and, later, administrative centers but were far from being modern metropolitan areas. Services were basic, the settlements contained large numbers of temporary residents living in a mixture of the typical architecture of the towns of Moxos and Santa Cruz and Amazonian *barracas*. The lack of missions, military outposts, haciendas or permanent indigenous settlements made the rubber *barraca* the basic social and economic organization of Bolivia's rubber areas. Many historians have equated the *barracas* to Latin American

haciendas and many others have likened them to military outposts.¹ Although both characterizations are true, the rubber *barraca* was sui generis and the result of both traditional organizations from the Bolivian lowlands and of the conditions created by the frontier and the peculiarities of the rubber industry.

Since the transportation of rubber and supplies was essential, most rubber *barracas* were located near rivers. The important buildings of the *barraca*, such as the *mayordomos*' residence, the company store or *pulpería* and the warehouses were usually located near the river docks. Some *barracas* also attempted to produce food staples such as maize, plantains and yuca and the *chacos*, whether they belonged to the *barraca* or to individual *siringueros*, were located near the river to take advantage of seasonal flooding. From the main *barraca*, the different *centros gomeros* were united by paths (*sendas*) which, in turn, led to *estradas* of approximately 150 rubber trees (See Fig. 28). The distance between *centros gomeros* and the main *barraca* depended on the density of rubber trees. For example, the Intendente Pastor Baldivieso mentioned that in 1896 many *centros* were located at a distance between forty to fifty kilometers from the main *barraca*.² As rubber trees near river shores depleted and more *siringueros* moved in, these distances increased and strained the resources of many smaller *barracas*. It seems that, after the disastrous floods of the early rubber boom, many *barracas* were moved to higher ground, which made transportation more difficult and increased encounters with

¹ See, e.g., Deprez, "Rise and Decline;" Gamarra Téllez, "Haciendas y peones." The first stresses the military aspects of *barraca* organization while the second stresses its hacienda-like features..

² Baldivieso, *Informe*, 5-6.

hostile indigenous groups.³

The building materials of most *barracas* were local and reflected the building style of Riberalta (See chap. 4). In some of the most populated and wealthier *barracas*, such as Ortón (Antonio Vaca Díez), San Pablo (Nicanor G. Salvatierra), or in Cachuela

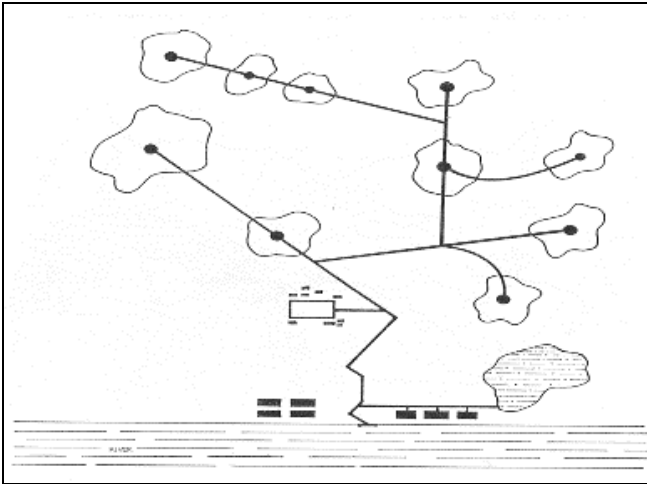


Figure 28. Diagram of the Settlement Pattern of a Bolivian Rubber Estate

The buildings near the river are the main buildings of the *barraca*. The thatched area on the right side is the *chaco* and the lines are paths that lead to the different *centros gomeros* which tapped concentrations of *hevea* trees.

Source: Based on Pablo Pacheco. *Integración económica*, 278.

Cachuela Esperanza, wealthy *patrones* invested in brick, cement and even imported tin roofs. Housing for workers was precarious, a combination of the collective *cuarteles* of the Moxos towns and the indigenous *malocas*. According to the Argentine engineer Antonio Pauly, these dwellings were “spacious houses shared by several families belonging to all races and to both sexes to the detriment of their morality and marital faithfulness, these communal *barracas* for workers are an ideal breeding ground for venereal and contagious diseases.” He added that many tappers, who presumably lived in

³ According to Luigi Balzan, most *barracas* were on small heights. Balzan, "Da Reyes a Villa Bella," 574.

isolated *centros*, also built individual shelters in their days off.⁴ The general lack of sanitation prevalent throughout Amazonia also applied to *barracas*; the rubber expert Joseph Woodroffe remarked that “offal is generally thrown and allowed to accumulate on the banks of the river or creek, this same point is where water is collected for domestic and drinking purposes, bathing, washing clothes and cleaning fish and game.”⁵ In reality, there was not much of a difference between *barracas* and the modest urban areas of Bolivia’s rubber regions. As chapter 4 has explained, Riberalta, for example, was plagued with sanitation problems and was noted for the precariousness of its dwellings. The *mayordomos*’ dwelling and storehouses played a central part in a *barraca*’s physical layout (See Fig. 29). Besides his more elaborate housing, the *mayordomo* displayed his authority through the public display of the instruments that he used to exert the company’s control over the work force. According to the British traveler Charles Johnson Post, every *barraca* displayed in a prominent place: “the stocks with the rows of leg-holes meeting in a piece of a great mahogany beam [...], a piece of chain and bar leg irons line in a nearby corner and a twisted bull hide whip hanging from the thatch above.”⁶ To many Bolivians this display signified the “barbarousness” of the *barraca* system. Physical punishment was not shunned in the rest of the Republic, but government bureaucrats resented that the *mayordomos* and *patrones* could administer it without resorting to the courts. As late as 1915, a Cobija newspaper complained that *barracas* did not recognize other authorities as the administrator or *patrón* and that

⁴ Pauly, *Ensayo*, 19.

⁵ Woodroffe and Smith, eds., *The Rubber Industry*, 139.

⁶ Post, *Across the Andes*, 334.

civilization had not arrived there yet.⁷ The *cruceño* intellectual Justo Leigue Moreno also observed that in the early days of the rubber boom, *siringueros* had neither laws nor authorities and the will of the strongest and the patron's authority ruled.⁸



Figure 29. An idealized version of the barraca of a wealthy gomero in the Lower Madeira c. 1870s
Source: Keller, *Amazon and Madeira Rivers*, 40.

Access to *barracas* was restricted and they did indeed operate as independent company towns. Whenever there were problems between *gomeros*, heavily armed *capangas* would restrict access to the rivers near a *barraca*. For example, during the feuds between Antonio Vaca Díez and Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra the latter published a pamphlet which claimed that watercraft could only stop in friendly *barracas* and that “all crews in these rivers, regardless of nationality, color or occupation are in danger” of

⁷ *El Noroeste* (Cobija), 8 Dec. 1915, n°200.

⁸ Leigue Moreno, *Nociones de geografía*, 52.

being kidnapped.⁹ This also applied to government representatives. In 1896, for example, José Manuel Roca, under direct orders from Antonio Vaca Díez, did not allow the Ortón *corregidor*, Don Manuel Granier, to land in the Montecristo *barraca*.¹⁰ On the other hand, during peaceful times, lavish hospitality with travelers was de rigueur and *barraqueros* were deeply offended if they were not visited. In visits to *barracas* in Caupolicán, for example, Charles Johnson Post was routinely offered gin cocktails, *pisco* (Peruvian grape brandy), champagne, *cachaça* and beer (“all of it tepid”) as well as half a sheep or a whole pig, *chalonga* (salted and sun-dried sheep), *chuño* (freeze-dried potatoes), plantains and imported preserves for desert. The Italian Luigi Balzan, though, was not very impressed with the quality of the alcohol sold in *barraca*; he observed that foul liquids were given the names of Bordeaux, Chambertin, Medoc, Vermouth and so forth.¹¹ The widespread consumption of alcohol is not surprising in frontier settlements that were mostly inhabited by males. All travelers commented on the universal use of alcohol that often interfered with the daily routines of rubber gathering. Charles Johnson Post commented, “*cachaça* was always on draught, for all at all times, half a week was a fiesta and Sunday a brawling bedlam.” Of course, as discussed later, this alcohol was freely available but not necessarily available free.¹²

The lack of institutions like schools, missions, military service or churches meant that the *barraca* was the main social unit of the rubber areas. As such, it became a

⁹ *Impugnación a los folletos mandados publicar por Augusto Roca en La Paz y Santa Cruz contra Nicanor Salvatierra en el año 1893* (Riberalta: Tip. Haencke, 1894), 5.

¹⁰ Baldivieso, *Informe*, 29.

¹¹ Balzan, "Da Reyes a Villa Bella," 590

¹² Post, *Across the Andes*, 166.

vehicle for acculturating indigenous peoples from different ethnic groups. The fact that rubber workers belonged to many different ethnic groups and that *barracas* were extremely isolated, as well as their coercive nature accelerated acculturation. During the early rubber boom, when most indigenous workers were from the Moxos savanna and shared a relatively homogenous culture, as discussed in chapter 6, mission culture was able to survive, to a certain extent, in the early *barracas*. As the rubber boom expanded, though, the labor force became increasingly diverse and incorporated peoples from many ethnic backgrounds. Amazonian indigenous peoples taken by force from their communities and families at an early age were particularly vulnerable to changing their culture. Antonio Pauly declared that in the rubber *barracas* “the Tacana, Quechua and Pano have exchanged their colorful tree-bark garments for some rags manufactured in Europe.”¹³ Erland Nordenskiöld visited indigenous residences in the rubber *barracas* and commented:

Everything indigenous has disappeared now there is only simple clay jugs, one or two baskets, empty tins of alcohol, glasses made from canned preserves and similar things are their domestic gear. Everything is poor, grey, tasteless, and gloomy. People seem sick, withered; their life is empty, joyless without any interest, not even their children play as freely and as naturally as the children of the jungles’ Indians do.¹⁴

The prevalence of imported goods was very important; they were an essential part of both the *habilito* and the *enganche* system. Figure 28 shows some *chacos*, but it seems that *chacos* were secondary to both rubber tapping and imported goods. Civil servants such as the Intendente Pastor Baldivieso, who came from the highlands, were appalled by

¹³ Pauly, *Ensayo*, 28.

¹⁴ Nordenskiöld, *Indios y blancos*, 85.

the fact that, despite the apparent fertility of the Amazonian soils, *patrones* preferred to import agricultural products rather than plant crops. He commented that tobacco and coffee were imported from Moxos at great expense, even though they could be easily grown in *barracas* and cacao groves grew wild but nobody bothered to harvest them. Of course, this was due to the *barracas*' labor allocation, since labor was always scarce, it was desperately needed to tap and export rubber. Some *siringueros* cultivated some yuca, rice and maize, but it was never enough to meet their needs. On the other hand, he commented that the Tacana and some "bárbaros" grew coca for their own consumption and that there were some exceptions to the growing of foodstuffs. Yet, some *barracas* produced sugar products for the local market. Barraca Ivón, near the Lower Beni River, for example, produced one hundred *quintales* of sugar cane alcohol (approximately 4,600 kg), 1,500 *arrobas* of sugar (17,250 kg) and 7,700 *arrobas* (88,550 kg) of *chancaca* (unprocessed raw sugar).¹⁵ Ivón was relatively near Riberalta and other settlements, so it is possible that the *barraca* attempted to complement rubber with agricultural products for the market. In any case, the presence of agriculture depended very much on the *barraca* owners' attitudes towards agriculture and on the availability of workers to carry it out.

The *centros gomeros* were isolated in the middle of the jungle. Within them, rubber tappers built precarious structures to live and to smoke their rubber. They were usually composed of a *siringuero* and his family (if any) or of groups of three to five *siringueros*. Individual tappers only visited the *barraca* to deliver rubber or to collect

¹⁵ Baldivieso, *Informe*, 7-8.

supplies. According to the Intendente Baldivieso, the *centros* were “impenetrable” as only locals knew their location. *Siringueros* rarely left the closed world of *barraca* and centro. *Patrones* monopolized river transportation and armed *mayordomos* kept a close watch on their subordinates. Besides, most rubber tappers found it impossible to travel by land in the dense jungles of the Bolivian Amazon. The Intendente Baldivieso, for example, commented that many tappers had not left their *barraca* in ten or fifteen years. The *centros gomeros* were also consistently used to hide criminals or *mozos* that had been kidnapped.¹⁶

Labor Stratification in the Rubber Industry

This section takes a close look at the inner organization of the rubber industry at its most basic level. The rubber industry was a simple extractive industry; nevertheless, the gathering, transformation and marketing of wild rubber required a certain degree of sophistication. Previous chapters have described urban centers like Riberalta and administrative centers like Cachuela Esperanza. Most of the population of the Bolivian rubber areas, though, was concentrated in the many *barracas* that dotted the Amazonian rivers and creeks. At the outset of the rubber boom, these settlements were few and far apart, but as the rush for rubber accelerated, they gradually increased and their boundaries grew. The following map gives an idea of how *barracas* were spatially distributed in the Bolivian Northeast at the height of the Casa Suárez’ success (1916-1922). At the time, the Casa Suárez had a virtual monopoly of rubber production in the

¹⁶ Ibid., 29.

Territorio Nacional de Colonias and Vaca Díez province. Notice that most of the *barracas* were near major rivers.

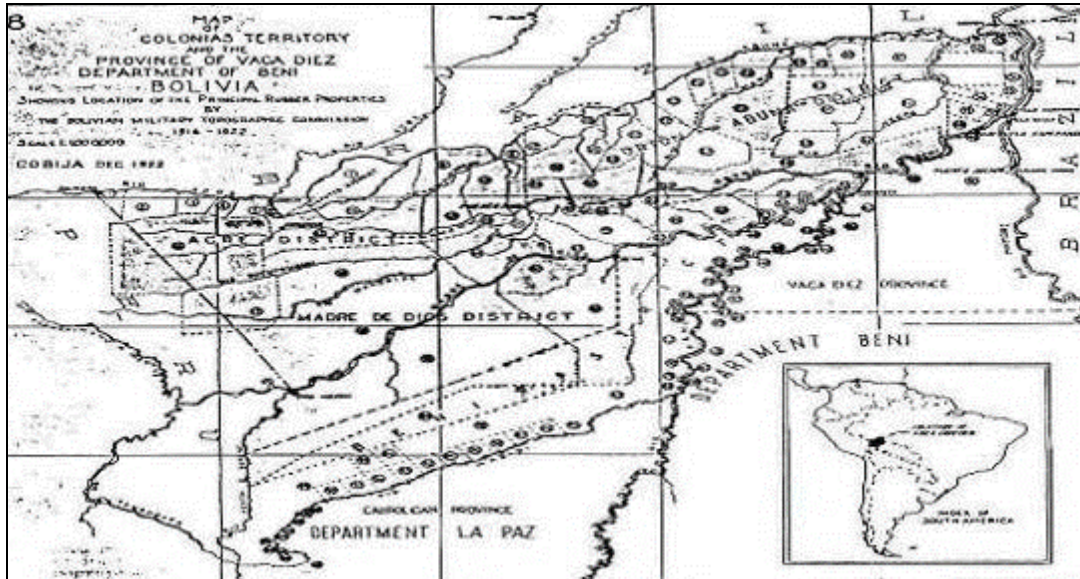


Figure 30. Location of Rubber barracas in the Territorio Nacional de Colonias and Vaca Díez Province, 1916-22

Note: The shaded areas indicate properties of the Casa Suárez.

Source: Schurz, *Rubber Production in the Amazon Valley*.

Not surprisingly, the rubber industry was deeply stratified. Ethnic identity was a very important aspect of this stratification. The politician and historian Pedro Kramer (born in La Paz and congressional representative for the department of Beni) succinctly stated that the industrialists belonged to the white race and the *empleados* (salaried clerks and other administrative assistants) and workers belonged to the Mestizo race. Optimistically, he included Indians in the Mestizo category, hoping that they would soon become acculturated. As early as 1897, he argued that the Northeast should separate from the department of Beni on racial grounds. He explained that in 1845, shortly after its foundation, the department of Beni had one white person for every thirty-seven

Indians. On the other hand, the Northeast had, according to Krammer, 16% Whites, 16% Mestizos, 67% Indians and 1% Blacks. Assuming that mestizos were “whiter” than Indians were, they amounted to only 32% per cent of the population, whereas Indians and Blacks constituted 68% of the population. Still, according to Krammer, the rubber industry would eventually bring more white immigration and the Northeast would become Bolivia’s “whiter” department.¹⁷

There were various attempts to carry out censuses of the rubber *barracas*. Often these censuses were inaccurate; they were made by *barraca* administrators at their whim or by civil servants who were denied access to most *barracas* and *centros*. Government records, for example, routinely carry the notation that the *barracas*’ owner refused to cooperate.¹⁸ Even the detailed 1900 census of Bolivia was full of omissions as far as the Territorio Nacional de Colonias and the department of Beni were concerned. For the former, the census editor, Manuel Vicente Ballivián, felt the need to explain that there was a huge difference between the population listed in the census (7,228) and the estimated population of the area (31,883).¹⁹ Despite their inaccuracies, censuses give a glimpse of the nature of the *barracas*’ population. This section uses the results of the 1900 census, the 1897 censuses of the Madre de Dios and Beni River *barracas* taken by the National Delegation, a census of Barraca Ingavi on the Madre de Dios River, taken by

¹⁷ Pedro Krammer, *Un nuevo Departamento (Proyecto de Ley presentado a la legislatura de 1896)* (La Paz: Taller Tipo. Litográfico, 1897), 58.

¹⁸ The 1897 censuses of the Beni and Madre de Dios Rivers, e.g., included the caption: “Production figures are not exact due to the mistrust of some owners who did not provide, in the information that they provided, the production totals of their barraca.” “Censo general de las barracas de los ríos Beni y Madidi,” Riberalta 30 Nov. 1897 in *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 8 Jan. 1898, n°53 and “Censo de población del Río Madre de Dios” Riberalta 20 Dec. 1897 in *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 15 Jan. 1898, n°54.

¹⁹ Bolivia, *Censo General 1901*, 141.

the Casa Suárez in 1910, and a military census of the Madre de Dios taken in 1916 to determine some general trends of the population of the rubber *barracas*. These censuses can only provide general trends because all census takers used different criteria to collect their data. Figure 31 shows the hierarchy of a typical rubber concern during the early rubber boom and it is useful to understand the position of each census category within the hierarchy of a rubber company.

A rubber company had three divisions. The *barracas* were the most important aspect of these divisions and they had the highest concentration of employees. For example, in 1901 Cachuela Esperanza only had a population of 195, even though it was the seat of the largest rubber concern in the area, whereas many *barracas* had a larger population.²⁰ In 1897, for instance, the Madre de Dios district had a total population of 2,484 concentrated in fourteen *barracas*. Some of these *barracas* had relatively large populations: El Carmen (810), Camacho (309), San Pablo (276), Sena (215), and Conquista (207). The total population of the Beni River area was 2,596 and the most populated *barracas* were Fortaleza (274), Etea (243) San Lorenzo 240, Santo Domingo (209) and Exaltación (155).²¹ Not all rubber companies had haciendas, but if they did, they had separate administration and were in charge of the *arrieros* (muleteers), who were responsible for the transportation of supplies and rubber between *barracas* and

²⁰ Bolivia, *Censo general 1901*, 141 and 20.

²¹ “Censo general de las barracas de los ríos Beni y Madidi,” Riberalta 30 Nov. 1897 in *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 8 Jan. 1898, n°53 and “Censo de población del Río Madre de Dios” Riberalta, 20 Dec. 1897 in *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 15 Jan. 1898, n°54.

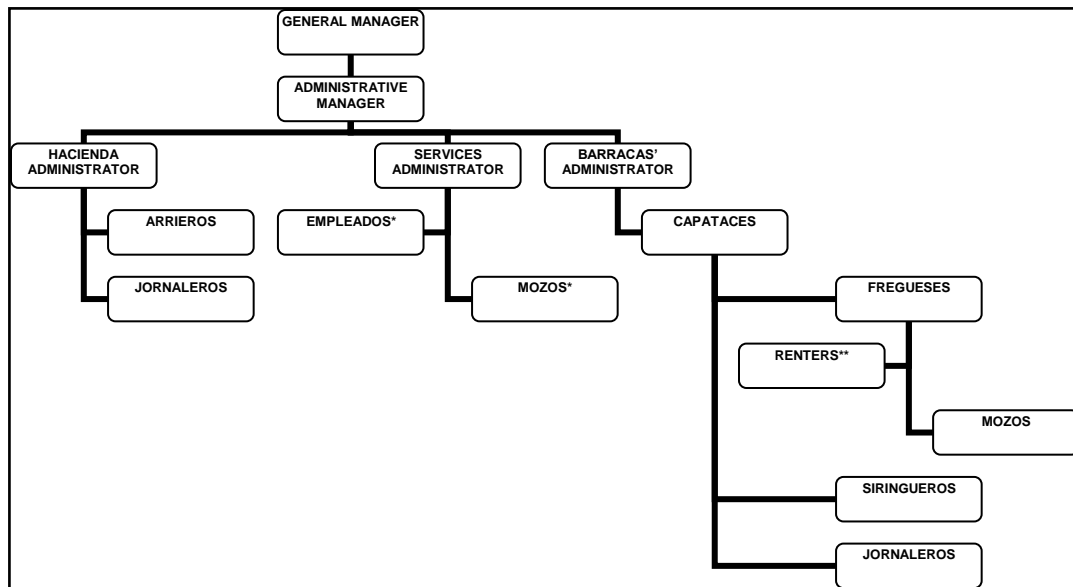


Figure 31. Organizational chart of a typical rubber enterprise

*To support all aspects of the rubber enterprise (production, services, and trade).

**They were technically not part of the rubber enterprise.

Source: Based on Pacheco. *Integración económica*, 108.

centros, and of agricultural workers (*jornaleros*). The services administrator was in charge of *empleados*, who worked in the seat of the company and in larger *barracas*, as well as the *mozos*, who were used for all aspects of the rubber enterprise such as tapping rubber, serving as watercraft crews (both as rowers of small craft and as crews of steamers), cutting down the forest for *chacos* and so forth. Larger *barracas* had an administrator who supervised the *capataces* or *mayordomos*. They were responsible for collecting rubber from *centros gomeros* and for ensuring that supplies reached them. They were also responsible for supervising all rubber tappers. *Fregueses* were supposed to be above *siringueros* and were the *patrones'* trusted men. They delivered rubber in exchange for supplies through the *habilito* system. Many *fregueses* had *alquilantes* (renters) who rented *estradas* from them and many also had *mozos* that worked for them.

Finally, the *siringueros* (who were often just called *mozos*) were responsible for tapping rubber for—a mostly fictitious—salary, food and lodging and were part of the debt peonage system, which is described below. Finally, *jornaleros* worked under similar conditions, were used to support rubber tapping, such as opening up *estradas* or transporting supplies or rubber (See Fig. 31).

Gender Divisions

Most observers of the Bolivian rubber boom commented on the lack of women in rubber *barracas*. For instance, Erland Nordenskiöld stated there were not any women in the *barracas* that he visited.²² Evidence shows, though, that the lack of women, typical of frontier societies engaged in “male” activities, was not universal. Despite the “macho” images of *siringueros* working in the wilderness fighting hostile Indians and wild animals, rubber tapping per se did not require much strength or skill. Ciro Bayo observed that rubber tapping was so simple that women and children could do it.²³ In fact, according to José Manuel Aponte, women were better at it because they did not destroy rubber trees and, because of their children, did not run away.²⁴ The lack of women was more apparent during the early days of the rubber boom. During the violent struggles between different *patrones*, women often became the prize. According to Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra, one of Antonio Vaca Díez’s *capangas* often boasted about

²² Nordenskiöld, *Indios y blancos*, 139.

²³ Bayo, *América desconocida*, 289.

²⁴ Aponte, *Revolución del Acre*, 35.

how he kidnapped women from *barracas* to reward his posse.²⁵ Not surprisingly, abuse of women was common. Luigi Balzan wrote that wife beating was considered normal around the rubber areas.²⁶ The Riberalta Press wrote frequently about violence against women. The newspaper *El Noroeste*, for example, reported that Rosendo Antelo had forcefully brought two young women from Santa Cruz. When they arrived at Riberalta, a certain Lorenzo Díez attempted to seduce them. When they resisted his advances, he proceeded to hand them over to a “savage Indian” from Tumupasa who raped them and took them to the *barracas* in the Ortón River, without having signed a work contract.²⁷

Most *patrones* were against the presence of women in their *barracas*. Iván Lugones, the *mayordomo* of the Barraca Porvenir on the Tahuamanu River wrote that they were returning Marcelina Peña to the *casa matriz* because she did not deserve either a salary or food because she did not have any skills, other than being a seamstress. In another letter, he reported that the *fregués* Celso Ojopi had a labor force of three women and three boys (one of them “an imbecile” and another one “good for nothing” because of his anemia) and, therefore, should be dismissed.²⁸

Nonetheless, most *siringueros* attempted to have female companionship. One of the most well-known images of the Bolivian rubber boom shows a *siringuero* going to the bush with his female companion carrying a baby and a trade gun, while he carries a small bag. The family is barefoot and is wearing clothing made from cheap European

²⁵ Salvatierra and Rober[t]son, *Atentados*, 5.

²⁶ Balzan, “Da Reyes a Villa Bella,” 500.

²⁷ *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 8 May 1897, n° 21.

²⁸ Iván Lugones to Suárez Hnos., Cachuela Esperanza, 21 Dec. 1909 and Id. 2 Dec. 1909. ACS/Correspondencia Porvenir.



Figure 32. A family of rubber tappers going to their estradas

Source: Photographed by Carl Blattman. Reproduced from Centeno et al. *Imágenes*, 35

imports, supplied by the *patrón* (See Fig. 32). Besides companionship and traditional chores, women contributed to the domestic economy by making rubber shoes, ponchos and bags for sale.²⁹ In his autobiographical novel *Páginas bárbaras*, the Chuquisaca physician Mendoza also mentioned that many *siringueros* captured women from independent indigenous groups. A *siringuero* from La Paz, for example, had taken a Pacaguara woman and, besides doing domestic chores and tending to their *chaco*, she was one of the most formidable tappers in the *barraca*.³⁰ Very often, these women were purchased. During expeditions against unincorporated groups, professional Indian hunters killed the warriors and took females and their children as captives. This was particularly true in the most peripheral regions of the Upper Amazon. The Brazilian

²⁹ Jaime Mendoza, *Páginas bárbaras; novela* (La Paz: Arnó Hnos., 1900), 128.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

historian Cristina Scheibe Wolff, for instance, has chronicled such expeditions in the no-man's land between the Upper Juruá, Purús and Acre Rivers (disputed by Bolivia, Brazil and Peru), and has calculated that a *siringueiro* was willing to offer 300 to 400 kilograms of rubber, that is the yearly production of an average *siringueiro*, for a captured indigenous woman.³¹

The *patrones'* arguments against women in *barracas* disguised blatant labor abuses. Women and children were expected to tap rubber to justify their presence in the *barracas* and yet, they did not obtain any direct benefits for it. Their rubber was added to the rubber of male tappers and they did not receive any credit for it. In 1897, for example, the newspaper *El Noroeste* reported that a sixteen-year old woman, Pastora Cruz, was legally married but she was forced to tap rubber without a contract.³² In 1897, the National Delegation also denounced that another female was forced to tap and when she requested her *cuenta* (account), she was given one hundred lashes.³³ It seems, though, that whenever the labor force became scarce, women and children had to carry the load of rubber tapping. For instance, in 1909, Nicolás Suárez himself, who was opening up the isolated Barraca Nueva Esperanza in the remote jungles north of the Ortón River, commented that the problem was that the "flower of our personnel" was sent to man boats and only "sick *mozos*, women and imbeciles stayed in the *barracas* to tap rubber."³⁴ Even though women and children were not given full credit for their labor,

³¹ Wolff, *Mulheres da Floresta*, 164.

³² *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 24 Apr. 1897, n°19.

³³ *Ibid.*, 27 Mar. 1897, n°5.

³⁴ ACS/Correspondencia, Ingavi, Nicolás Suárez to Sr. Alberto Von Berck, Nueva Esperanza, 22 Nov. 1909.

in the event of a *siringuero's* death, their debt was transferred to their surviving spouses and children, "even if they were not legitimate."³⁵ Ironically, it was only upon the death of a man that women became of legal age. Bolivian women did not acquire judicial equality until the 1940s and were only allowed to vote in municipal elections in 1945. Yet, local authorities insisted that women were entitled to individual contracts, yet deplored that they should inherit the debt of their male partners.³⁶

The sex ratios of the *barraca* census confirm unbalanced sex ratios. For instance, the *barracas* in the Madre de Dios had 58% males and 42% females, the *barracas* in the Beni and Madidi contained 57% males and 43% males, finally, the *barraca* Ingavi, had a ratio of 56% males to 44% females.³⁷ These figures taken from different *barracas* at different times are remarkably similar and suggest a general trend. Although there was a sex unbalance, the situation was not as male-dominated as observers indicated. It was more balanced than in many Moxos towns, where, during the early days of the rubber boom travelers had reported five to six women for each man.³⁸

Like elsewhere, life on the frontier meant that many institutions were lacking. The institution of marriage for example, whether religious or civil, was not very common. Neither priests nor judges were frequently present in the rubber areas and, as a result,

³⁵ Baldivieso, "Informe que presenta al Sr. Ministro del Gobierno nacional el intendente de la Delegación Nacional en Noroeste, Teniente coronel Pastor Baldivieso, Riberalta (1895)," ANB/MI, Delegación Nacional en el Noroeste, t.287, n°15.

³⁶ Marta Irurozqui, "Sobre leyes y transgresiones: reformas electorales en Bolivia, 1826-1952," in *Legitimidad, representación y alternancia en España y América Latina: las reformas electorales, 1880-1930*, ed. Carlos Malamud (México: El Colegio de México; Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 170.

³⁷ "Censo de población del Río Madre de Dios," Riberalta, 20 Dec. 1897 in *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 15 Jan. 1898, n°54; "Censo del Establecimiento Ingavi en 1910," ACS/ Censos 1910.

³⁸ Mathews, *Up the Amazon and Madeira Rivers*, 160-61.

marriages had to be performed *en masse* whenever they were available. In the Beni and Madidi *barracas*, a large percentage of the male population (65%) was single, whereas only 30% were married and 5% were widowers.³⁹ The Madre de Dios census showed an even larger percentage of single men (78%), with only 20% married men and 2% widowed. On the other hand, the 1916 military census of the Northeast had an overwhelming 88% single men, 11% married and 1% widowers, but this reflects the fact that it only counted men fit for military service.⁴⁰

In conclusion, even though travelers' accounts might have exaggerated the predominance of males in rubber *barracas*, men, and single men were indeed the majority of the population in the *barracas*, regardless of location or date. Although contemporaries dismissed both their numbers and their contribution, women were a substantial part of the *barracas*' population and were involved (albeit exploited and not recognized) in the tapping of rubber.

Place of Birth, Occupation and Ethnicity

Previous chapters have looked at places of origin of Bolivia's rubber industry workers. Most laborers came from the Bolivian lowlands. The mission towns of Moxos and Chiquitos, the city of Santa Cruz, the province of Cordillera in the department of Santa Cruz and the tropical provinces of La Paz (Larecaja, Caupolicán and, to a lesser extent, Yungas) provided most of the workers. The rubber industry also incorporated

³⁹ "Censo general de las barracas de los ríos Beni y Madidi," Riberalta, 30 Nov. 1897 in *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 8 Jan. 1898, n°53. The census does not indicate what criterion was followed to determine 'marriage' and whether common law or civil or religious marriages were accepted.

⁴⁰ Ibid., "Censo de población del Río Madre de Dios," and "Censo militar del Territorio Nacional de Colonias en el Noroeste levantado en el año 1916," in *El Noroeste*, (Cobija), 7 July 1917, n°225.

uncontacted Amazonian indigenous peoples and Brazilians, Peruvians and Colombians. There were also some workers from the Andean valleys (Cochabamba, Chuquisaca and Tarija) and some European, Japanese and Middle Eastern immigrants. Many of these immigrants were hired by Riberalta *casas comerciales* and concentrated in urban centers (See chap. 4). This examines the points of origin and ethnicity of *barraca* workers, and at how they fitted into the *barracas*' labor structure. Yet, throughout the Bolivian rubber boom, most workers continued to be overwhelmingly indigenous.

Larger *barracas* had an administrator who supervised several *mayordomos* or *capataces*. Smaller *barracas* had one or several *mayordomos* who responded to the *Casa Matriz's* (a rubber firm's seat or head office) administrators. Besides overseeing the labor force, these employees were responsible for producing a *balance general* (general balance sheet) after each *fábrico* and for forwarding regular written reports to the Casa Matriz. The general balance was a detailed report of the *barracas*' assets and liabilities, (including peons' debts and production statistics). As was the case in Cachuela Esperanza, many of the administrators had German surnames and were Austrian, Swiss or German. The administrator of Barraca Ingavi, for example was Alberto Van Berck and he was assisted by two *cruceño* "white," literate *mayordomos*, Rosendo Vaca and Adolfo Suárez.⁴¹ Barraca Porvenir did not have an administrator but had three *cruceño capataces*, M. Durán, D. Domínguez and S. Mendoza, who were literate and white and who reported to the larger Barraca Ingavi. Literacy and a "white" background, mostly

⁴¹ Alberto von Berck had started to work in Baures (in the Northern Moxos plains) for the German Casa Comercial Voss & Stoeffens, after the end of his contract it seems that he became an employee of the Casa Suárez. Hollweg, *Alemanes en el Oriente boliviano*, 209.

European and *cruceño*, were the prerequisites to be at the top echelons of the *barracas*. There were also other administrative jobs. For example, the *barraca* Manoa, on the Abuná River, had four accountants (*contador*) who were literate, white and from the city of La Paz, C. Sibaut, H. Peñaloza and R. Salazar. Since Manoa was at the confluence of the Madeira and Abuná Rivers and was across the Abunã station of the Madeira Mamoré Railway, it is possible that these accountants supervised the export of rubber to Brazil.⁴²

Most skilled workers lived in the rubber areas' small cities or in the headquarters of large rubber firms, such as Ortón or Cachuela Esperanza. Some *barracas*, though, had some artisans living in them. R. Rivas, for example, was an *hojalatero* (tin worker), who was white and born in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra and Barraca Porvenir had a saddle-maker (*talabartero*), A. Franco, who was also white and from the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Tin-workers were needed to repair and make *tichelas* and *baldes* and a saddlemaker where important to outfit ox carts, horses and mules. Other job categories were muleteer (*arriero*) and *marinero* (sailor). C. Vargas, for example was an illiterate *arriero* from Isozó in the province of Chiquitos (department of Santa Cruz) attached to Barraca Porvenir and, J. Alpire was an illiterate sailor from the city of Santa Cruz and P. Barrabás was a literate *arriero* from the province of Chiquitos. They were all described as "Moreno," which means that they were either indigenous or mestizo. The so-called *marineros* or *tripulantes* were not skilled workers. They were used to load and unload cargo from steamboats and for the arduous task of cutting lumber for the boats' boilers.

⁴² "Censo del Establecimiento Ingavi en 1910," and "Censo militar del Territorio Nacional de Colonias en el Noroeste levantado en el año 1916," respectively.

The Intendente Pastor Baldivieso registered many complaints of *mozos* or *fregueses* who were forced to become *marineros* or *tripulantes* in steamboats and resented it. *Mozos* often were punished by being forced to work in watercraft. For example, in 1914 the *mayordomo* of Barraca Porvenir, Iván Lugones sent the *mozo* Lorenza Cachanlla to Cachuela Esperanza to work in the company's launches because "he is the leader of all runaways."⁴³

It is not clear whether *comerciantes* (merchants) were independent contractors attached to *barracas* or were there on transit. Most *barracas* had some *comerciantes* listed as residents. L. Hurtado and M. Chávez were both from the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra and were listed in Manoa and were probably mestizo (*Moreno*). Manoa also listed M. Carranza, who was a mestizo from Trinidad and A. Casanovas, who was white and born in the Beni River Region (Territorio Nacional de Colonias), M. Barba, a white from Santa Cruz de la Sierra, and J. Santa Cruz who was a white from Cochabamba. Merchants could be white or mestizo and literacy did not seem to be a prerequisite for the trade. The presence of merchants in Manoa was more common because it was across the Madeira Mamoré Railway.⁴⁴

The 1910 census of Barraca Ingavi lists several occupational categories for women. Vivi Demmer, who was a white from Madidi (on the Territorio Nacional de Colonias) and Cinta Urgel, who was also categorized as a white from Santa Cruz were listed as *criadas*. They were both minors. On the other hand, Obdulia Medina, who was

⁴³ "Al Sr. Ministro de Colonización," signed by Pastor Baldivieso in *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 27 Mar. 1897, n°5 and Porvenir, 14 Oct. 1914, Iván Lugones to Suárez Hnos., Cachuela Esperanza in ACS/Porvenir, Correspondencia.

⁴⁴ "Censo militar del Territorio Nacional de Colonias en el Noroeste levantado en el año 1916."

also white from Santa Cruz, was a *servienta* of age, assisted by two Indian minors from Santa Cruz and one minor from Beni who was a mestiza. A *servienta* was a domestic who worked for the administrator and *mayordomos* of the *barraca*. On the other hand, the meaning of *criada* is probably the more traditional meaning of the Spanish word; it refers to orphan minors who were adopted as *entendados*, a minor attached to a household, and receives food, lodging and “education” in exchange for their services. This arrangement is still quite common in both the Bolivian highlands and the lowlands. The adult seamstress (*costurera*) Petrona Méndez, was categorized as a White from Santa Cruz and her work was, as mentioned above, not considered to be necessary in the *barraca* environment. The census also listed women and children under the *fregués* category. All of them share surnames with male *fregueses* and the fact that they were listed does not necessarily mean that the rubber company gave them the benefits of a *fregués*, as explained above. There were also a few adult females listed as *peonas*, some were attached to male *peones*, but some were not, and they were all Indian.

Men were divided between *fregueses* and *peones* (or *mozos*). There were 50 *fregueses* and 16 *peones*. The *fregués* category was quite heterogeneous. Many of them were Indians from Caupolicán or Chiquitos, but there were also white *fregueses* from the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, mestizos from Beni, one Peruvian Indian, a Brazilian white and even a white *fregués* from Tarija. In contrast, most *peones*, with the exception of a mestizo from Santa Cruz, were exclusively Indian. The 1896 censuses do not list occupation but the 1916 military census, besides the above-mentioned categories, included the category of *labrador* and *siringuero*. The *labradores* were in charge of

cultivating the land and there seems to have been some degree of specialization by *barraca*. Barraca Almonedas in the Negro River did not have any *labradores* listed, Barraca Manoa had five listed and Barraca Ultimátum, on the Tahuamanu River, was exclusively composed of *labradores*. In contrast, Barraca Porvenir did not have any *labradores*. The military census, on the other hand, listed *siringueros* as a single category and did not distinguish between *fregueses* and *mozos* or *peones*. *Labradores* were a heterogeneous category and could be white or *moreno*, most of them came from Santa Cruz and La Paz, but there was one from Riberalta, and one from Cochabamba. Surprisingly, there were seven white *labradores* from the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. This shows that *cruceños* of all echelons of society migrated to the Northeast and it may show that *cruceños* tended to consider themselves as white. (See chapter 4).⁴⁵

The total racial composition of Ingavi was consistent with most *barracas*. Indians were the majority and whites were the minority. Figure 33 shows the percentage of the racial categories that the census recorded. The racial composition of Barraca Ingavi in 1910 was not very different from that found in the Madre de Dios in 1898, indicated in Figure 34. The most relevant differences are the presence of a Black minority and a larger percentage of Indians. It is plausible that many Brazilian Blacks returned to Brazil after the Acre War.⁴⁶ The 1898 census of the Beni and Madidi Rivers, on the other hand,

⁴⁵ “Censo del Establecimiento Ingavi en 1910.”

⁴⁶ It should be noted that slavery was abolished in the Brazilian provinces of Ceará and Amazonas in 1884 and in the whole country in 1888. See Robert Edgar Conrad, *Children of God's fire: a Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 435. Previously, many Brazilian slaves had fled to the Bolivian lowlands to seek freedom since, according to the Bolivian Constitution, they were free once they entered Bolivian territory. According to the U.S. Navy lieutenants Lardner Gibbon and William L. Herndon, who visited Bolivia in the 1850s, there were two

does not include race. The military census of 1916 is of note because it included race but it did not use traditional categories. Instead of *Indio*, *Mestizo*, *Negro* or *Blanco*, it listed skin color that is *Negro*, *Blanco* or *Moreno* (Brown).⁴⁷ The *Moreno* category is rather ambivalent and it included peoples of mixed race and Indians. It means that, by 1916, the indigenous population of the *barracas* had achieved a high degree of acculturation or that the authorities who compiled the census denied the indigenous populations' ethnicity.

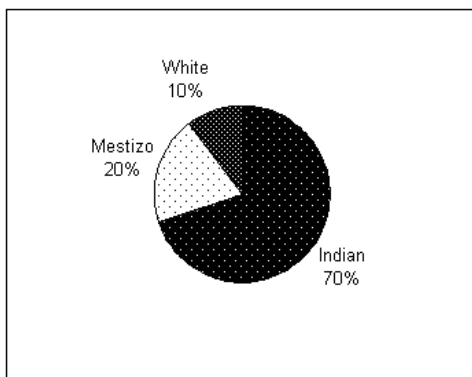


Figure 33. Racial categorías in Barraca Ingavi (1910)

Source: "Censo del Establecimiento Ingavi en 1910," ACS/ Censos 1910.

thousand Brazilian runaway slaves in Bolivian territory. They observed that Brazilian ex-slaves had more legal rights in Bolivia than "the Indian of his own soil." Herndon, Gibbon, and Dept., *Exploration*, 435. Their "freedom" in the Bolivian rubber *barracas* was very relative, as will be seen below. There has been very little research on Africans in Bolivia. For a recent study of slavery during the colonial period in the valley town of Mizque (in the present Dept. of Cochabamba), see Lolita Gutiérrez Brockington, *Blacks, Indians, and Spaniards in the Eastern Andes: Reclaiming the Forgotten in Colonial Mizque, 1550-1782* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Alberto Crespo R., *Esclavos negros en Bolivia* (La Paz: Academia Nacional de Ciencias de Bolivia, 1977), and Max Portugal Ortiz, *La esclavitud negra en las épocas colonial y nacional de Bolivia* (La Paz: IBC, 1978), offer earlier and more general surveys.

⁴⁷ Incidentally, the term *Moreno* is used to designate Afro-Latin Americans in Central America, but that is not the case in Bolivia.

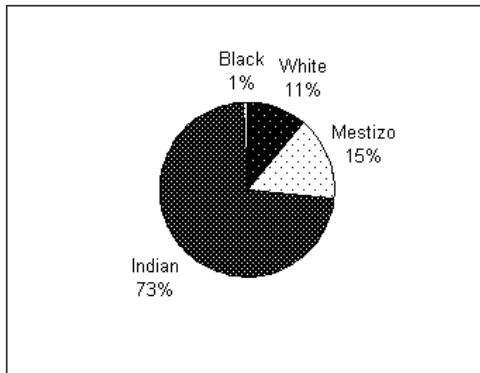


Figure 34. Racial Categories in the Madre de Dios Barracas (1898)

Source: “Censo de población del Río Madre de Dios” Riberalta Dec. 20, 1897 in *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 15 Jan. 1898, n°54.

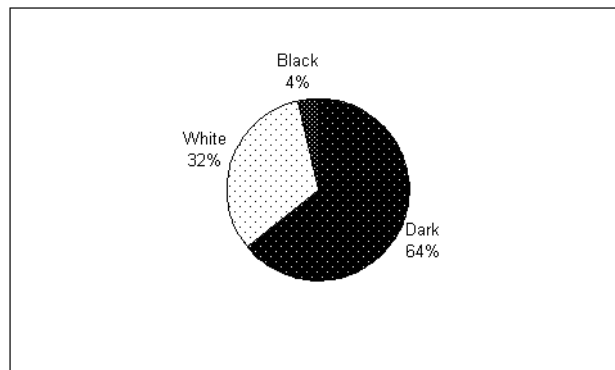


Figure 35. Racial Categories in the Military Census of 1916

Source: “Censo militar del Territorio Nacional de Colonias en el Noroeste levantado en el año 1916.” *El Noroeste*, (Cobija), 7 July 1917, n°225.

This contrasts with some of the earliest documents of the rubber boom, which gave individuals ethnic labels, such as Araona or Pacaguara (see chap. 6). The elimination of the “Indian” category increased the percentage of whites, yet the addition of “Black” and “Moreno” still produced an overwhelming 68% of non-whites.⁴⁸ The number of Blacks

⁴⁸ According to the Brazilian historian Cristina Scheibe Wolff, during the rubber boom Brazilians used the term “caboclo” to describe tribal Indians to deny them their tribal affiliation and ethnicity. To a certain extent, the same can be said about the term *camba* in the Bolivian Oriente. This census categorization might be due to a similar intention. Wolff, *Mulheres da Floresta*, 190.

was quite low but was higher than that of the *barraca* Ingavi census of 1910. Surprisingly, one of them had been born in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra and another one in Loreto, near the city of Trinidad. The other two had been born in the Territorio Nacional de Colonias. None were Brazilian. It is plausible that the term was used to describe skin color, not necessarily African characteristics. On the other hand, a small percentage of Afro-Bolivians were present in most Bolivian departments. Despite Pedro Krammer's predictions, the population of the rubber *barracas* in the *Territorio Nacional de Colonias* after the collapse of the Amazonian rubber boom continued to be mostly non-white.

The rubber industry recruited workers from throughout the lowlands and beyond. Previous chapters have explained how most rubber workers were originally recruited in the towns of Moxos and Caupolicán. Subsequently, rubber companies recruited in the city of Santa Cruz and in the towns of the provinces of Chiquitos, Velasco and Cordillera. Since the earliest days they also tried to incorporate the disperse "savage" tribes of the area and Peruvian, Brazilian and Colombian rubber tappers. This section analyzes censuses and provide a profile of the origins of rubber workers during the Bolivian rubber boom.

None of the 1896 censuses provided inhabitants' place of origin. However, the 1910 census of the Barraca Ingavi showed that most workers were from within the limits of the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, from the mission towns of Ixiamas and Tumupasa in the province of Caupolicán in the department of La Paz and from Cordillera province in the department of Santa Cruz. The workers from the city of Santa Cruz were a mixed

bunch, including Whites, Mestizos and a few Indians. Most workers from Caupolicán were Indian (Tacana) and most workers from Cordillera were Chiriguano Indians. The Beni workers were all in the *fregués* category and were both Indian and Mestizo. The fact that only one of the workers was from the Territorio Nacional de Colonias (Madidi) is remarkable. The Territorio had a high concentration of rubber *barracas* and its inhabitants did not have much access to other economic activities. On the other hand, the census also shows that the rubber industry attracted a few workers from the Bolivian valleys. There was one worker from the department of Tarija and four from the Interandean valley town of Vallegrande in the department of Santa Cruz.⁴⁹

Table 10. Workers' Origins of Barraca Ingavi in 1910

<i>Origin</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Santa Cruz de la Sierra	31	29%
Caupolicán	26	24%
Cordillera	26	24%
Beni	19	8%
Chiquitos	7	6%
Vallegrande	4	4%
Germany	1	1%
Brazil	1	1%
Peru	1	1%
Madidi	1	1%
Tarija	1	1%

Source: "Censo del Establecimiento Ingavi en 1910," ACS/ Censos 1910.

Labor Systems

The censuses mentioned use different criteria in describing inhabitants and do not

⁴⁹ Vallegrande is culturally very similar to the valley towns of the Departments of Cochabamba and Chuquisaca which were a source of emigrants to both the Chaco frontier and the mining economy of the highlands. The rural population of these valleys had a relatively high population density and they were not attached to haciendas, so they had an unusual degree of mobility. Their presence, albeit in small numbers, in the Amazonian rubber forests is not, therefore, surprising.

provide the whole picture of the real life of *barraca* workers. They do, however, show how the rubber industry had to recruit workers from near and far places. This section looks at the *enganche* system in the Bolivian rubber industry and at the different contractual systems that co-existed, particularly at the differences between *fregueses* and *mozos*. It also discusses the issue of the severity of labor conditions in rubber *barracas*.

As chapter 2 discussed, the *habilito* system was created during the *cascarilla* boom and lasted throughout the rubber boom. It was similar to the *aviamento* system used in the Brazilian rubber boom analyzed in Barbara Weinstein's *The Amazon Rubber Boom, 1850-1920*.⁵⁰ In the Bolivian case, the *habilito* system should not be confused with the *enganche* system. Unlike the *enganche* system, advances of merchandise were given to independent *cascarilla* and rubber collectors to deliver the product in exchange for an advance in supplies. The idea behind the *habilito* was to facilitate or *habilitar* a constant supply of cinchona or rubber. Without these facilities, there would have been no rubber because credit was impossible to obtain elsewhere. The *habilito* was granted to *habilitados* or *contratistas* who could be individuals or even other rubber companies. It was a business contract in which the future deliveries of rubber was the collateral. At the outset of the system, a credit system turned to debt only if the delivery of product was not completed. Nicolás Suárez, for example, started out as an *habilitador* and had *habilitador* contracts with large rubber companies, such as Antonio Vaca Díez' "The Orton Rubber Company." On the other hand, a rubber company could have individual *habilitados*, usually called *fregueses*, who labored in exchange for supplies. To

⁵⁰Weinstein, *Amazon Rubber Boom*, chap. 2

contemporaries, then, the *habilito* was not a labor system, it was a business practice based on credit for rubber deliveries.

The etymology of *fregués* stems from the Portuguese word (*freguês* for parishioner (*feligrés* in Spanish), which later became synonymous with “client.”⁵¹ In Bolivia, *fregueses* were considered above simple *mozos* or *peones* and were the trusted men of a rubber company. *Fregués* status was granted after years of service with the company as a *mozo*. On the other hand, the *mozos* or *peones* worked for daily maintenance (room and board and medicines) and a mostly fictitious wage. According to the Intendente Pastor Baldivieso, the relationship between *mozos* and *fregueses* was always tense and was always a source of violence. The fact that *mozos* thought that they were equal to *fregueses* whereas *fregueses* considered themselves almost *patrones* led to this violence. Many *fregueses* had an *habilito* from the *barraca* and hired *mozos* to assist in rubber gathering so, in reality, they almost operated like independent contractors of the rubber companies.⁵²

The term *enganche* is common in Peru, Bolivia and Colombia but similar arrangements have existed in other parts of Latin America. *Enganchar* comes from *gancho* or hook. Professional labor recruiters attempted to attract labor to usually geographically removed areas by offering contracts that promised better wages and labor conditions. They often recruited in urban areas or in economically depressed rural areas. Once the workers had been taken to their workplaces, either the contract was ignored or

⁵¹ José Pedro Machado, *Dicionário etimológico da língua portuguesa* (Lisbon: Editorial Confluência, 1967), s.v. “freguesía.”

⁵² Baldivieso, *Informe*, 26

they found that their wages were not suitable for the high cost of living of their new workplace. The *enganche* was often tied to various debt schemes and to the company's monopoly over basic supplies through the company store. In Peru, for example, the *enganche* was used to recruit peasant from the densely populated highlands to work in coastal plantations, in the eastern tropical forests or in the mines of the central Andes. The *enganche* system was also used to recruit Bolivian and Peruvian peasants to work on Chile's nitrate mines.⁵³ One of the main problems of the Amazonian rubber industry was its scarcity of labor. Unlike the Peruvian cases, in Bolivia neither the highlands nor the valleys were a suitable source of labor for the rubber industry. Rubber barons had to

⁵³ For a study of coastal sugar plantations, see Peter F. Klarén, *La formación de las haciendas azucareras y los orígenes del APRA*, 2a. ed. (Lima: IEP, 1976); Michael J. Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture and Social Control in Northern Peru, 1875-1933* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); Peter Blanchard, "The Recruitment of Workers in the Peruvian Sierra at the Turn of the Century: The Enganche System," *Interamerican Economic Affairs* 33, no. 3 (1979); for a look at the recruitment of labor for the mines in the highlands of Bolivia, see Larson, *Colonialism and Agrarian Transformation*, chap. 9; for a similar process in Peru, see Florencia E. Mallon, *The Defense of Community in Peru's Central Highlands: Peasant Struggle and Capitalist Transition, 1860-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), chaps. 5 and 6, and Josh DeWind, *Peasants Become Miners: The Evolution of Industrial Mining Systems in Peru, 1902-1974*, (New York: Garland Pub., 1987); for an analysis of Andean labor in Chile's nitrate fields, see Michael Monteon, "The Enganche in the Chilean Nitrate Sector, 1880-1930," *Latin American Perspectives* 6, no. 3 (1979); for a look the recruitment of workers from the highlands for coffee production in Colombia, see Catherine LeGrand, "Labor Acquisition and Social Conflict on the Colombian Frontier, 1850-1936," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 16, no. 1 (1984). For Guatemala, see David McCreery, "Debt Servitude in Rural Guatemala, 1876-1936," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 63, no. 4 (1983); for Yucatán and Chiapas, see Friedrich Katz, "Labor Conditions on Haciendas in Porfirian Mexico: Some Trends and Tendencies," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 54, no. 1 (1974), and Sarah Washbrook, "Indígenas, exportación y enganche en el norte de Chiapas, 1876-1911," *Mesoamérica (USA)* 25, no. 46 (2004), Sarah Washbrook, "'Enganche' and Exports in Chiapas, Mexico: A Comparison of Plantation Labour in the Districts of Soconusco and Palenque, 1876-1911," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39, no. 4 (2007). For an overview of debt peonage in Mexico, see Alan Knight, "Mexican Peonage: What Was It and Why Was It?" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 18, no. 1 (1986); for northern Argentina, see Donna J. Guy, "The Rural Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Argentina: Forced Plantation Labor in Tucuman," *Latin American Research Review* 13, no. 1 (1978); for Nicaragua, see Elizabeth Doré, "Debt Peonage in Granada, Nicaragua, 1870-1930: Labor in a Noncapitalist Transition," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83, no. 3 (2003); for a look at the Latin American *enganche* system as a whole, see Tom Brass, "The Latin American Enganche System," in *Towards a Comparative Political Economy of Unfree Labour: Case Studies and Debates*, The Library of Peasant Studies no. 16 (London and Portland, OR.: Frank Cass, 1999), chap. 6.

compete with other economic activities that managed to absorb all the labor from the western half of the country. The mining oligarchies that controlled the government of the country (first the silver oligarchy from Sucre and then the tin oligarchy from La Paz) had a firm grasp of the highlands' labor force and free labor was relatively rare. Free labor was only prevalent in the mestizo areas of western Chuquisaca, Cochabamba, Tarija and Vallegrande. Although coercion existed in both the hacienda system and the mining industry, it was cruder in the frontier areas that were beyond the grasp of the central government and which had been recently incorporated to the nation. With some exceptions (specifically foreign and domestic *empleados* and technicians), it is safe to state that a free labor market was almost non-existent in the Amazonian and Chaco frontiers, with the exception of labor in missions.⁵⁴ The rubber industry could not recruit labor from the highlands but it used several schemes, including the *enganche* system, to recruit from Bolivia's lowlands.

The *enganche* system was devised to transport workers from the relatively populated cities and towns of Moxos, Caupolicán and the department of Santa Cruz to the under populated rubber areas of Bolivia. The remoteness of the rubber areas and the harshness of the Amazonian environment prevented "spontaneous" migration.

It should be noted that the *enganche* system co-existed with other labor systems. Wherever they had power and the state was not present, recruiters did not have to bother with the legalities of a contract. At the outset of the rubber boom, for instance, Moxos

⁵⁴ For labor in the Chaco missions, see Erick D. Langer, "Franciscan Missions and Chiriguano Workers: Colonization, Acculturation and Indian Labor in Southern Bolivia," *The Americas* 42, no 1 (1987); id., *Expecting Pears from an Elm tree*, esp. chap. 6.

Indians were recruited as a continuation of their personal service obligations towards their *patrones*. The Beni *patrones* simply moved individuals from their cattle *estancias* and haciendas to their canoes and their rubber estates on the Madeira River (with the collusion of both indigenous and non-indigenous authorities).

Later, rubber barons simply incorporated “wild” Indians into rubber *barracas* by right of conquest and forced them to work for food and clothing in what contemporaries characterized as slavery. Then again, many European administrators and technicians moved to the rubber areas through free contracts signed in London, Paris or Hamburg.

The *enganche* system was based on hacienda debt peonage, which has been present throughout Latin America since colonial times. Hacienda workers exchanged their labor for mostly subsistence plots and other benefits such as medicine, clothing and the *patrón*'s protection. Although contemporary observers decried this system because it tied peasants to the land and restricted their access to a “free” labor market, John Tutino and D.A. Brading have argued that debt peonage did produce a degree of security and even material prosperity for Mexican peasants in certain regions.⁵⁵ The difference between hacienda debt peonage and *enganche* as practiced in the Bolivian lowlands was that a substantial *anticipo* or money advance was necessary to convince potential workers to move to remote areas. This *anticipo* was in fact the *enganche* or hook. As explained in chapter 2, the economy of the lowlands was chronically short of cash, particularly in the departments of Beni and Santa Cruz, so the impact of an *anticipo* in silver coins in the

⁵⁵ D. A. Brading, *Haciendas and Ranchos in the Mexican Bajío, León, 1700-1860* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978); John Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social bases of Agrarian Violence, 1750-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

hands of people who had rarely had access to cash should be stressed. The *cruceño* novelist Juan B. Coimbra has masterfully described the impact of professional recruiters in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra:

The recruiters strolled through the town with their arrogant airs. A thick gold chain crossed their posh and tall waistcoats. Boasting of their wealth and with extravagant self-importance, they sponsored never-ending banquets and parties, moving very smoothly to make sure that that the sterling pounds in their fists jingled. [...] These characters indeed brought plenty of gold, good gold from the Bank of London. With their arrival, the *enganche* of *peones* cropped up. First in an open manner, later, when speculators entered the scene, in a secret and twisted manner, and, finally with the rule of bad faith which plunged everything into a sort of slave-trading, with the intervention of armed officials who ensured the enforcement of laws that had precisely been legislated as a result of such a peculiar situation.⁵⁶

These professional *enganchadores* were recruited by wealthy rubber firms. Since European merchandise was often simply exchanged for high-priced rubber, the *anticipos* were often the highest direct expense of a rubber baron. General José Manuel Pando, for example, wrote that the rubber companies of the remote Mapiri River had invested 60,000 bolivianos in one semester to recruit workers in Caupolicán.⁵⁷ As Coimbra explained, very often workers spent the *anticipo* amount in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, celebrating the departure so that *peones* were in debt before even leaving the city. This ensured that they were fully committed to working in the rubber areas.⁵⁸ Once a peon had left his region, the novelist Jaime Mendoza wrote, “it could certainly be said that he had definitely lost his freedom and that he belonged to a new world where he should

⁵⁶ Coimbra, *Siringa*, 30-31.

⁵⁷ Pando, *Viaje a la región de la goma elástica*, 7.

⁵⁸ Coimbra, *Siringa*, 33.

unconditionally comply with whatever was demanded of him.”⁵⁹ As soon as he had spent his *anticipo* his debts started to accumulate. Very often peons had to pay for *gastos de conducción* or transportation costs and *gastos de persecución* (persecution costs) if they ran away and they even owed the fee that was given by *barraca* owners to *enganchadores*. Pastor Baldivieso transcribed a contract signed in Santa Cruz de la Sierra between the *peona* Lucía Rocha and his *patrón* Honorio Peña for all types of work in his *barracas* (See Table 11). If, like most rubber workers, Lucía was illiterate, it is doubtful if she would have understood her contract with the *patrón*. It is remarkable that she only earned 104 bolivianos in approximately three years, yet she ended up owing 726.70 bolivianos. It appears that the initial *enganche* was 100 bolivianos, which was as large as her total earnings for those three years. In addition, the transportation costs were 250 bolivianos. The sums that were deducted by “administrators” in the transit points of in Santa Ana [de Velasco] and San Ignacio [de Velasco] are not clear but they probably were maintenance costs (food and lodging) while in transit or, perhaps, more transportation costs. It seems like the ambiguity of these amounts in transit was deliberate. Many items, such as dresses and a hat, were clearly defined but it is quite possible that Lucia not know what these two deductions were. Of course, this contract did not take into account the premium given to the *enganchador*, but perhaps this was also included.

⁵⁹Mendoza, *Páginas bárbaras*, xvii.

Table 11. Account Balance between Honorio Peña and Lucía Rocha (1892-95), in Bs.

Received to my account	100	
Given to my administrator in Santa Ana	10	
In San Ignacio	7.62	
1 hat and 2 dresses given to me by Benjamín	13.4	
Given by the same employee for other tools	14.1	
Given by D. Ramón Roca	10	
Payment for current months since July 9, 1892 to Oct. 8, 1893, at 4 Bs. per month.		60
Interest of 1.5% owing for balance until Oct. 8, 1893.	22.4	
Payment for 9 months since the day that the contract was signed, from Oct 8, 1893 to July 9, 1894 at 6 Bs. per month.		54
Transportation costs	250	
Interests for debt until July 8, 1894, date in which the debtor left the house, of the amount of Bs. 300 and not taking into account the months before the present date of May 1895.	49.4	
Balance to be settled		363.2½
	477.3½	477.3½
Balance to my account	363.3½	
I will pay the debt with the customary penalty	363.3½	
The signer of the contract owes this amount.	726.7	

Source: Pastor Baldivieso, *Informe...* in MI/Delegación Nacional en el Noroeste t. 228, n°15, 65.

Labor *enganchadores* had a lucrative business. According to Pastor Baldivieso, in the 1890s they could earn from £2,000 to £4,000 per year, according to the number of *mozos* they delivered to *barracas*.⁶⁰ Because of the high cost of paying *enganchadores*, only well-financed rubber companies could attract a suitable labor force. On the other hand, the concentration of Bolivian rubber production in the hands of a few can be explained because of their recruitment power. Nicolás Suárez and Antonio Vaca Díez, for example, had a network of *enganchadores* that operated in most of the Bolivian lowlands and even the valleys. The Compagnie Brillard also had agents as far as Arequipa. Keeping this network required a great deal of expense and political influence to curb the influence of local authorities.

⁶⁰ Baldivieso, *Informe...* in MI/Delegación Nacional en el Noroeste, t. 228, n°15, 76

Even powerful companies, though, did not disdain more informal methods of attracting laborers. For example in the *barraca* Puerto Rico, the Peruvian *fregués* Andrés Perzumate was authorized to bring a female companion and some *mozos* from the Tambopata River, in Peruvian territory. Some *mozos* from *barraca* Porvenir also requested permission to bring family members from Baures.⁶¹ The advantages of these arrangements to rubber companies were obvious, the company did not have to pay an *enganchador* and the proximity of family-members or workers from the same area probably enhanced the workers' loyalty and performance. As discussed above, these cases were exceptional and *siringueros* were generally against bringing women to *barracas*. Neither Baures nor the Tambopata River were too far from the Northeast, so bringing indigenous females from nearby (who would probably not require any expenses) was, in these cases, allowed.

The eventual decline of many rubber-producing regions, such as the provinces of Larecaja and Caupolicán in the department of La Paz, can be partly blamed on the failure to secure labor. It is ironic that, unlike their counterparts in the department of Santa Cruz, the *paceño* rubber producers of these provinces could not secure local workers, even though they were relatively plentiful. The Tacana, for example, preferred to travel to the Northeast than to labor near their settlements and, as seen above, were a significant part of the tappers of rubber *barracas* in the rubber-producing areas of the Bolivian Amazon. As chapter 6 has explained, they were fleeing *salvaje* attacks, mission

⁶¹ Puerto Rico, Dec. 1909, Juan Egger to Casa Matriz, ACS/ Correspondencia, Puerto Rico and Porvenir, 30 July 1909 Iván Lugones to Casa Matriz, Cachuela Esperanza, ACS/Correspondencia Porvenir.

restrictions, and the combined pressures of local authorities and landowners demanding their labor and taxes.

The sources of labor for the rubber industry developed over time. First, the rubber industry recruited Indians from the plains of Moxos, as well as Caupolicán, particularly the Tacana from the former Franciscan missions of Tumupasa and Ixiamas, who were threatened by *guarayo* (See chap. 6) attacks and by the authorities' inability to protect them. Many rubber barons also forcibly incorporated independent Amazonian groups such as the Araona and Pacaguara. In the 1890s, *enganchadores* started to operate in Chiquitos and in Cordillera province, in the department of Santa Cruz. Finally, at the beginning of the twentieth century, they recruited within the city of Santa Cruz and its environs and in the valleys of Cochabamba. Initially, the fiction of a debt or an *anticipo* was not necessary, since *patrones* could use sheer power to recruit the Indians in their *estancias* or haciendas. As described in chap. 4, many rubber barons owned substantial haciendas and *estancias* in Moxos and, when they became unprofitable, they moved to the rubber areas *en masse*, along with their Indian charges or with Indians forcefully obtained with the collusion of indigenous and non-indigenous authorities. In the most remote rubber areas, such as the Acre and Purús, laborers were also violently recruited through professional Indian hunters, Bolivian and foreign. Poor *fregueses* were also known for kidnapping unincorporated Indian youth and women. The *anticipo*, though, became paramount to recruit mestizos and whites from Santa Cruz and Cochabamba and it was there that the *enganche* system received more challenges. In Santa Cruz, for example, local authorities simply forbade it. Yet, professional

enganchadores were not only the only source of workers. Many *fregueses* attempted to bring workers from their places of origin to receive extra money from the rubber company and possibly to have more companionship. In 1909, for example, the *fregués* Domingo Morón from Barraca Porvenir requested a “small sum” to bring workers from Moxos.⁶²

Labor scarcity was one of the most difficult challenges that the Bolivian rubber industry faced. The rubber areas were located in scarcely unpopulated areas and rubber barons were not able to recruit from Bolivia’s densely populated highlands. Therefore, they had to be creative in obtaining labor. Besides recruiting workers in an extensive area that went as far as the Chaco and Peru, they also used a variety of labor systems. Contemporaries decried the *enganche* system, and local authorities attempted to prohibit it, but this system was both costly and time-consuming. Very often, the rubber industry had to rely on more direct recruitment systems. Wherever the state was not powerful or was vulnerable to the rubber barons’ influence, the rubber industry incorporated *salvage* and missionized Indians by force, at a minimum expense. Rubber companies also paid their *mozos* and *fregueses* small sums to bring family and members from their communities to the rubber *barracas*.

The Debate over Debt Peonage

Debt peonage in the Bolivian rubber industry was common. It had been inherited from the hacienda and mining systems and, during the late nineteenth century, it was on

⁶² Iván Lugones to Casa Matriz, 18 Aug. 1909, ACS/Correspondencia Porvenir.

the upswing throughout Latin America. The prevalence of mission culture and the limited white migration to Beni before the 1870s delayed its development. It was not until the late *cascarilla* and early rubber booms that it appeared in the Moxos towns. There has been extensive research on debt peonage in haciendas and in the last decades of the twentieth century, there was a lively debate between traditional and revisionist views of debt peonage. To a certain extent, Arnold J. Bauer's 1979 article entitled "Rural Workers in Spanish America: Problems of Peonage and Oppression," initiated the debate.⁶³ Traditional interpretations of debt peonage echoed contemporary assessments, which viewed it as an oppressive system where laborers were at the mercy of their *patrones* and were living at the brink of subsistence. Revisionists, on the other hand, viewed debt peonage as potentially a safety net and claimed that Latin American workers were often able to manipulate the system to their advantage. Historians of Mexican debt peonage, in particular, have argued that in many cases, peons viewed debt peonage as an insurance for survival and as insulation from the uncertainties of agriculture in traditional corporate communities. After all, *patrones* were obliged to provide clothing, food (either as part of payment or as subsistence plots) and, to a degree, health care. Like in traditional Manorialism or seigneurialism, there was also a certain amount of paternalism. The patron-client relationship implied that the *patrón* should also protect the peon against outside threats.⁶⁴ According to Bauer, classical debt peonage was typical of the southern

⁶³ Arnold J. Bauer, "Rural Workers in Spanish America: Problems of Peonage and Oppression," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 59, no. 1 (1979).

⁶⁴ See, in particular, Knight, "Mexican Peonage: What Was It and Why Was It?," and Katz, "Labor Conditions on Haciendas in Porfirian Mexico: Some Trends and Tendencies," for seminal analyses of Mexican peonage.

regions of Yucatán and was particularly harsh in the plantation region.⁶⁵ The British labor historian Tom Brass has re-launched the traditional view through a Marxist lens and has reviewed revisionists and, in turn, has generated another lively debate.⁶⁶ Brass has dismissed claims that debt peonage was a safety net and has stressed its oppressive aspects and the fact that it curtailed individual freedom of movement and made extensive use of physical punishment.

Barbara Weinstein presented the view that *siringueiros* in the Brazilian rubber boom had a relatively free existence and that the Amazonian environment gave them an unprecedented freedom of movement because they were relatively unsupervised.⁶⁷ On the other hand, the Putumayo region has become synonymous with extreme oppression and brutality.⁶⁸ International observers occasionally thought that conditions in the Bolivian rubber industry were similar to those of the Putumayo. In fact, they varied according to the location of the rubber estates and the chronology within the rubber boom. In Brazil, for example, the freedom that Barbara Weinstein mentions increased during the long decline of the rubber boom, since *aviadores* did not have the economic means to control tappers through expensive merchandise.⁶⁹ In Bolivia, on the other hand,

⁶⁵ Bauer, "Rural Workers in Spanish America: Problems of Peonage and Oppression," 4.

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Laird W. Bergad, "On Comparative History: A Reply to Tom Brass," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 16, no. 1 (1984); Tom Brass, "Yet More on Agrarian Change and Unfree Labour," *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 4 (1996); Brass, "The Latin American Enganche System."

⁶⁷ She actually cites Bolivian examples to press her point. For instance, she cites Bolivia, *Monografía*, extensively in Weinstein, *Amazon Rubber Boom*, see, e.g., 283, 289 and 314.

⁶⁸ Stanfield, *Red Rubber, Bleeding Trees*, seems to agree with the classical accounts cited in chap. 4.

⁶⁹ In Bolivia, *patrones* were not able to be as generous as previously to attract labor, yet, that does not mean that they loosened their grip on their working force. By the end of the rubber boom, they had found an unexpected ally, the Bolivian state, to uphold the outstanding debts that their workers had accumulated during the rubber boom. Thus, they continued to have access to an almost captive labor force. In 1914, *El Noroeste* declared that nobody was in conditions to offer great credits or to buy a *mozo's* debt in order to

greater freedom was found at the outset of the rubber boom, when *patrones* were many and lived at great distances from each other. As the rubber industry consolidated and *patrones* became fewer and more powerful, they tightened their grip on their work force. While oppression did exist in some rubber *barracas* and during certain periods, rubber tappers were also able to devise strategies to lessen this oppression, and, to some extent, counteract the *patrones*' control over their lives.

Working Conditions in the Barraca: Mozos and Fregueses

As discussed above, besides some managers and some specialized positions, most of the *barracas* were made up of *mozos* and *fregueses*. *Mozos* were recruited through the enganche system and were the main victims of debt peonage. Their contracts invariably specified that the rubber company could employ them in any capacity. Even though they were mostly rubber tappers, they could also do agricultural work or be employed in navigation. Theoretically, *fregueses* were above *mozos* and had a special relationship with the company. On paper, they were almost partners and were very similar to agricultural *aparceros* or sharecroppers. Evidence shows that *mozos* aspired to be *fregueses*. The Brazilian *mozo* João Natal de Lomatte, for example, wrote to the Casa Suárez in 1909 stating that he was not happy as a *mozo* and he humbly requested that he should become a *fregués* of the company.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, this “promotion” was often

attract labor. *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 6 Dec. 1914, n°181. In 1917, a newspaper in Baures advertised that workers were required to work in steam launches but that the company would offer neither *anticipos* nor *cuentas* of more than 300 Bs. *El Porvenir* (Baures), 4 Mar. 1917, n°203.

⁷⁰ João Natal de Lomatte to Nicolás Suárez, Boca del Ortón, 28 Feb. 1907, ACS/Correspondencia, Nicolás Suárez.

expensive. Pastor Baldivieso, for example, was outraged at the fact that one of the Casa Suarez's *habilitados*, a Sr. Oliva, besides charging interests of 15 to 20% for *anticipos*, and charging the usual transportation costs, also charged an undisclosed amount for the privilege of becoming his *fregués*. He observed that it seemed like he granted the *fregués* title as a nobility title!⁷¹

What were, however, in reality the differences between a *fregués* and a *mozo*? Evidence suggests that their working conditions were similar. Nevertheless, their contracts were very different. *Freguesía* contracts specified that *fregueses* should work for a specific period and that the company could assign them to any *barraca*. The *fregués* had to give the *barraca* a certain amount of rubber for a predetermined price and could not sell rubber to a third party. The *fregués* also had to pay for his tools and his food during the *fábrico*. In some cases, the *barraca* provided free yuca, plantains, rice and maize from its *chacos*. After the *fábrico*, *fregueses* were forced to work for the *barraca* for a daily wage plus food and medicine (becoming in fact *mozos*). They also promised to re-pay their *anticipo* through their labor and, in case of not re-paying it at the end of the contract, to remain working in the *barraca* until the debt was paid off. Finally, the *fregués* was obliged to pay a fine of 100 bolivianos if he did not fulfill the terms of the contract and was also obliged to pay an unspecified fine plus expenses in case he ran away and had to be captured.⁷²

⁷¹ *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 27 Feb. 1897, n°12.

⁷² Standard blank *Contrato de fregués* printed by the Compagnie Brillard in the 1910s. Transcribed in Pacheco, *Integración económica*, Anexo 8, 247-48. According to Pastor Baldivieso, the “Gastos de persecución” could be as high as 150 Bs. Pastor Baldivieso *Informe...* in ANB/MI Delegación Nacional en el Noroeste, t. 2285, n°15, 68.

Mozo contracts, however, were different. Very often rubber companies did not actually contract *mozos* directly but “rented” them from their *patrones*. In 1911, for example, they contracted one indigenous *mozo* belonging to Sra. Fitalia Herrera for one year. The contract specified that the *mozo* should do any work that was required of him and, in case he ran away, he would have to pay a fine of 200 bolivianos. and capture expenses. He owed Sra. Herrera the amount of 1,571.50 bolivianos. The Suárez Company had paid this amount to Sra. Herrera as an *anticipo* for his services. Suárez Hermanos would pay a salary of 60 bolivianos. per month for agricultural labor or for work (as a *marinero*) on the rivers of the region and 200 bolivianos. for any return trips to San Antonio on the Madeira River (to be applied to the *mozos*’ debt), free food, plus free medical care in case of illness.⁷³ In a similar contract with Suárez Hermanos, the *cruceño* C.M.[Carlos Melquíades] Barbery “rented” eight “healthy and suitable indigenous men” to carry out construction and agricultural work in the Barraca Palestina, on the Ortón River. The contract lasted six months and Sr. C.M. Barbery received 100 bolivianos per month per *mozo*. The *mozos* received housing, food and medical attention and the company took care of transportation costs to the Ortón River, if the *mozos* worked as crews in the steamer or canoe. In this case, Suárez Hermanos would not be responsible for runaway costs and would pay the *mozos* 10 bolivianos per month in merchandise.⁷⁴ The benefits to C.M. Barbery were obvious; he was to receive 800 bolivianos per month with no investment whatsoever. On the other hand, Suárez Hermanos saved *enganche*

⁷³ “Contrato de trabajo jornalero entre Walter Sierra y Suárez Hnos.” Signed by Suárez Hnos., Sucursal Riberalta on 27 Nov. 1911. Transcribed in Pacheco, *El itinerario*, Anexo 6, 243.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, “Contrato de alquiler de trabajo indígena,” Anexo 3, 237-38.

fees and was not responsible for the troublesome business of capturing runaway *mozos*. It should be noted that contracts were produced *en masse* by rubber companies and were often *pro forma*. In many cases, they were also *post factum*. In 1919, for example, the *mayordomo* of the Barraca Candelaria “ordered” blank copies of the contracts that Dr. Antelo (Feliciano Antelo, the Suárez’ company lawyer) had made for some runaway (and presumably captured) *mozos*.⁷⁵

Even though contemporaries decried the enganche and debt peonage systems as exploitative, there was another side to the coin. The *mayordomo* Iván Lugones complained about the “Señores” from Santa Cruz de la Sierra (white educated employees). One of them had already accumulated a debt of 1,400 bolivianos before starting to tap any rubber. He wrote, “It is deplorable that all these gentlemen who come in search of work have such high debts before having even touched a *machadiño* (a hatchet used for tapping rubber). Generally, they turn up here almost naked and we have to give them large amounts of credit in food, merchandise and tools. In a short while they end up owing enormous amounts, including the debts that they bring from home.”⁷⁶ Of course, all rubber tappers had large debts but it would seem that whites had more “needs” or were perhaps less self-sufficient than other tappers. To many rubber tappers, it seems like debt (which was impossible to pay back), was a minor inconvenience and the rubber company’s credits allowed them access to imported goods that would have

⁷⁵ Establecimiento Candelaria to Suárez Hnos., Sucursal “A,” 9 Nov. 1919 in ACS/ Correspondencia, Candelaria.

⁷⁶ Iván Lugones to Casa Matriz, Porvenir, 19 June 1909. ACS/Correspondencia, Porvenir.

been impossible to access in their places of origin.⁷⁷ Nicolás Suárez himself complained that the laziest *mozos* were the ones who were harder to please in the Company's *pulperias*. In another example, one of Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra's workers requested a gramophone, music, a typewriter and a Helinger rifle on credit. The *mayordomo* of Puerto Rico who wrote to the Casa Matriz, told his supervisors of such an outrageous demand.⁷⁸

Once workers arrived to the *barraca*, whether they were *fregueses* or *mozos*, they were at the mercy of their *mayordomos* and *capataces*. The hardships of *barraca* life were manifold. Besides the trap of debt peonage, they had to deal with disease, corporal punishment, lack of mobility and bad food. Travelers were mostly impressed with the prevalence of the whip in *barracas*. In nineteenth-century Bolivia, corporal punishment was present in missions, haciendas, schools and the army. Lizzie Hessel summarized the prevailing view when she claimed that Indians could only be made to work by the whip and added that "to be kind is no good, they will only laugh at you" and "that they have to be treated like children."⁷⁹ The prefect of Beni and jurist Mamerto Oyola thought that the authorities should apply physical punishment as a "paternal correction" and that the best private schools in the Republic practiced it. Therefore, since the laws recognized that the State had guardianship over Indians, as minors, it was "completely legal and rational" to

⁷⁷ This was also common in the southern department of Tarija, see Erick D. Langer and Gina Hames, "Commerce and Credit on the Periphery: Tarija Merchants, 1830-1914," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no 2 (1994).

⁷⁸ Juan Egger to Casa Matriz, Puerto Rico, 26 June 1909. ACS/Correspondencia, Puerto Rico.

⁷⁹ Hessel et al., *Lizzie: a Victorian Lady's Amazon Adventure*, 52 and 60.

do so.⁸⁰ According to the Beni historian Rogers Becerra Casanovas, whipping followed an established “criminal code.” For example, liars received 50 lashes, thieves 100 lashes and “rascals” and repeat offenders 200 to 500 lashes.⁸¹ Naturally, the death of scarce *mozos* due to whipping was counterproductive and rare. There were cases where *mozos* were accidentally killed. For instance, one of the characters of Ignacio Mendoza’s novel *Páginas bárbaras* named Coani, died after receiving a few lashes. A *fregués* blamed both the victim for having wiggled too much during the procedure and the *capataz* for not knowing his job. Coani died, because of wounds in his groin. The same *fregués* remarked that many tappers were able to withstand 800 or 1,000 lashes!⁸² Although Ignacio Mendoza’s account is part of a novel, we should bear in mind that the author spent a few years in the Northeast and lived in many *barracas*, so even if he took some poetic license in his narrative, it was based on personal experience.

Eventually the National Delegation heard cases of physical abuse and attempted to accuse culprits judicially. In a confidential letter written in 1914, the *mayordomo* of the Barraca Candelaria wrote about punishing the runaway *mozo* Antonio Mayupi. He claimed, “We know and we understand that by no means can we operate without corporal punishment, yet, as far as we are concerned we advise to use a high degree of discretion to avoid the harm against us that everybody is trying to stir up every day.”⁸³

Although the rubber-tapping process was not particularly strenuous or dangerous,

⁸⁰ Oyola and Bolivia, *Informe...Prefecto del Beni*, 14.

⁸¹ Becerra Casanovas, *Imperio del caucho*, 69.

⁸² Mendoza, *Páginas bárbaras*, 135.

⁸³ “Confidencial,” E. Knotts to Sres. Suárez Hnos., Establecimiento Candelaria, 16 Jan. 1914. ACS/Candelaria, Correspondencia.

rubber tappers were distinguished by their unhealthy appearance. There are no statistics on life expectancy before or after the rubber boom, but observers remarked on their short life span and they compared rubber tapping to working in the mines, in terms of disease and mortality.⁸⁴ For example, Perry Fawcett commented that the “working life” of a rubber tapper was five years and that, in Cobija, the death rate was as high as fifty per cent.⁸⁵ Chapter 2 described the dangers of navigation in the Amazonian Rivers of Bolivia. Life in the *barraca*, though, was almost as lethal. Joseph Woodroffe stressed the dangers of smoking latex. Tappers smoked rubber using green branches and foliage, in an enclosed space and in a very humid environment. He commented “ he [the rubber tapper] will be found, after he has finished his day’s collection of latex with tired, sore eyes, shrunken and smarting from the effects of the smoke, his body raided with spasmodic coughing and covered with smoke, dirt and soot.”⁸⁶ The *fábrico* took place during the dry season, but *barracas* created an ideal environment for mosquito breeding. Rubber *bolachas*, *tichelas* and *baldes* provided an ideal breeding ground for mosquito larvae that thrive in shallow water. Moreover, deforestation to open up *estradas* and *chacos* also contributed to malaria infection. The dry season also produces still and shallow waters in most of Amazonia.⁸⁷ Most Bolivians did not believe that mosquitoes spread the disease and most educated visitors believed in the miasmatic theory.⁸⁸ As a

⁸⁴ Cabrera, *Navegación fluvial*, 22.

⁸⁵ Fawcett, *Exploration Fawcett*, 58 and 6.

⁸⁶ Woodroffe and Smith, eds., *The Rubber Industry*, 45.

⁸⁷ According to Fray Armentia, during the dry season, water became stagnant and it decomposed “taking an extremely repulsive color and stench.” This led to chronic fevers. Armentia, *Diario de sus viajes*, 62.

⁸⁸ As late as the 1880s, the journalist and politician Toribio Gutiérrez believed that malaria was caused by the miasmas produced in “putrid muck” at certain hours. Gutiérrez, *Recuerdos del Oriente*, 19.

result, very few preventive measures were taken. At most, *mozos* and *fregueses* were lined up by *capataces* every morning to receive their daily dose of imported quinine pills under the threat of a whip. The *cruceño* historian Hernando Sanabria Fernández wrote that sometimes *capataces* were overzealous and quinine overdoses (which cause vertigo and deafness) were common. He also mentioned that a well-known folk cure for malaria was to drink large amounts of unsweetened coffee.⁸⁹ Other tropical diseases included yellow fever (called “fiebre de abajo” or fever from downriver) and leishmaniasis or *espundia*. (called “mal de los Andes” in colonial documentation) is more common in higher ground, especially in the Yungas and Caupolicán) so Luigi Balzan might have been right when he commented that the disfiguration of face and limbs that it causes may also have been the result of advanced and untreated syphilis.⁹⁰

Nonetheless, it seems like malnutrition and unsanitary conditions were the cause of most deaths. The tappers’ diet was rich in carbohydrates and poor in vitamins, protein and minerals. It relied mostly on polished rice and yuca; fresh meat, fruits and vegetables were mostly absent.⁹¹ Therefore, anemia, pellagra and beriberi were rampant. Contemporaries thought that beriberi was a contagious disease because it occasionally took on epidemic proportions.⁹² Lack of hygiene also produced a host of intestinal diseases, which were mostly caused by contaminated water. Additionally, bacterial and

⁸⁹ Sanabria Fernández, *En busca de Eldorado*, 125.

⁹⁰ Balzan, “Da Reyes a Villa Bella,” 501.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 502.

⁹² The similarity of rubber tappers’ health conditions and those among Caribbean black slaves is striking; see Kenneth F. Kiple, *The Caribbean Slave: A Biological History* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); for beriberi, see 96-100. According to Percy H. Fawcett, Cobija’s 50% death rate could be mostly blamed on beriberi. Fawcett, *Exploration Fawcett*, 63.

parasitological infections were generally classified as dysentery.⁹³ Most observers blamed eating unripe fruits and lack of hygiene for dysentery.⁹⁴ In reality, many other diseases were the result of inappropriate housing and humidity. There were also cases of arthritis, tuberculosis and general respiratory disorders.⁹⁵ Bolivians and foreigners also mentioned widespread earth eating (pica or Geophagy), especially among indigenous youth.⁹⁶ All classical explanations for Geophagy may apply here. For example, as explained above, the Amazonian diet was particularly poor in minerals and calcium, so there might be a nutritional explanation. In addition, according to Ciro Bayo, many Amazonians ate “cooked earth” to purge themselves and, thus, expel intestinal parasites, so there might be a medical explanation.⁹⁷ On the other hand, Geophagy and pica also appears in moments of cultural stress. Lizzie Hessel, for example narrated, how captured “savage” children would compulsively eat earth or their clothing. Without a hint of sympathy, she stated how a little girl that she had purchased died because of this.⁹⁸ Regardless of the cause, earth eating in the Amazonian environment (without the precaution of cooking it) can be lethal. Ironically, although Geophagy could be used as a cure for intestinal parasites (especially tapeworms), many of these parasites and bacteria entered the body

⁹³ According to Father Rafael Sans, smallpox and dysentery were the main causes for the Pacaguaras’ refusal to live in missions. Sans and Bravo, *Memoria histórica*, 82.

⁹⁴ For example, Balzan, “Da Reyes a Villa Bella,” 574.

⁹⁵ “Apuntes de viaje, Reyes” in *La Gaceta del Norte* (Ortón), 16 Mar. 1898, n°52.

⁹⁶ Pica refers to eating non-foods in general, whereas geophagy refers to eating earth. There is a relatively large amount of literature on geophagy in the Caribbean, Africa and North America, but very little research on other parts of Latin America. See, e.g., Peter W. Abrahams and Julia A. Parsons, “Geophagy in the Tropics: A Literature Review,” *The Geographical Journal* 162, no. 1 (1996); John M. Hunter and Renate de Kleine, “Geophagy in Central America,” *Geographical Review* 74, no. 2 (1984). In Bolivia, e.g., the Aymara traditionally eat a very fine and white clay, called *ph’asa*, to accompany boiled potatoes. It is available in the traditional markets of the city of La Paz.

⁹⁷ Bayo, *Grandes cacerías*, 200.

⁹⁸ Hessel et al., *Lizzie: a Victorian Lady's Amazon Adventure*, 69 and 101.

through the practice of Geophagy. Speaking of the town of Reyes, a journalist explained how the “secret vice and horrible tradition” of eating earth caused “great mortality” through the ingestion of parasite eggs found in the earth.⁹⁹ Finally, travelers also commented on a myriad of skin diseases, scabies and rashes. According to the *mayordomo* Melquíades Roca, his *mozos* had “revolting skin diseases, due to their lack of cleanliness.”¹⁰⁰

In the remote Amazon, public health was non-existent and, as late as 1916, the National Delegation complained that there was only one military physician in Riberalta, who was supposed to take care of all military and civilian population of the Northeast. He also pointed out that physicians who came to the area had been trained abroad or in the highlands and, therefore, had no knowledge whatsoever of tropical medicine.¹⁰¹ The lack of medical attention was indeed a major source of suffering in the rubber areas. The civil servant Napoleón Leigue, for example, wrote to Suárez Hermanos to request a credit of £500 to £1,000, in exchange for “all my assets” to cure himself of beriberi.¹⁰²

It should also be noted that many of these health issues were made worse by the massive consumption of poor quality alcohol that was common in all *barracas*. Alcohol was present in all commercial and social transactions and was probably one of the

⁹⁹ *La Gaceta del Norte* (Ortón), 16 Mar. 1898, n°52.

¹⁰⁰ Melquíades Roca to Suárez Hnos., Ingavi, 27 Nov. 1909. ACS/Correspondencia, Ingavi. Also, there is very little work on public health in Bolivia, see, on the other hand, Ann Zulawski, *Unequal Cures: Public Health and Political Change in Bolivia*. Incidentally, she analyzes the Chuquisaca-born physician Jaime Mendoza, who spent a few years in the rubber fields of the Northeast and published *Páginas bárbaras*, an autobiographical novel, about his experiences.

¹⁰¹ Carlos Gutiérrez, Delegado Nacional “Informe Administrativo de la Delegación Nacional al 31 de julio de 1915” in *El Noroeste* (Cobija), 8 Dec. 1915, n°200.

¹⁰² Napoleón Leigue to Nicolás Suárez., Villa Bella, 13 June 1901. ACS/Correspondencia, Nicolás Suárez.

attractions of living in a *barraca*, especially for mission Indians who otherwise could only drink during religious festivals. Despite the National Delegation's many prohibitions to include alcohol in rubber tappers' debt, a large part of debts was the result of alcohol purchases. The British engineer Edward Davis Mathews was shocked by the quantity of alcohol consumed in the rubber areas of Bolivia and concluded, "I never came across any people that could at all compare to the Bolivians in downright hard drinking."

103

Although *mozos* and *fregueses* had different sorts of contracts, they shared a similar fate. They were both victims of the peculiar environment of the *barracas* and through *habilito* and *enganche* systems, they fell into permanent debt with the rubber companies. Additionally, they suffered similar working conditions. They were exposed to the same diseases and environmental conditions and they were equally dependent on the rubber barons for inadequate food, tools and general supplies.

Responses to Domination

Most literature on the Amazonian rubber boom emphasizes the helplessness and desperation of rubber tappers. The previous chapter has looked at how indigenous peoples responded to the rubber boom. This section takes a closer look at everyday responses to oppression. Since organized labor did not enter the rubber areas of Bolivia until the late twentieth century, these responses were non-political. Rubber tappers did

¹⁰³ Mathews, *Up the Amazon and Madeira Rivers*, 157. For an analysis of alcohol use by Bolivia's different ethnic groups, see Dwight B. Heath, "Changes in Drinking Patterns in Bolivian cultures. A cautionary Tale about Historical Approaches," *Addiction Research & Theory* 2, no. 3 (1995).

not challenge the rubber industry directly and, in many ways, their responses fell into the typical responses of most pre-industrial, non-literate peoples. James Scott's theories about responses to domination are certainly applicable to Bolivia's rubber industry. However, they tend to depict reactive responses and underplay the agency of the players.¹⁰⁴ Chapter 6, for example, has showed how many indigenous individuals sought to be involved in the rubber boom and benefited from it in various ways. Unfortunately, sources on the rubber boom are usually one-sided and there is a total lack of oral histories. Still, they offer glimpses of how rubber tappers reacted to their environment and to their domination. Theoretically, it would seem to be relatively easy to avoid work in the rubber industry. Rubber tappers were often armed, they lived in isolated areas and they were the majority. Yet, the Bolivian rubber areas never experienced an open rebellion or uprising, with the exception of the Acre rebellion. Yet, the Acre was extremely homogenous, it was mostly populated by Brazilian *siringueiros* who rebelled (as Brazilians) against Bolivia's rule. This can be explained because most workers were imported from other areas and, as explained above, lacked social or cultural cohesion and because they operated in an alien environment. The *centros gomeros* were far from each other and, thereby, isolated from other workers. Each *centro* had only a few workers linked by tortuous *estradas*, so that large gatherings of *siringueros* were rare. Their weapons, on the other hand, were trade guns of doubtful quality and ineffective in the

¹⁰⁴ See, e.g., James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

Amazonian environment. The rubber barons, in contrast, had private armies equipped with modern Winchester rifles and had a monopoly of river transportation.

Running away has been a strategy to avoid harsh labor since colonial times. Colonial literature is full of examples of runaway Indians who fled to avoid the *mita* or other forms of forced labor. African slaves also ran away and founded communities (*palenques, quilombos* or other Maroon communities). For rubber barons, running away was a serious offense and they spent valuable time and resources to capture and punish run away *mozos* and *fregueses*. It appears that they reserved the harshest punishments for captured runaways.

In 1914, the *mayordomo* of *barraca* Candelaria (in the Madre de Dios River) complained that his workers were “irrational and corrupt” and were constantly running away. He found it impossible to tap any rubber and suggested that the *barraca* should only work for half a *fábrico* and then it should close down and its tappers should be dispersed among other *barracas*. He also proposed that workers should be placed in *barracas* that were easily supervised and, more important, far away from Riberalta. The location of Candelaria created this problem. Through the Madre de Dios River, *mozos* could flee to Peru or hide and find protection in the city of Riberalta.¹⁰⁵ The environs of Riberalta were full of runaway *mozos* trying to reach the city. An editorial in the local press complained that citizens could not sleep because captured rubber tappers were whipped all night and their painful cries could be heard in the city.¹⁰⁶ Peru, though, was

¹⁰⁵ Manuel Zarco to Suárez Hnos., Candelaria, 14 Dec. 1914. ACS/Correspondencia

¹⁰⁶ Enrique Salinas “Al Sr. Ministro de Colonización,” in *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 27 Mar. 1897, n°7.

not the only destination of runaway *mozos*. Many also decided to move to Brazil. In the early days of the rubber boom *patrones* could easily pursue runaways into Brazil, but as the rubber boom continued, Brazil did not permit this. After all, the Brazilian rubber industry also needed laborers and Bolivians had always been welcome. Moreover, Brazil and Bolivia did not have any extradition treaties.¹⁰⁷

In order to locate runaways, some *patrones* advertised in the local newspapers. Nicanor Gonzalo Salvatierra, for example, advertised that one of his *mozos*, Amelio Ardaya, had traveled to the *barracón* Ortón with his permission, and had escaped to Santo Antônio (on the Madeira River) in the *Sernamby* launch.¹⁰⁸ Rubber barons also constantly accused each other of stealing workers. Very often, *mozos* were sent to *barracas* to “seduce” the work force to move to another *barraca* with better conditions. For example, the *mayordomo* Misael Medina of the Casa Suárez accused Sr. Machado of the Casa Barber of “seducing” his *fregueses* by buying their rubber and welcoming them in his *barraca*. Many of them started to work for him without paying their debts to the Casa Suárez. According to Medina, “a person who proceeds this way is capable of anything.”¹⁰⁹ The powerful Arana house, based in Iquitos, was accused in another incident. The *mayordomo* of Porvenir sent the Peruvians Julio Tuchiba, Reynaldo Rivas

¹⁰⁷ For example, Riberalta judges concluded that they could not do anything about some *mozos* who had taken a minor to the Brazilian side of the Abuná River. ACS/AJR, n°38, Ordinario sobre reclamo de la menor Enriqueta Vaca. Demandantes: Raquel Quiles de Vaca y Rosauero Vaca. Riberalta, 12 Apr. 1921. Manuel Aponte also mentioned that both *mozos* and *fregueses* who did not want to pay their debts routinely ran to the Xapury and Acre Rivers. Aponte, *Revolución del Acre*, 100.

¹⁰⁸ *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 12 June 1897, n°26.

¹⁰⁹ ACS/“Testimonio de varios documentos que cursan en el corregimiento del Río Ortón sobre avances a las posesiones de Suárez Hnos. en el Río Manu hecho por Alfredo W. Barber y Co.” Signed by Misael Medina, 3 Jan. 1917.

and Reynaldo López to Cachuela Esperanza because they had tried to “conquer” the workforce of *barraca* Mukden (near the Acre River). According to the *mayordomo*, they wanted to take twelve men and some women. The *mayordomo* had given 500 lashes to each one and sent them to the head office for further punishment.¹¹⁰

Indigenous peoples were more prone, or perhaps more adept at running away than members of other groups. They also had the option of joining unincorporated indigenous groups. The dislocation of the rubber boom had caused the demographic collapse of many Amazonian ethnic groups and they were happy to incorporate members into their *malocas*. Not all of them were indigenous. Travelers often commented on the existence of white or black “savages.” For example, many Caripuna reportedly had African and white features.¹¹¹

Notwithstanding their constitutional freedom, Afro-Brazilian slaves who made it to Bolivia suffered discrimination and tended to join indigenous communities or to run back to Brazil. This discrimination outlasted Brazil’s abolition of slavery in 1888. In 1909, for example, an Afro-Brazilian ran away. According to the *barraca mayordomo*, while he was alone he had been “tame;” when he was joined by other Afro-Brazilians he became “a lion.” They danced and drank for three days and then proceeded to run away. The *mayordomo* requested permission to pursue them with the *barraca*’s *fregueses* and punish them. In 1894, the *corregidor* of the Ortón, Augusto Roca, ordered the whipping of a few Afro-Brazilians and one of them died instantly. His business partner Nicanor

¹¹⁰ Iván Lugones to Casa Matriz, Porvenir, 14 Mar. 1921, ACS/Porvenir.

¹¹¹ Tomlinson, *The Sea and the Jungle*, 189.

Gonzalo Salvatierra wrote a letter to Sr. Angel Ramalho (most likely a Brazilian) requesting to confirm in writing, “Brazilian Blacks are always dangerous and have a tendency to abuse women and to be disrespectful and even violent to men that disturb them.” Sr. Ramalho answered that he was not aware of this.¹¹²

Even with the difficulties of running away and the constant vigilance of *capangas*, runaways were able to establish short-lived communities in the middle of the jungle. Jaime Mendoza commented that there was a community of *huilones* composed of thirteen runaways from the Barraca Palestina.¹¹³ Juan B. Coimbra called them *cimarrones* and wrote that very few of them made it to Loreto or Rurrenabaque. Most were captured and whipped.

If running away was not a viable option, there were other methods to contest the *patrones*' dominance. Many tappers, for example, worked as little as possible; this was possible because the *centros* were far away and the *mayordomos* could not control all of them. According to *El Noroeste*, after the collapse of the rubber boom, *fregueses* knew that rubber prices were low and that there were few possibilities of ever repaying their debt. Therefore, they worked “whenever they felt like it” and were more interested in “drinking *chicha* and *viñapo* (*wiñapu*) and chewing coca leaves than tapping rubber.”¹¹⁴ *Fregueses* also managed to deceive the *mayordomos*. Jaime Mendoza explained how a

¹¹² “Carta de Nicanor Salvatierra a Angel Ramalho, Riberalta, 15 Sept. 1894 in *Impugnación*, 60.

¹¹³ Mendoza, *Páginas bárbaras*, 137.

¹¹⁴ In the lowlands, fermented *chicha* can be made of a variety of foodstuffs such as yuca, plantain, sweet potato and maize. The Quechua word *wiñapu*, on the other hand, refers to *chicha* made from germinated maize or wheat flour, as opposed to the traditional *chicha* made from chewed grains. “Informe sobre los trabajos gomeros instalados en las barracas de los Sres. Seiler y Compañía” *El Noroeste*, (Cobija), 11 May 1927, n° 412.

fregués explained that he was not concerned with the *mayordomos*. His tactics varied depending on the situation. He invited them to premium drinks, gave them presents, threatened to kill them, or gave them a percentage of his profits. These profits were made by selling rubber to outside rubber buyers, which was strictly forbidden by *freguesía* contracts. He offered the *mayordomo* one *arroba* if he could sell the rest and “the rest were 50 *arrobas*.”¹¹⁵ In other words, he paid the *mayordomo* a commission of one *arroba* for every 50 *arrobas* that he sold to outsiders. The *mayordomo* of the *barraca* Candelaria, for example, wrote that it was impossible to calculate how much rubber an *estrada* (and therefore an *estrada* worker) produced per day because it varied and because production was only weighed at the end of the *fábrico*.¹¹⁶ Other protests included adding weight to the *bolachas* by including rocks, sand or yuca meal, causing shipwrecks and then stealing the floating *bolachas*, or feigning a different name and starting a new contract with a new *patrón* without paying the debt with the former *patrón*.¹¹⁷ Finally, as discussed in the previous chapter, the murder of *patrones* and *mayordomos* was relatively common through ambushes. Jaime Mendoza narrated how an old *cruceño* tapper who had been brought by Antonio Vaca Díez and had a large debt became a hero by murdering his *patrón* and stealing his wife.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Mendoza, *Páginas bárbaras*, 121.

¹¹⁶ Manuel Zarco to Suárez Hnos., Candelaria, 8 Nov. 1914. ACS/Correspondencia.

¹¹⁷ Mentioned by Weinstein, *Amazon Rubber Boom*, 21. All shipwrecks were suspected of foul play, Rómulo Gómez, e.g., demanded a sworn affidavit of all the surviving crewmembers, before a public prosecutor. “Información solicitada por Rómulo Gómez sobre el naufragio de la carga que conducía para la casa Barber von Bercks y Co. de Riberalta,” 12 Mar. 1899. ACS/AJR, Criminal n°141, Caja XXX. “Informe sobre los trabajos gomeros instalados en las barracas de los Sres. Seiler y Compañía” *El Noroeste*, (Cobija), 11 May 1927, n°412.

¹¹⁸ Mendoza, *Páginas bárbaras*, 186.

Albeit rare, there were also other more formal forms of resistance. Luigi Balzan, for example, described how a Catalan, a Chilean and a Peruvian from Arequipa were taken to Reyes to be tried for instigating an uprising at an unspecified *barraca*. Before their formal trial, they had already received 350, 275 and 250 lashes respectively. It is significant that they were all foreigners. They had probably been more exposed to other forms of resistance and they were delivered to the Bolivian authorities as an example of foreign “agitators” similar to those who operated in Argentina and Brazil.¹¹⁹ Another classical form of resistance, banditry, was also relatively rare. Despite the weakness of the Bolivian state, rubber barons operated as effective police forces and banditry existed only in the periphery of the rubber regions. The isolated Iténez, besides giving refuge to war-like indigenous groups, sheltered Beni’s most notorious criminals. The town of Exaltación was often described as the safe haven of criminals.¹²⁰ Another peripheral area, the Acre, was home to the Brazilian gang of Alexandrinho who had 150 members and attacked Bolivian *barracas*.¹²¹ A more organized type of banditry existed in the province of Caupolicán in the department of La Paz. The clashes between rubber barons, haciendas, indigenous communities and a relatively strong state attempting to collect taxes led to a volatile situation. As late as 1912, the hacienda Ticamblaya was a refuge

¹¹⁹ Balzan, “Da Reyes a Villa Bella,” 572. European immigrants to Argentina and Brazil were often accused of anarchist agitation. This migration started in the 1880s and was mostly composed of southern and eastern Europeans. In Argentina, police treated radicals brutally but it was not until the early 20th century that Liberal governments legislated against radical immigrants and initiated massive deportations. See Iácv Oved, *El anarquismo y el movimiento obrero en Argentina* (México: Siglo XXI, 1978), 225-83. Brazil had a similar story; it also repressed foreign activists harshly, and routinely deported them. It even founded a concentration camp for radicals in Oiapoque, near French Guyana. See Sheldon L. Maram, *Anarquistas, inmigrantes e o movimento operário brasileiro, 1890-1920* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1979).

¹²⁰ Sagárnaga, *Recuerdos*, 171.

¹²¹ Moisés Subirana, *Memorias históricas de mi viaje al territorio de colonias del noroeste de la República, 1908-1912* (La Paz: Ed. “América,” 1930), 37.

for Andean bandits armed with Winchesters who refused to acknowledge any authority.¹²² From the rubber barons' point of view, however, as long as they did not steal from their *barracas*, criminals could be a valuable work force and, as a result, they were routinely accused of offering shelter to convicted criminals. On the other hand, the state did not provide any suitable jails and a *barraca* (unless they were promoted to *capanga* status) could probably be the closest thing to a jail.¹²³

Finally, as the Bolivian state extended its institutions into the frontier, both *mozos* and *fregueses* complained to government officials or initiated lawsuits against their *patrones*. These strategies became increasingly bothersome to the rubber barons. The Casa Suárez for example actively tried to prevent their employees from travelling to Riberalta. Captured runaways from *barraca* Candelaria, for example, were sent to Cachuela Esperanza with the specific aim of preventing them from complaining to the Riberalta authorities.¹²⁴

In sum, this chapter has looked at the labor practices of the Bolivian rubber industry and at the realities of working in a rubber *barraca*. The rubber *barraca* was a peculiar institution that was only found in Bolivia's rubber areas. Until the late twentieth-century, they were the main social units in the Bolivian Northeast. The population of the *barracas* was mostly indigenous peoples from throughout the Bolivian lowlands and, to some extent, the Interandean valleys. *Barracas* became an important source of acculturation and were beyond the jurisdiction of any national institution. The

¹²² Sorata, 25 June 1912.ALP/P-A, Correspondencia,

¹²³ Baldivieso, *Informe*, 29.

¹²⁴ Candelaria to Suárez Hnos., Sucursal "A," Riberalta, 23 Jan.1919. ACS/Establecimiento Candelaria

rubber *barraca* was the center of very distinct forms of time-honored labor practices such as debt peonage and the *enganche* system. Although these systems were oppressive and brutal, *siringueros* found ways to get around them by various strategies. Yet, because of the isolation of *barracas* and the lack of social cohesiveness of *barraca*, workers' full-fledged rebellion was rare. As the rubber boom progressed, the Bolivian state attempted to profit from it and to implement policies that would "integrate" the rubber areas to the rest of the nation. Yet, *barracas* continue to exist in the department of Pando and Beni's Vaca Díez province. They have combined rubber extraction with the collection of Brazil nuts and timber and many of them have become communities but the historical name of *barraca* has persisted.

CHAPTER 8. THE BOLIVIAN STATE AND THE RUBBER INDUSTRY

Belatedly and with mixed results, the Bolivian state played an active role in the development of the rubber boom. This chapter analyzes how it attempted to legislate to regulate land tenure, taxation and labor relations in the rubber boom. It also deals with its attempts to create new administrative units, such as the National Delegations and the National Territory of Colonies and to import, without success, colonizers that would both populate and “whiten” the area. These attempts caused conflicts within and without Bolivian territory. Within Bolivia, they caused a growing dissatisfaction within the Bolivian lowlands, which would eventually nourish *camba* irredentism. The richness of Bolivia’s most remote frontiers, the Acre and Purús, and the Bolivian state’s failure to populate them with Bolivian nationals, also brought conflicts with Peru and Brazil. The Acre War with Brazil and skirmishes with Peru caused further loss of Bolivian territory. Ironically, the loss of the Acre led to the partial completion of Bolivia’s long held panacea for its isolation, the Madeira-Mamoré Railway. Unfortunately, the railway was completed as the Amazonian rubber boom collapsed. Despite this, the Casa Suárez managed to survive the collapse and became the most important economic force in lowland Bolivia until the 1952 Revolution, which confiscated its properties.

The French geographer Jean-Claude Roux has characterized the Bolivian state in the nineteenth century as a non-state.¹ Even though there is some truth to this statement, the same could be said about the various states that shared the Amazon basin. Even Brazil, the most aggressive and “victorious” state of the region, had a tenuous hold over its Amazonian territories. During the First Republic (1889-1930), the relationship between the coastal center and its Amazonian periphery was plagued with armed rebellions, uprisings and federal interventions.² In addition, in an attempt to solve disputes between the states of Pará and Amazonas, frontier areas became federally administered territories (the Acre Territory until 1962 and the Guaporé Territory, later Rondônia, until 1981). The same applied to Peru. The Amazonian department of Loreto, for example, attempted to separate from Peru in 1896 and Lima was obliged to send a naval force through the Magellan Straits and up the Amazon River to quell it.³ The Bolivian state met challenges in managing its Amazonian territories, but besides the Acre rebellion and its subsequent separation and independence, did not face full-fledged uprisings in territories inhabited by Bolivians.

Administration and Taxation

Following the example of many Amazonian states, the Bolivian state attempted to create a special status for its frontier. The creation of the National Delegations in the

¹ Roux, *La Bolivie orientale*, 5^{ème} Partie, Le non-état territorial.

² After its secession from Bolivia and its incorporation into the First Republic, the Acre territory continued to be a headache for Brazil. According to the Brazilian historian José Antônio Loureiro there were quite a few separatist attempts between 1909 and 1912. The Federal government also bombarded Manaus in 1910, as a result of a revolt. Loureiro, *A Grande Crise (1908-1916)*, 121-25.

³ Stanfield, *Red Rubber, Bleeding Trees*, 93.

Northeast and of the Territorio Nacional de Colonias met bitter opposition in the lowlands. Locals resented the imposition of *colla* bureaucrats, both the department of Beni and Santa Cruz felt that the central government had historically belonged to the *camba* sphere. In 1904, the *cruceño* politician Rafael Vásquez bitterly recalled how the first National Delegation had arrived to Riberalta in 1893, “as an army attempting to invade an enemy territory or fortress.” It had come with a line infantry corps and with its attendant military and civilian staff. According to Vásquez, its maintenance cost the national treasury 309,062.54 bolivianos per annum. On the other hand, the department of Beni had an official budget of 167,000 bolivianos that was rarely paid, and that contrasted with the budget of 80,000 bolivianos for the small *Delegación del Madre de Dios*. Vásquez concluded that National Delegations were extremely unpopular and that this system of administration was generally loathed to the point that the establishment of a delegate in a town was considered the “worse wickedness and inhabitants uttered the worse insults against the institution.”⁴ A pamphlet published in Santa Cruz de la Sierra also attacked the Delegations (See Fig. 36). It argued that the inhabitants of the Delegations could not elect their representatives democratically. It also accused the National Delegates of having dictatorial powers whereas the Beni prefects did not have any real power. What is more, it complained about the fact that the “proper” department of Beni only had two senators and that, to add insult to injury, none of the employees of

⁴ Rafael Vásquez, *La colonización del departamento del Beni y el mensaje presidencial* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Tip. Comercial, 1904), 5-15.

the National Delegations were from the department of Beni or Santa Cruz.⁵ In contrast, a *paceño* politician echoed the feelings of many highlanders. He claimed that the Amazonian territories should be treated as colonies and be subject to special administration because they were not part of the national territory.⁶ The administration debate raged until the creation of the department of Pando in 1938.



Figure 36. Offices of the National Delegation in Puerto Acre c. 1900

Source: Arthur Posnansky. *Campaña del Acre: la lancha "Iris": aventuras y peregrinaciones*, 9.

One of the main reasons behind the establishment of the National Delegations was to capture revenue from the rubber industry. Up to the 1890s, most Bolivian rubber entered Brazil without paying any duties to Bolivia. On the other hand, the Brazilian provinces of Amazonas and Pará often collected duty on Bolivian exports and imports. The Bolivian government established several customhouses along its borders with Brazil.

⁵ *Cuestiones orientales*, (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Tip. "La Industrial," 1905), 88.

⁶ L. Ballesteros, *La provincia de Caupolicán*, 5.

The most important became Villa Bella on the Madeira River near the confluence of the Mamoré and Beni Rivers. For a few decades, rubber duties became an important source of revenue and, for the first time in Bolivia's history, were greater than mining revenues. Statistics on rubber revenues started to be collected in 1890. The following table shows the main sources of revenue from 1890 to 1902. Although import and export duties continued to be the most important revenue for the whole period, by 1900 rubber contributed more than silver, tin or copper to the country's total revenues. In 1901,

Table 12. Main Sources of Revenue of the Bolivian Government 1890-1902 (in Bs.)*

Year	Customhouses	Silver	Copper	Tin & Bismuth	Rubber	Alcohol Tax**
1890	1,583,729	833,839	11,485	20,000	28,000	
1891	1,174,333	912,570	31,865	21,000	30,000	
1892	1,348,493	928,603	31,500	23,000	31,600	
1893	1,515,630	1,164,166	32,000	25,400	32,235	
1894	1,590,534	1,006,297	36,183	31,960	55,000	
1895	2,618,553	815,659	27,450	37,440	71,340	403,515
1896	2,523,496	603,889	37,134	35,800	107,888	584,025
1897	2,691,722	675,638	30,328	67,733	145,586	237,186
1898	2,796,331	n.a.	36,500	80,000	497,580	383,383
1899	3,714,588	415,790	64,000	120,000	n.a.	227,666
1900	4,038,486	421,540	54,220	298,508	808,536	562,713
1901	3,847,884	404,235	56,086	410,574	1,261,533	478,628
1902	2,649,659	376,147	80,184	407,068	1,000,871	441,497

*Decimals have been omitted.

**They were not collected before 1895.

Source: Transcribed from Bolivia. Oficina Nacional de Inmigración, Estadística y Propaganda Geográfica. *Censo general de la población de la República de Bolivia según el empadronamiento del 1 de Septiembre de 1900*. La Paz: J.M. Gamarra, 1902-04, XLI.

revenues from rubber had increased to over one million bolivianos. Even if contemporary sources claimed that much of the rubber paid duty to Brazil or was passed as contraband, and that Bolivia's output was very small within Amazonia, it was an essential asset for the Bolivian state.

The Bolivian government repeatedly regulated rubber export duties. In 1883, it proclaimed that rubber should pay 0.80 bolivianos per *arroba* of fine rubber and 0.50 per *arroba* for lower quality *sernambí*. On November 1898, the government raised the tax to 1.00 bolivianos per *arroba* and on December 7, 1895, to 12 *centavos* per kilogram of fine rubber and 6.5 *centavos* per kilogram of *sernambí*. Again, on November 16, 1896 the duty was fixed at 16 *centavos* per kilogram of fine rubber and 10 *centavos* for *sernambí*. Finally, in an attempt to imitate the Brazilian system, the National Convention of 1899 set an ad valorem duty of 8 to 15 per cent.⁷

According to the *Ley de estradas gomeras*, proclaimed on December 12, 1895, all rubber trees belonged to the state. In fact, the Bolivian government viewed them like a mineral resource. Since colonial times, mining had been the main economic activity in Bolivian territory and the state considered itself owner of all mining resources. Therefore, it also considered that resources such as cinchona and rubber were also part of its national patrimony and was willing to grant concessions to exploit them for a period for a fee, rather than granting property rights over them. This law stipulated that *estradas* of 150 trees would be the main measuring unit for rubber concessions. The same law imposed a total fee of 15 bolivianos per *estrada* and gave a time limit of fifteen years to pay the amount. In theory, there should have been an annual payment of one boliviano per *estrada*.⁸ Although it was not stated explicitly, if the payment was made, the *estradas* became the property of the payee. If the payment was not made, the *estradas* reverted to

⁷ Paravicini, "Conferencia," 66-67.

⁸ Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Colonización Bolivia, *Ley y reglamento sobre adjudicación de estradas gomeras. Edición oficial* (Sucre: Imp. Bolívar, 1896), Art. 9, VII.

the state and were considered vacant lands.⁹ The areas around the *estradas* were considered vacant lands and could be acquired following the usual procedures to acquire vacant lands. By 1910, the Liberal government demanded payment of outstanding debts, since the slowness of establishing an effective government infrastructure in the rubber areas and the fact that most rubber barons had very limited access to currency had led to a generalized default on the owed amount. In 1903, for example, the National Delegate reported that, since its foundation, the National Delegation had only received 18,390.10 bolivianos as payment for rubber concessions as opposed to 6,563.000 bolivianos for the sale of urban plots of land in the city of Riberalta.¹⁰

Nicolás Suárez seized the opportunity and offered to pay the tax in exchange for the rubber concessions in question. As a result, he became the area's most important rubber producer and achieved a virtual monopoly over rubber production. Following the fate of Antonio Vaca Díez and the Roca brothers, many of the pioneers of Bolivia's rubber industry such as Fidel Endara, Velasco & Henicke, Dévès et Compagnie, C. Saravia and others lost their concessions to Suárez. By 1920, Suárez Hermanos had managed to acquire 2,605 *estradas* on the Beni River, 6,729 on the Madre de Dios River, 6,283 on the Ortón River, and 485 on the Abuná and Acre Rivers. In total, it had 20,161 *estradas* or 4,891,601 hectares (or the equivalent to 4.4% of Bolivia's national territory). Considering the standard unit of 150 trees per *estrada*, Suárez Hermanos controlled a

⁹ See Ministerio de Gobierno Bolivia, *Reglamento de colonias y tierras baldías de 10 de marzo de 1890* (La Paz: Imp. "El Comercio," 1890).

¹⁰ Ministerio de Guerra y Colonización Bolivia, *Memoria presentada por el Ministro de Guerra y Colonización a las cámaras legislativas de 1903* (La Paz: Imp. del Estado, 1903), 27.

staggering 3,024,150 rubber trees.¹¹ Suárez's monopoly over rubber production enabled him to face the gradual collapse of the market for Amazonian rubber. As prices went down, he increased production and reduced costs. Although it benefitted Suárez Hermanos, rubber legislation had a fundamental flaw, in that it measured rubber concessions in *estradas*. The ideal unit of 150 trees per *estrada* was rarely a reality and it was impossible to measure the exact number of trees contained in a *barraca*. Both rubber barons and politicians criticized rubber taxation and many suggested that Bolivia should adopt the Brazilian system. A former National Delegate, José Paravicini, for example suggested that taxation should follow the Brazilian system, a small tax per square kilometer of property and a high *ad valorem* tax on rubber exports of 22 to 26 per cent.¹² The many attempts to legislate taxation of the rubber industry created a situation of chaos. In the long term, they led to the concentration of land in a few hands and it is quite probable that, at the local level, *de facto* property rights endured and, as previously, matters were decided informally.

Legislation

Policy on the rubber industry was closely linked to the older policies on colonization. Like many other Latin American countries, Bolivia attempted to attract immigrants to its thinly populated eastern territories. Even though legislation on colonization became a priority for most Bolivian governments since the 1850s, the results

¹¹ "Cuadro sinóptico de la propiedad gomera de Suárez Hnos, con demostración de superficie, estradas, terrenos en las mismas y excedentes. Demostración para el pago de excedentes efectivos." Cachuela Esperanza, Jan. 1920. ACS/Cachuela Esperanza 1919.

¹² Paravicini, "Conferencia," 67.

were almost virtually nil.¹³ As discussed in previous chapters, most “colonizers” entered the rubber producing areas through private contracts with individual *casas comerciales*. Antonio Vaca Díez unsuccessfully attempted to attract European immigrants to the Ortón and Nicolás Suárez incorporated Colombians and Peruvians into his *barracas*.¹⁴ These efforts were by no means very large and they were entirely private adventures, without any governmental promotion. Yet, the first rubber barons had taken advantage of colonization legislation. In 1886, the Conservative President Gregorio Pacheco issued the *Ley de colonias y tierras del estado*, based on Argentine legislation, granting vacant lands, among others, in the departments of Beni and Santa Cruz.¹⁵ This Act stated that public lands in these departments could be granted or sold to individuals who cultivated them for a period of four years and the state would be responsible for exploring and measuring them. In 1890, the Government issued the *Reglamento de colonias y tierras baldías*, which authorized the sale of up to 250,000 hectares per individual or enterprise. The government could authorize concessions greater than 250,000 hectares.¹⁶

In 1905, the Bolivian Congress under the Liberal Party approved the *Ley de Tierras Baldías*. This law imposed the hectare as a measuring unit (thereby abolishing the *estrada*) and allowed Bolivians and foreigners to buy up to 20,000 hectares at the low price of 10 *centavos* per hectare. The law also stipulated that the buyer had property rights over all “vegetation” on the property, thereby abolishing state rights over rubber

¹³ For a thorough analysis of Bolivian colonization efforts, see García Jordán, *Cruz y arado*.

¹⁴ See chap. 5.

¹⁵ See Bolivia and Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto, *Memoria del Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores y Colonización al Congreso de 1887* (Cochabamba: n.p., 1887), 56-59.

¹⁶ Bolivia, *Reglamento colonias y tierras baldías*, and ANB/MH 1890, t.208, n°5.

trees and other forests. As in previous legislation, the government could authorize the sale of properties over the legislated limit.¹⁷ As seen in the previous chapters, these laws were not generally applied. Since the state rarely intervened in the exploration or measurement of vacant lands, private corporations and individuals who had access to the government managed to amass large amounts of land. Exceptions to stipulated limits, for instance, were widespread. The Bolivian government was unable or unwilling to colonize its vast territories and attempted to delegate colonization to private interests. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the state granted huge concessions to private individuals and corporations. In 1901, for example, it granted the Acre Territory to the US-based Bolivian Syndicate. The Bolivian Syndicate was to substitute the Bolivian state for a period of thirty years and was responsible for administration, taxation and the sale of *estradas*. The Bolivian government thus gave up its sovereignty to facilitate the colonization of the Acre. Not surprisingly, Brazil considered the concession a threat and decried the appearance of “US Imperialism” in its borders.¹⁸ Another concession was granted to the Belgian company *L’Africaine* (involved in colonization in Argentina, Russia and Central Africa) to build a railway from Santa Cruz de la Sierra to the Paraguay River and to construct a port there. The contract allowed for the transfer of five million hectares along the railway to the company! Since

¹⁷ Ministerio de Colonización y Agricultura Bolivia, *Ley y Reglamento referentes a la adjudicación de tierras baldías del Estado*, oficial ed. (La Paz: Taller Tip.-Lit. J.M. Gamarra, 1907), Art. 4. For the application of this law in the Chaco, see Langer, *Economic Change*, 125-37.

¹⁸ For details of the Acre conflict and its relationship with the rubber industry, see Fifer, "The Empire Builders,," Lewis A. Tambs, "Rubber, Rebels, and Rio Branco: The Conquest of the Acre," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 46, no. 3 (1986).

the Belgians never started construction, Bolivia broke the contact in 1902.¹⁹ Finally, in 1911 the Liberals granted 3,750,000 hectares to the Madeira Mamoré Railway Company. Although the railway from Porto Velho to Guajará-Mirim was completed in 1912 (See Fig. 37), the link to Riberalta, required by the Treaty of Petrópolis (1903) between Bolivia and Brazil, was never completed and, therefore, the railway never entered Bolivian territory and could not claim the 3,750,000 hectares.²⁰ These are just a few examples of dozens of similar concessions that marked one of Bolivia's most important land grabs. The underlying liberal principle behind this legislation was that all lands without property deeds were vacant and belonged to the state. Bolivian legislation, like elsewhere, completely ignored the property rights of Amazonian indigenous groups. Amazonia, like most of southern Argentina was considered a desert, that is an uninhabited place and, to the Bolivian state, indigenous peoples did not legally exist. The same process applied to the Chaco. According to Erick D. Langer, in the 1880s and 1890s land concessions routinely included Indian villages and its inhabitants as part of the grant. Like in Amazonia, local elites with political connections managed to

¹⁹ See Manuel Vicente Ballivián and Daniel S. Bustamante, *Industrias y ferrocarriles. Las propuestas de "L'Africaine" en Bolivia* (La Paz: Taller Tip. y Lit. Ayacucho, 1901); *The Acre territory. Documents concerning the controversy between Brazil and Bolivia over a contract made with American citizens* ([n. p.]: 1902), and George Earl Church, *Acre territory* ([London, etc., Printed by W. Clowes & Sons, Ltd., 1904).

²⁰ For the text of the Dec. 4th, 1911 Law, see Antezana Salvatierra, *Los liberales*, 157-58. This author mentions concessions to the Bolivian Company in Caupolicán and Larecaja, to the *Compañía Exploradora de Bolivia* in the Chapare, for the *Sindicato Fomento del Oriente* in the Dept. of Santa Cruz, to the *Bolivian Railway Company*, anywhere, and to the Berlin-based Staudt & Co., in the Chaco. For Staudt & Co., see Langer, *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree*, 241-43. For Caupolicán, see Ministerio de Colonización e Industria, Bolivia, *La "Bolivian Company," Sociedad de explotación, colonización y vialidad en la región de Caupolicán* (La Paz: Taller Tip. Lit., 1901). For the complete text of the Petrópolis Treaty, see Brazil. et al., *Brazil and Bolivia Boundary Settlement; Treaty for the Exchange of Territories and Other Compensations, signed at Petropolis, November 17, 1903; together with the Report of Baron Rio Branco, Minister for Foreign Relations of Brazil* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1904).

accumulate most of the land and the stated goal of populating the frontier with colonizers did not take place. As the previous chapter has explained, many Amazonian Indians reacted to this situation by fleeing to Brazil and thus the Amazonian frontier became even less populated.²¹

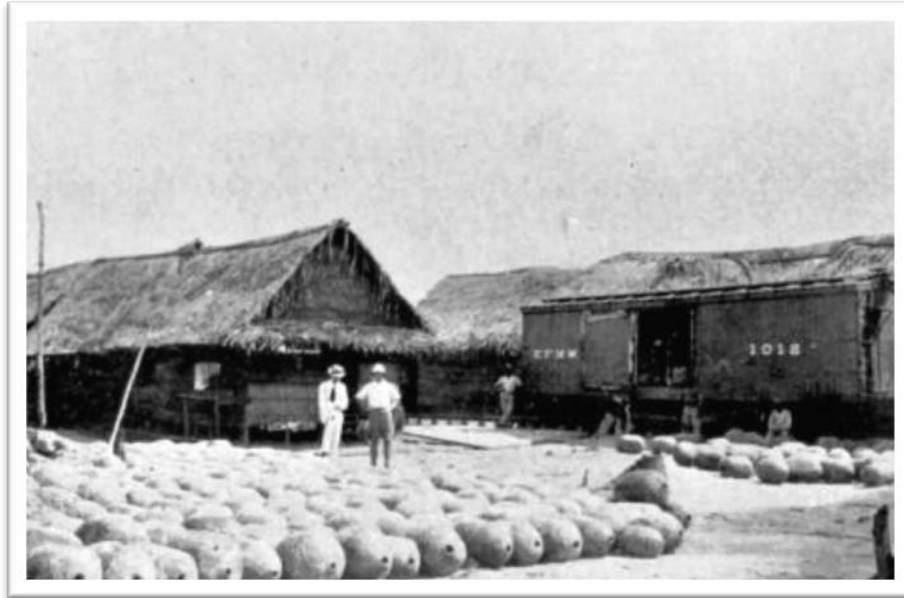


Figure 37. Bolivian rubber bolachas ready to be shipped at the Abuná Station of the Madeira Mamoré Railway

Source: Landor. *Across Unknown South America*, 372.

Both internal and international pressure forced the Bolivian government to intervene in the rubber industry's labor relations. In the early days of the rubber boom, local government, especially in the Beni Prefecture, had been a willing ally of rubber barons. In the 1860s and 1870s, prefects were accused of sending Moxos Indians to the Madeira for a fee. Despite a widespread outcry, the situation continued until *enganchadores* started to scour the department of Santa Cruz for potential rubber

²¹ See Langer, *Economic Change*, 134-38.

workers. *Cruceño* politicians and public opinion started a campaign to stop the depopulation of the department and, since they had more political influence than their Beni counterparts did, they succeeded in forcing the central government to legislate the hiring of workers for the rubber industry. In 1896 the central government, under the presidency of Severo Fernández Alonso (President 1896-1899) issued its *Ley de Enganche de peones* to regulate labor relations in the rubber areas, a law proposed by the liberal General Pando after his explorations of the Bolivian Amazon.²²

The law applied to labor contracted for the areas north of the 14th parallel south. After the approval of the law, legislators found out that several Moxos towns were located south of the 14th parallel so the law was modified to include Trinidad, Loreto, San Joaquín, San Ignacio [de Moxos] and San Xavier [de Moxos].²³ The law was supposed to protect rubber workers from exploitation. Article 27, for example, forbade physical punishment, including whippings and the use of stocks in the *barracas*. Article 1, required that contracts should be signed and filed in the prefectures, sub-prefectures or police officers with a public notary. The same article specified that *patrones* should cover *enganche* and transportation expenses to the rubber *barracas*, that they should provide “good food,” a return ticket or a lump sum of 100 bolivianos and that *anticipos* should not exceed 400 bolivianos. *Patrones* should also deposit 200 bolivianos per

²² Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Fomento Bolivia, *Ley y reglamento sobre enganche de peones* (Sucre: Imp. "Bolívar," 1897.

²³ *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 12 June 1897, n°26.

worker in the department's treasury to warrant their return. If they died, this amount should be given to the workers' heirs.²⁴

As with most Bolivian legislation, enforcement of the law was uneven. Rubber barons were opposed to it and blamed all of the rubber industry's ills on the *Ley de Enganches*. The anonymous pamphlet *Cuestiones orientales*, mentioned above, blamed the loss of the Acre, for example, on this law. The author claimed that the law put so many obstacles for recruiting Bolivian workers that the rubber industry was forced to recruit Brazilians, who became a majority of the Acre population.²⁵ Another *cruceño* claimed that *enganchadores* met open hostility in Santa Cruz de la Sierra and that they were victims of police and mob violence, even if they were operating within the law.²⁶ Theoretically, the most important beneficiary of the law was the laboring population of the department of Santa Cruz. Its authorities, however, found it almost impossible to enforce it. For instance, a report by a prefect of Santa Cruz wholeheartedly endorsed the law by claiming that the department did not have a surplus of labor and that the abandonment of its agriculture should not be allowed. Yet, it also asserted that enforcing the law was virtually impossible. *Mozos* were running away from their jobs during the night to meet the *enganchadores* in the countryside. The city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra only had only a force of twelve police officers on foot and, according to the prefect, any Santa Cruz *mozo* had access to good horses and *enganchadores* were well armed, so

²⁴ Bolivia, *Ley enganche peones*, 1-3.

²⁵ *Cuestiones orientales*, 33.

²⁶ Vaca Díez, *Conferencia*, 7.

pursuit was impossible.²⁷ Another report concluded by estimating that the rubber industry had “abducted” 8,000 peons from the department of Santa Cruz from 1890 to 1900.²⁸

One of the main arguments against the *Ley de Enganches* was legal. According to Oswaldo Vaca Díez, for example, the law restricted the freedom of movement guaranteed by the Bolivian Constitution and discriminated against the rubber industry. He rhetorically asked why should Indians from the Altiplano be freely contracted to work in Chile and the Chiriguano to work in Argentina but *cruceños* needed a passport to work within their own territory?²⁹ The protectionist intention of the *Ley de Enganches* was lost and, like many other political issues, it was used to add fuel to the emerging fire of “Oriental” irredentism. Because it had been proclaimed by a Conservative government, albeit under *cruceño* pressure and under the sponsorship of no other than Bolivia’s eventual first Liberal President General Pando, and because it was issued in Sucre, it became a “backward” law that attempted against free enterprise and the free movement of labor within the Republic of Bolivia. As chapter 6 explains, its effects on the provinces of the department of Santa Cruz and on the departments of Beni and the province of Caupolicán were minimal. Just as *enganchadores* were able to dodge the watchfulness of Santa Cruz authorities, they were also able to avoid the duty to pay a deposit and sign contracts for workers before local authorities. Despite all the uproar it

²⁷ Angel Mariano Zambrana, *Informe del Prefecto y Comandante General del Departamento de Santa Cruz, Don Angel Mariano Zambrana* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Imp. de “La Estrella de Oriente,” 1897), 10-14.

²⁸ Rojas, *Informe...de 1905*, 54.

²⁹ Vaca Díez, *Conferencia*, 9.

caused, the *Ley de Enganches* became a dead letter. Most of the practices that it denounced and forbade routinely continued throughout the rubber boom. Thanks to Franciscan missionaries, though, it was enforced to a certain extent in the Chaco and in Guarayos. In the Chaco, for example, missionaries used the law to keep their charges from the clutches of *enganchadores*.³⁰

Missions and the State

The role of missions during the rubber boom was briskly debated. Members of the rubber industry had been enthusiastic supporters of Bolivia's Liberal Party and one of the Party's tenets was its anticlerical stance. On the other hand, Bolivian governments were aware that missionaries had historically been very effective in integrating frontier Indians to the nation. Although the rubber areas did not contain any missions, a belt of Franciscan missions surrounded them. To the west, there were the missions of Caupolicán, which had a tenuous hold over the Mosestén and various Tacana groups. Further south, there were some also precarious Yuracaré missions along the Beni/Cochabamba border. The missions among the Guarayú, along the undefined border between Santa Cruz and Beni, were among the most prosperous and well-organized missions of the Republic. Franciscans also founded missions among the Chiriguano and other indigenous groups of the Chaco.³¹ As the rubber industry depleted mestizo, indigenous and "savage" sources of labor, *gomer*os looked at missions as a potential

³⁰ See Langer, "The Eastern Andean Frontier," and García Jordán, "*Yo soy libre.*"

³¹ For missions among the Chiriguano, see Langer, *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree*.

source of workers and pressed the Bolivian state for secularization of the missions.³² As previous chapters have shown, *barracas* employed workers from many of these missions, especially, Tacana, Chiriguano and Guarayú Indians, which shows that missionaries gradually lost control over their charges.

Originally, missions were regulated by a law proclaimed in 1871, which granted ample power to the missionaries. In reality, the state was giving much of its power to missions in the frontier and, as Langer notes, this legislation reflected the weakness of Bolivia's central government in the 1870s.³³ When Liberals came to power, they implemented new legislation to weaken the power of missions. In 1901, they proclaimed a new law that, among other matters, ordered missionaries to teach Spanish to neophytes.³⁴ A new *Reglamento* was issued in 1905, which further restricted missions. Its more important articles stipulated that missionaries were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Colonies and Agriculture and, more important, that they could not interfere with the recruitment of laborers among their neophytes.³⁵ After this decree, Liberal governments gradually pursued the secularization of missions. Even though they were relatively successful in the Chaco, there were very few secularization attempts in the Amazon frontier during these early years. For one, many of the missions, especially those in Caupolicán, had already disappeared or were in frank decadence. On the other hand, the isolation of many missions also meant that neither the state nor the mestizo landowners were interested in purchasing land within them. In addition, the rubber boom

³² See García Jordán, "*Yo soy libre.*"

³³ See Langer, *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree*, 226.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 239.

³⁵ Honorable Congreso Nacional. *Decreto Misiones*.

provided enough economic opportunities and, as stated above, none of the missions were located in rubber producing areas. However, their most valuable asset was indeed their workforce, which became a target of *enganchadores* from Bolivia's various rubber areas.

During the 1880s and early 1890s the Bolivian state, in an attempt to extend its control over its Amazonian frontiers, promoted exploration and supported the establishment of missions among independent Indians. Father Armentia, for example, received funding to explore possible missions among the indigenous peoples of Northern Bolivia.³⁶ To many Bolivians, missions were the most efficient way to integrate "savages." The Ministry of External Affairs, in a report to the Conservative National Congress of 1887, compared the rapid acculturation that missions could accomplish with the situation of the Quechua and Aymara Indians of the highlands. While missions produced citizens through work, and converted independent Indians into useful Spanish-speaking citizens, "the highland race, dominated for centuries, stays static, clinging to its ancient traditions, resisting the civilizing movement that is advancing throughout the Republic and dangerously resisting any change, even if it benefits them [...]. It is clear that our legislators have not studied this problem, so that they can prepare the transformation of that race."³⁷

In 1890, the government had established the Beni Apostolic Vicariate, under the leadership of Father Pifferi, and had assigned 10,000 bolivianos for his trip to the Beni and a yearly budget of 15,000 bolivianos to establish missions along the Madre de Dios,

³⁶ See, eg., Armentia, *Diario del viaje al Madre de Dios*.

³⁷ Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto, Bolivia. *Memoria del Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores y Colonización al Congreso de 1887* (Cochabamba: n.p., 1887), 52.

Ortón, Abuná, Chapare and Iténez Rivers. It also had assigned an extra allotment of 15,000 bolivianos for “installation expenditures.”³⁸ Father Pifferi traveled to Beni and he and his successors spent a few decades attempting to establish missions there. Franciscans worked among Moxo runaways and among the Iténez (see chap. 6), but were not able to establish missions along the Madre de Dios, Ortón and Abuná Rivers, which had been under the firm control of liberal rubber barons since the 1880s. Despite official support, neither Father Armentia nor his successors were able to establish new missions near rubber-producing areas.

In the early twentieth century, opposition to missions became more explicit. The liberal press of Beni and Santa Cruz routinely criticized missions and viewed them as a threat to the development of the region. In 1906, for example, the prefect of Santa Cruz Rosendo Rojas informed that rubber barons constantly complained about the friars. Since the 1905 decree, *enganchadores* were openly recruiting workers for the rubber industry in the Guarayos missions. According to them, foreign missionaries (mostly, German, Austrian and Italian), favored recruitment by foreign *casas comerciales* and, thus discriminated against Bolivian citizens. The prefect also accused the friars of exploiting their native charges illegally. He wrote that neophytes were forced to build canoes and to plant and harvest foodstuffs and that the friars sold them at a handsome profit to rubber *barracas*, but refused to pay any wages to the Indians. Besides, the missionaries were also failing to integrate Indians into the Bolivian nation by refusing to

³⁸ Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto, Bolivia. *Memoria de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto presentada al Congreso ordinario de 1903* (La Paz: Tall Tip-Lit de J.M. Gamarra, 1903), xxxviii.

teach them Spanish and educating them in the Indians' native language.³⁹ After 1906, there was an open conflict between the missionaries and outside forces but, as had been the case in the Chaco, the state sided with settlers. The rubber industry and hacendados competed for neophytes and the expanding Bolivian state needed their services to construct public interest projects. During the 1920s and 1930s, a stronger Bolivian state started the forced secularization of the Republic's missions. Neophytes became "citizens" and the military often forced them to become their auxiliaries. With the collapse of the rubber boom, the Bolivian military established, for the first time, a strong presence in the lowlands and started the "pacification" of the remaining independent Indian groups, such as the Sirionó or the Iténez.⁴⁰

Immigration

Like many of its Latin American counterparts, the Bolivian state considered that European immigration would be a panacea to bring about the development of its frontiers. Bolivia's migration policies went hand in hand with its colonization policies. Since independence, governments issued countless laws to bring European immigrants to the nation's unpopulated areas. European immigrants were preferred because they were allegedly superior to mestizos, Indians and even Creoles. The *cruceño* intellectual Justo Leigue Moreno presented this view in 1890:

The White race descends from the Spanish and their most illustrious surnames are represented here in abundance. It has the lowest numbers but it has kept its supremacy over the rest, as is the case everywhere. It

³⁹ Rojas, "Informe...1905," 72.

⁴⁰ See Luís Leigue Castedo, *El Iténez salvaje* (La Paz: Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, 1957).

rules the state and fills political posts and appointments [...]. Thus, fulfilling the sociological laws that rule race formation, a Creole race was gradually created. Although it was inferior to the Spanish race, it was much superior to the indigenous race.⁴¹

Despite official rhetoric, most immigrants to the lowlands arrived with their own means or rubber companies and *casas comerciales* hired them directly in Europe. Unlike its Argentine or Brazilian counterparts, the Bolivian state was not able to subsidize immigrants. In Argentina, for example, immigrants had free transportation and free legal titles after three years of farming. In addition, they could obtain free agricultural tools.⁴² Although Bolivia had generous citizenship laws and offered cheap land, immigrants found it difficult to settle in its remote frontiers.⁴³ During the early twentieth century, the debate over immigration became more heated. In 1901, a government report justified the vast concessions that the government granted to foreign nationals in Caupolicán (see above) on the grounds that, “after all, since nationals [of Bolivia] are deficient to colonize and populate the vast expanses of this republic, it is impossible to leave the great future that awaits this nation in their hands without seriously harming it.”⁴⁴

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Bolivia’s immigration legislation was rarely implemented and immigration lacked behind most South America’s countries, yet debate over suitable immigrants was a constant of government reports and the press. Some favored “Latin” immigrants; for example in 1905 an official *Geography*

⁴¹ Leigue Moreno, *Nociones de Geografía*, 115-17.

⁴² Ministerio de Gobierno, Bolivia, *Informe al Honorable Congreso Nacional de 1891 por el Ministro de Gobierno* (Oruro: "La Revolución," 1891), 121.

⁴³ Immigrants were, for example, able to acquire Bolivian citizenship within one year of their arrival. “Ley de colonias,” Art. 15. ANB/MH 1890 t. 208, n° 52, Ministerio del Interior y Colonización.

⁴⁴ Ministerio de Colonización e Industria, *La “Bolivian Company,”* 15.

of Bolivia, claimed that French and Italian immigrants were more suitable than German or English immigrants were because they were similar to Bolivians and could be easily assimilated. In 1915, the National Delegation lamented that Vaca Díez and Nicolás Suárez had imported Colombian and Spanish immigrants, who were “worse” than the locals were. The liberal bureaucrat Manuel Vicente Ballivián, on the other hand, recommended Anglo-Saxon immigration. He enthusiastically wrote that the race had good work habits, a good system of land ownership and agriculture, that it was dominated by private enterprise, self-sufficiency, and was a colonizing race par excellence, citing the colonization of North America, spurred by the homestead and the savings account.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, as seen in previous chapters, many of the immigrants were not European. Like elsewhere in Amazonia, the Northeast attracted many Levantine Arabs, who are usually called *turcos* in Latin America. Most of them settled in the urban areas of Acre and the Territorio Nacional de Colonias but they gradually moved towards most of the Bolivian lowlands.⁴⁶ No immigration policies had foreseen that non-European immigrants would arrive to Bolivia. However, Japanese and Chinese immigrants arrived to the Northeast in late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries. In 1903, an individual called Jackson Todd (probably a British labor broker) requested and obtained permission from the Liberal government to import 1,000 Chinese laborers for the rubber industry, but it seems that they did not materialize.⁴⁷ Yet, in the early 1900s, many

⁴⁵ Ballivián, *Industrias y ferrocarriles*, 32.

⁴⁶ For example, Nordenskiöld found them in Santa Rosa [del Yacuma] and San Borja trading with the Chimán during the 1910s. He unsympathetically described them as a real scourge for the Indians. Nordenskiöld, *Indios y blancos*, 220.

⁴⁷ Ministerio de Guerra y Colonización, *Memoria...1903*, 32.

Chinese moved from the Peruvian coast to Iquitos and then to the Madeira River and settled in Bolivian towns. Later, the Madeira Mamoré Railway also recruited many Chinese to work as domestics and many eventually settled in Cobija and Riberalta.⁴⁸

However, the largest numbers of non-European immigrants were Japanese. After some initial misgivings, Bolivians became enthusiastic about Japanese immigrants. Starting in the 1890s, many Japanese started to leave Peru and settled in Riberalta where they proved to be very adaptable. According to one observer, they worked in fishing, agriculture, horticulture, and timber production. They were also skilled carpenters and woodcutters and worked as barbers, laundrymen, cooks, domestics, shop assistants and even *siringueros*.⁴⁹ In 1915, the National Delegate explained that the Japanese “were the most adaptable immigrants to the peculiar conditions of this tropical region.” He claimed they were ideal workers because they withstood the harsh conditions of the rubber industry, and, unlike other settlers, were well disposed towards agriculture. He regretted that the National Delegation did not have any land available to grant them and suggested that they should move from Riberalta to Beni and other areas. Moreover, he suggested to the Bolivian government to use diplomatic means to bring more Japanese immigrants to establish a Japanese colony in the Northeast.⁵⁰ In 1923, the Cobija press praised Japanese immigration again; it claimed that, “Japanese workers have demonstrated an unusual adaptation to our climate, way of life, and laws. They are even ethnically similar

⁴⁸ Woodroffe, *The Rubber Industry*, 155.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ “Informe administrativo de la Delegación Nacional.” Signed by Carlos Gutiérrez. *El Noroeste* (Cobija), 26 Sept. 1915, n°195.

to our best aboriginal peoples.”⁵¹ These attitudes contrasted with other countries’ attitudes towards Asian immigrants. In 1903, for example, the Peruvian Congress passed a law to exclude Asian migrants and many others followed this law throughout the early twentieth century. It is possible that many Japanese who came to Bolivia were fleeing such legislation.⁵² Unlike Levantine Arabs, who intermingled and became part of the Beni elite, few Japanese stayed on the Bolivian Amazon after the collapse of the rubber boom. In 1927, the Cobija press announced that the Japanese, the Brazilians and the Peruvians had been the first to abandon the *siringales*. It seems like many of these Japanese migrants re-settled in Peru or along the Brazilian coast.⁵³

Despite the official wish to encourage European immigration, the isolation of Bolivia’s frontiers failed to bring immigrants, who preferred to settle in more accessible and developed areas such as Argentina, coastal Brazil, Uruguay or Chile. Many authorities of the rubber areas became convinced that European immigration was not desirable. In 1905, the prefect of Santa Cruz reported that European immigration had failed because it had brought the “vices of old European societies.” He advocated for the return of missions that could convert the “jungle barbarians” into workers who were used to the diseases and way of life of the Bolivian jungles.⁵⁴

Many Europeans fared well and, after their contracts with rubber companies were over, settled in the towns of the lowlands and became prosperous merchants or

⁵¹ *El Noroeste*, (Cobija), 19 Apr. 1923, n°57.

⁵² Ayumi Takenaka, "The Japanese in Peru: History of Immigration, Settlement, and Racialization." in *Latin American Perspectives* 31, no. 3 (2004), 88.

⁵³ *El Noroeste*, (Cobija), 11 May 1927, n°412.

⁵⁴ Rojas, *Informe... 1905*, 23.

hacendados. This was particularly the case with Germans, who could rely on a relatively large German colony. Despite official propaganda, being European did not necessarily warrant success. Immigrants who had skills in demand, such as ship captains did quite well. According to the American traveler Charles Johnson Post, an experienced steamship pilot earned wages equal to those of the whole crew, had extra cargo room for his private trading, a rifle and cartridges and “the amount of alcohol necessary to get him into this amiable state of mind.” Experienced German, French and English clerks seemed to have a high standard of living managing the warehouses of Riberalta’s *casas comerciales*.⁵⁵ However, many did not fare so well. Many immigrants stayed in the rubber areas because they could not afford to return home and fell into the trap of debt peonage. Joseph F. Woodroffe was appalled that Englishmen were treated no better than the inferior native employees were. An English machinist was given an advance of £130 in England. This quantity only covered his trip and purchases in the company store in South America basics such as a small water filter, a mosquito net, a bucket, a hammock, a bedspread, and four wooden poles and rope for the hammock. While at the *barraca*, he could not appeal to local authorities because there were none and the nearest consulates were in La Paz, Oruro, Pará and Iquitos. Another Englishman died and the company charged his widow £3.5 for burial in a public cemetery and 120 bolivianos for “a bed in which to die.” After more than three years in Bolivia, he had saved less than £40.00. Following usual *barraca* procedures, the exchange rate of his credits was at 20 bolivianos per sterling pound, while the exchange rate for his salaries was 12.50 bolivianos per

⁵⁵ Post, *Across the Andes*, 340 and 337.

pound. Woodroffe was appalled that British subjects should be treated this way by a “so-called English company,” which indicates that he was probably referring to the Casa Suárez.⁵⁶ In conclusion, despite official rhetoric, as the US traveler Cecil Herbert Prodgers laconically observed, “South Americans will not pay Europeans more than their Indians.”⁵⁷

The fortunes of foreigners who were lured by the Bolivian rubber industry varied. Despite favorable legislation, their circumstances depended on many factors and they were often at the mercy of rubber companies and were not able to appeal to local or consular authorities. Yet, they had relatively easy citizenship legislation. On the other hand, Bolivia’s legislation denied this basic right to their indigenous majorities. Bolivian Indians, whether they were Andean or not, were legally considered minors and did not have legal rights. In 1885, the National Commissioner for the Oriente, Manuel Aguirre declared all Beni Indians “social minors” (*impúberes*) and added they did not qualify as citizens because they lacked “the simple intellect that even the most rudimentary political organization demands to consider an individual able to fully exercise his rights.”⁵⁸ Despite this, as throngs of colonizers failed to materialize in the country’s remote frontiers, local authorities started to look at “savages” closely as a possible source of citizens, of course after a civilizing process.

As discussed above, missions had been considered the most adequate means to accomplish this task. By the end of the nineteenth century, there was an increasing trend

⁵⁶ Woodroffe, *The Upper Reaches of the Amazon*, 206.

⁵⁷ Prodgers, *Adventures in Bolivia*, 132.

⁵⁸ Bolivia and Aguirre, *La Delegación en el Oriente*, 56.

to secularize the state in general and missions in particular. Even rubber barons became aware that the swift demise of the lowlands' "savages," as a barrier to progress was counterproductive. They proposed that they, instead of the missionaries, could take care of "civilizing" them by honest work in their rubber *barracas*. We cannot speak of an "Indian policy" in the Bolivian Amazon, but local authorities tried to regulate the capture of independent Indians. In 1890, in a circular to all sub-prefects, the Beni prefect acknowledged that some *gomeros* killed adult *bárbaros* and sold their children. He instructed local authorities to seize these children and take them to missions or, if there were not any, offer them to "honest families of good character" to be educated.⁵⁹

The capture of independent Indians to be used as free labor in rubber *barracas* was widespread. In 1897, Pastor Baldivieso questioned this practice. He stated that former "savages" who were working in *barracas*, whether through their own will or capture, should not serve their *patrones* indefinitely. It seemed that the only obligation the *patrones* had towards them was to exploit their labor indefinitely, without ever granting them freedom. The Intendant added that these Indians had already paid for the expenditure of their capture by their years of labor.⁶⁰

After a few months, the National Delegation attempted to regulate the capture of independent Indians through a local decree. Article 1 forbade armed assault against "savages," without the permission of the authorities. Article 6 made the customary practice of killing male adults and bringing only children and women illegal. Other

⁵⁹ "Circular a los sub-prefectos." Prefectura del Beni, Trinidad, 12 de junio del 1891. Signed by González Portal, in *Sucesos del Beni con relación al ciudadano Samuel Gonzalo Portal, Ex-prefecto del Departamento del Beni* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Tip. "El Mentor," 1895), 39.

⁶⁰ "Nuestros salvajes," signed by Pastor Baldivieso in *El Noroeste* (Riberalta), 23 May 1897, n°23.

articles forced would be “conquerors’ to obtain a license from the National Delegate and to present a full report of their raids. The most notable part of the decree, though, granted “conquerors” legal custody over the captured Indians, whether they were adult or not, for four years. The period of four years could not be shortened, even if the Indians were deemed “civilized” before that period. The law also ordered that runaway Indians should be returned to their original “owner” and that they could not be transferred to any other person. *Gomeros* who captured independent Indians were confirmed their right to obtain free labor from them for at least four years. After that period, like any *barraca* worker, they gained the privilege of working in exchange for debts, which prevented their running away from the *barraca*.⁶¹ Despite this legislation, it is possible that rubber companies started to charge debts as soon as the captured Indians arrived at a *barraca*. Unlike colonial conquerors, the decree did not provide free labor for Christian doctrine, it seems like work by itself would achieve the Indians’ “civilization.” No other type of instruction was required, since the area lacked schools, missions or churches. Around the same period, the National Delegation offered the Spanish writer *Ciro Bayo* a salary of 100 bolivianos per month to found school in *Riberalta*. After a few months, *Bayo* resigned because he had only managed to enroll six white students and did not want to obtain a salary “for doing nothing.”⁶²

⁶¹ “Decreto reglamentario,” signed by *Dámaso Alonso*, Delegado Nacional en el Madre de Dios, Acre y Purús, 19 Sept. 1897 in *El Noroeste (Riberalta)*, 9 Oct. 1897, n°40.

⁶² *Bayo*, *Por la América desconocida*, 292

The Bolivian State and the Acre War

This dissertation does not analyze in detail the Acre War because for all practical purposes the Acre was a Brazilian enclave under nominal Bolivian administration. According to the *cruceño* Oswaldo Vaca Díez, at the turn of the twentieth century the Acre had a population of 250 Bolivians among 5,000 Brazilians.⁶³ However, the Acre War illustrates the relationship between the Bolivian state and the rubber industry. On January 1899, the Bolivians founded Puerto Alonso on the Acre River and imposed a head tax on Brazilian residents and a 30% export duty on rubber. This led to a series of rebellions, which were eventually supported by the Brazilian state of Amazonas, which led to the removal of Bolivian authorities and the proclamation, on July 1899 of the Republic of Acre under the leadership of the Spanish adventurer Luís Gálvez.⁶⁴

Bolivian historiography tends to blame the inefficiency of the Bolivian military for its loss of the Acre. Although the new Liberal government was emerging from the Federalist War (1898-99), it vigorously responded to the Acre rebellion. It sent three columns under the command of prestigious Liberals to Acre. The first column was commanded by the National Delegate General Andrés Muñoz, took two months to reach the Northeast from La Paz, following the Beni route; the second column left Cochabamba under the leadership of the Vice-President, Lucio Pérez Velasco and the third left La Paz,

⁶³ Vaca Díez, *Conferencia*, 5.

⁶⁴ This narrative is mostly based on Tambs, “Rubber, Rebels and Rio Branco” and Fifer, “The Empire Builders.”

and took the Larecaja route under the Minister of National Defense Ismael Montes. These Bolivian columns reached the Acre and managed to reestablish Bolivian authority and to expel Gálvez. They also ensured the cooperation of the Brazilian central government, which was also reorganizing after the crises that culminated with the resignation of Emperor Pedro II and the inauguration of the First Republic in 1899.

The second phase of the Acre conflict was spurred by General Pando's grant of the Acre Territory to the US-based Bolivian Syndicate (see above). Brazil considered the presence of the US syndicate as a threat and, this time, Amazonas and the Federal government supported the Acre rebels. José Plácido de Domingo proclaimed the second Acre Republic and requested to be part of Brazil. This time the rebels were able to defeat the few Bolivian troops that had stayed in the area. Again, in 1902 General Pando decided to move regular troops under his personal command to the Acre, the arduous descent from La Paz through Larecaja was repeated, and Pando reached Riberalta in 1903. Brazil considered this as a provocation and moved 3000 troops its Acre and Mato Grosso borders. Pando's troops and the Acre rebels fought several battles, the Bolivians were defeated at Volta Empresa, and Porto Alonso, at the end, Pando decided to solve the conflict peacefully by signing a *Modus Vivendi* with Brazil in 1903 that culminated with the signing of the Petropolis Treaty of 1904.

Bolivian *siringueros* under the command of Nicolás Suárez also participated actively in the Acre conflicts. Conflicts between Brazilian and Bolivian *siringueros* had dominated the frontier since the beginning of the rubber boom. Bolivians had little sympathy for the Brazilian immigrants from the Northeast who were gradually

overrunning the Acre. According to the Bolivian physician José Manuel Aponte, the *cearenses* were a “mixture of Tupinambá Indians and Blacks and the perverse instincts of both races are present in them,” according to the author their main skill was in the deadly use of their knives.⁶⁵ Few of the Acre rubber concessions belonged to Bolivians, but after their victories, rebels started their advance south, they started to attack Bolivian *barracas* on the Tahuamanu, Ortón and Abuná Rivers. Alarmed, Nicolás Suárez decided to organize a column of *siringueros* to protect his properties and Bolivian sovereignty. The *Columna Porvenir* was founded in 1902 under the command of Colonel Federico Román and was supported by Nicolás Suárez and other *patrones*. The irregular troops of the column were 250 *siringueros* from the Manuripi, Tahuamanu and Madre de Dios *barracas*. Soldiers were issued 50 cartridges each and there were 900 on reserve and its indigenous members were given kerosene, bows, and arrows. Their lit arrows were used to set fire to thatch-covered enemy *barracas*. Their most well-known victory was against Bahía, a Casa Suárez *barraca* that had been occupied by the Acre rebels. The column attacked it by surprise and, while Tacana archers set the buildings on fire, the rest of the column shot the emerging rebels. The Bolivians killed 53 Brazilians and Nicolás Suárez executed seven prisoners, deserters were administered 300 lashes. Bahía eventually became the city of Cobija, capital of the present department of Pando. Suárez’s ruthless methods brought some conflicts with Colonel Román who, after the Acre War, challenged Suárez to a public duel, which Suárez declined.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Aponte, *Revolución del Acre*, 68-69.

⁶⁶ Suárez, *Anotaciones y documentos*, 8-11.

Like all wars, the Acre conflict stimulated Bolivian nationalism. As the conflict progressed, the loyalty of foreigners was tested. Many of the “officers” of the Columna Porvenir had foreign last names, Suárez mentioned Alberto Trucco, Arturo Lawrence and Bruno von Ellinger. Others were neutral or cooperated with the enemy. For example, Hugo Winckelmann, who had been one of the first settlers of Riberalta, initially refused to provide supplies for the troops and they were forced to buy them at market prices using promissory notes of the Villa Bella customhouse. The Maison Brillard declared itself neutral.⁶⁷ The Alsatian León Hirsh, on the other hand, cooperated with the Brazilians.⁶⁸

Initially, the Column had assumed that the Bolivian government would provide supplies. However, that was not the case. In one of its first campaigns, the Columna Porvenir had to withdraw because it did not have enough food.⁶⁹ Later, Suárez assumed most of the costs. He emphatically stressed, “The mule trains, the steam and rowing boats, the best guides and scouts to convey orders, and everything was in service of the cause.”⁷⁰ On the other hand, the Casa not only supplied food for its troops, it also had to feed the families of the soldiers. At the end of the campaign, Suárez presented a bill for war damages. He justified it by stating, “I was the owner of weapons and munitions and supplies that the campaign needed, I was the *patrón* of most of the men that had enlisted in the Columna Porvenir [...] everything would have turned out differently had I just stayed in my hammock waiting for the development of events.” The total costs were

⁶⁷ Ibid., 10 and 14.

⁶⁸ Aponte, *Revolución del Acre*, 46.

⁶⁹ Suárez, *Anotaciones y documentos*, 11.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 13.

20,777.83 bolivianos for the maintenance of the Columna Porvenir, this included 8,402.68 bolivianos for privates and 2,157.03 for *fregueses*. Other costs included destroyed chacos, stolen merchandise, and burned houses, *anticipos* to Brazilian *fregueses* who are now with the enemy and 5,000 *arrobas* of stolen rubber, totaling £70,000.⁷¹

In 1907, the National Delegate presented a report about the Acre campaign. According to the Delegate, the National Delegation had borrowed 58,739.77 bolivianos, of this 37,096.64 were in silver and 21,643.13 in supplies.⁷² Local *gomer*os had contributed “patriotic donations” worth 6,603.00. He gave some examples of these donations; Ramón Roca had contributed 500 bolivianos, Suárez Hermanos 4 Winchesters, 4000 bullets and supplies worth 2,023.00, Daniel Pardiell 1 Winchester and 100 bolivianos, Abel Reyes Ortiz, and his wife six pairs of shoes and a flag with its coat of arms for the National Delegation plus 200 bolivianos. Moreover, Suárez Hermanos and the Orton Bolivian Company had offered discounts of 50% on its boats. The paceño Timoteo Mariaca had forgiven a debt of 31,474.15 as a “patriotic donation.”⁷³ Despite this generosity, the National Delegations still owed 2,289 bolivianos to Nicolás Suárez, 17,741 bolivianos to Suárez Hermanos, 27,371.85 to Orton Bolivian Company, and 48,402.12 to Timoteo Mariaca. The National Delegate mentioned that there was not any money to pay for these debts. It had only received 18,390.10 bolivianos in revenue from their tax per *estrada* and 18,390.10 from selling vacant lots in Riberalta. The Villa Bella

⁷¹ Ibid., 13.

⁷² Ministerio de Colonización, Bolivia, *Informe y anexos...*, 38.

⁷³ Ibid., 40.

customhouse was in total disarray and there were not any receipts, or duty stamps, since it was accepting duty payments in merchandise or provisions.⁷⁴ As usual, the National Delegation did not have any cash and had issued promissory notes against its customs revenues.

Suárez took full advantage of the government's debt with his company. During the following decades, he was exempt for any duties or taxes until his debt with the government was cleared. The government was not able to liquidate its debt until the 1920s when it formally recognized the Casa Suárez's ownership over large tracts of land in the Northeast (see above).

Despite its initial successes, the Acre campaign disenchanted the members of the Bolivian rubber industry. They had been enthusiastic supporters of the Liberal Party and were disappointed by its performance in the Acre. To this day, *cruceños*, *pandinos* and *benianos* regard the Treaty of Petropolis as treason by the Bolivian government. In it, Bolivia gave up one of Amazonia's richest rubber areas in exchange for some land near the Mato Grosso swamplands, a compensation £2 million and the promise of financing a railway within Bolivian territory.⁷⁵ In 1910, Oswaldo Vaca Díez criticized the Bolivian Army and wrote that Bolivian colonization had only gone as far as the *machadiño* had gone. There was no state presence in the Amazonian frontier. While Nicolás Suárez had armed *siringueros* in the frontier, the Bolivian Army only had 20 soldiers who were

⁷⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁷⁵ For an English version of the treaty, see Brazil, *Brazil and Bolivia Boundary Settlement*.

posted at a distance of twenty days of navigation from the Acre.⁷⁶ Sentiments against the central government were particularly virulent in Santa Cruz and it seems like the Acre War was pivotal in crystallizing an irredentist *Oriental* identity. Not surprisingly, a Santa Cruz pamphlet blamed the loss of the Acre on the *Ley de Enganches*, which had prevented the migration of *cruceños* to the frontier. The pamphlet also proclaimed that *cruceños* and *benianos* had defended the Acre voluntarily, and that the Liberal had sent enough soldiers. In an allusion to the Liberals' alliance with the Aymara during the Federalist War, it asked, "Why did not the gentlemen from La Paz send their stupid *indiada* who vegetate in the Altiplano to colonize the Acre?"⁷⁷ In the same racist vein, the pamphlet also blamed the Federalist War for monopolizing national attention. For example, the battle of Ayo Ayo, (24 Jan. 1899), where "Aymara cannibals" had massacred Conservative troops received more attention than Gálvez's rebellion in the Acre Territory (1 March 1899). In addition, the pamphlet questioned the £2 million compensation. None of it had been used to improve the infrastructure of the Oriente. Besides, neither the government nor Brazil seemed to be willing to fulfill the terms of the peace settlement by building railways in the Northeast.⁷⁸

The Acre conflict was a turning point in the history of Bolivian Amazonian area. To most *Orientales*, it reiterated their distrust of the Bolivian state. Yet, it is important to note that the Liberals had been initially successful in quelling the uprising and in neutralizing Brazil. Yet, the Liberals' colonization policies had provided a perfect

⁷⁶ Vaca Díez, *Conferencia*, 6.

⁷⁷ The term *indiada* is a pejorative term used to describe the supposedly passive masses of Indians. In Bolivia, it was often interchangeable with the term *choleada*.

⁷⁸ *Cuestiones orientales*, 84.

motive for Brazil's intervention. At the local level, the state ended up being in debt with the local rubber barons. After all, the National Army would not have survived with their cooperation. Ironically, the same people who had greeted the National Delegation as an invading army in 1893 were now patriotic defenders of the fatherland. After the Acre, the Bolivian state became weaker in the rubber areas and continued to delegate many of its functions on the Casa Suárez. The Acre campaign had strengthened the Casa Suárez and it became even more militarily-organized. After its successes against Brazilians the Casa consolidated its *barracas* westwards and was able to stop Peruvian incursions, which had started since the first Acre uprising. In 1902, for example, Peruvians *caucheros* with indigenous Campa (Ashénika) and Chama (Ese' Ejja) allies invaded Suárez *barracas* on the upper Madre de Dios and were contained by Bolivian irregulars who had been swiftly sent by one of the Casa Suárez's launches. Conflicts with Peru continued until a settlement was reached in 1912. After the settlement, many of Suárez's *barracas* were located within Peruvian territory, so Peruvian rubber companies compensated the Casa Suárez with £4000.⁷⁹

Until the 1890s, the relationship between the Bolivian state and the rubber industry was very limited. To a certain extent, rubber barons fulfilled many of the duties of the Bolivian state. As rubber became increasingly profitable, the Bolivian state started to be interested in extending its sovereignty to its eastern and northern frontiers. Initially,

⁷⁹ Roca, *Economía y sociedad*, 253. Argentina had arbitrated border disputes between the two countries in 1909 and Bolivia had rejected its decisions. See Bolivia, *Bolivia-Perú. Documentos que justifican la actitud de Bolivia contra el laudo arbitral dictado por el presidente de la República Argentina en la cuestión de límites con la República del Perú* (New York: York Printing Co., 1909).

its main motivation was to levy export duties on Bolivian rubber. Later, it also attempted to tax and to regulate rubber producers. To do so, it implemented a series of laws, which were often contradictory and of difficult implementation. Rubber barons were particularly sensitive to land tenure and labor legislation. Originally, they openly opposed it or ignored it blatantly. As the rubber boom progressed, though, many rubber barons, such as Nicolás Suárez, were able to manipulate legislation to their advantage and, ultimately, Bolivian legislation of the Amazonian frontier led to a generally weak Bolivian state and the concentration of power and land into a few hands. The relationship between the Bolivian state and the rubber barons can be called a symbiotic relationship. At times, the Bolivian state needed the rubber barons and at times, the rubber barons needed the state. For example, during the Acre conflict the Bolivian state needed the rubber barons' resources, yet it ended up deeply indebted with them and, ultimately, the rubber barons used the conflict to minimize taxation of their properties and production. Although Bolivian legislation had many flaws, it was not a problem by itself. Ultimately, Bolivian governments of the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth centuries, whether they were Conservative or Liberal, did not have the strength to implement their legislation in their isolated frontiers. The *Ley de Enganches*, for example, could not be even enforced in the city of Santa Cruz. Despite initial misgivings, rubber barons were aware of this and, despite increased state intervention in their region, continued to substitute the state in many of its basic functions. Ironically, the Acre conflict, which had been aggravated by Bolivia's colonization legislation, did not lead to further foreign concessions. Brazil became the owner of the Acre, but the rest of the Northeast was more

firmly under the Casa Suárez's control. The Bolivian state did not attempt to control the Northeast until the 1950s. Meanwhile, the lowlands' elites continued to decry the central government's lack of interest in their isolated regions.

CONCLUSIONS

This project has studied the insertion of one of Latin America's most remote and least known areas, the Bolivian lowlands, into the Atlantic economies during the Amazonian rubber boom. Most historians suggest that the rubber boom took place between 1880 and 1914 but its temporal analysis reaches before and after. After all, Brazilians were exporting rubber before the 1860s and Bolivians were exporting *cascarilla* and rubber by the 1860s. Although historians usually place the conventional collapse of the Amazonian rubber boom at the beginning of World War I, individuals in the Upper Amazon continued to discover and exploit *hevea* well after that. In any case, the rubber boom inserted a previously marginalized region into the world economy and unleashed a series of historical processes that had profound environmental, social, cultural and political effects on local populations.

This dissertation has concentrated on the effects of the Amazonian rubber boom on Bolivia. Yet, the notion of the reach of the Bolivian state should also be qualified. The Bolivian state had nominal control of most of the Bolivian lowlands but its presence in most of them was not very effective. Local elites were very powerful and, in some cases, subalterns were able to resist it. Moreover, throughout the rubber boom, national and international boundaries shifted considerably. It is, therefore, important to be careful

about national and regional boundaries. Throughout the nineteenth century, official maps rarely reflected reality. During the rubber boom Bolivia lost control of vast tracts of land in the Madeira and Acre to Brazil, yet the border between the two countries continued to be extremely porous as is the case even today. Internally, the provinces of Caupolicán and Chapare did not become part of the highland departments of La Paz and Cochabamba until the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, they continued to be culturally and economically linked to the lowland Beni throughout the nineteenth century and participated in the rubber boom. Confirming this lack of control, the departments of Santa Cruz and Cochabamba continue to have disagreements about their boundaries. Moreover, during the rubber boom, there were acrimonious boundary disputes between the department of Santa Cruz and Beni and, after the creation of the *Territorio Nacional de Colonias* in 1900, between Beni, La Paz, and the central government about the boundaries of the Territory. Despite this, neither rubber, nor indigenous peoples or the rubber trade recognized these internal or international borders during most of the Amazonian rubber boom. The rubber industry was indeed a transnational industry.

While focusing on Bolivia, my dissertation has attempted not to lose sight of the international dimensions of the Amazonian rubber boom. One of the most striking aspects of the rubber boom is how the demand for a product that was essential to the industrial world and that, to a certain extent, was the epitome of modernity (bicycles, automobiles and industrial machinery), was produced in the remote Amazonian rivers using such “primitive” methods. This contradiction is evident throughout the rubber boom. While subject to harsh physical punishment and involved in forms of debt

peonage or slavery, recently acculturated indigenous peoples participated in the benefits of the industrializing Atlantic world. As part of their debt, they wore cotton produced in England, drank French and German alcoholic beverages and used flour milled in the USA. Their *patrones*' participation was, of course, much more conspicuous. Rustic *patrones* left their jungle *barracas* to make periodic visits to London, Paris or Buenos Aires. On the other hand, the rubber industry attracted an odd assortment of North American and European adventurers. French Indian hunters, Spanish literati, Swedish ethnologists and British entrepreneurs rubbed shoulders with German accountants and mechanics, cooks or plain adventurers from every corner of the Atlantic world. Despite their isolation, the amount of attention that Bolivia's rubber areas received is remarkable. In order to understand the Bolivian rubber boom, then, it is imperative to look at the interactions among the local, the regional, the national and the international.

The environmental dimensions of the Amazonian rubber boom were paramount to its development. Rubber could only grow in certain conditions and could be tapped during certain periods. In contrast to the Andes, navigable rivers cross the Bolivian lowlands. In theory, navigable rivers equate easy communication. Yet, the massive Andes hampered communication in the west and impassable rapids in the northeast. Other areas were covered with thick jungle or extensive swamplands. As a result, Bolivian rubber exporters faced tremendous difficulties to place their product in the international market. During most of the rubber boom, the high cost of rubber justified the high cost of transportation and, up to a point, was offset by the low cost of labor. The tropical environment offered other challenges such as unfamiliar diseases, extreme

humidity and heat, wild animals.

National and international boundaries were imprecise but the same is true about the boundaries between environmental regions. The Andean, Amazonian and Pampean regions converge in Bolivia, and within them, there are many ecosystems. Although most rubber production concentrated on the properly Amazonian areas of present northeastern Bolivia, microclimates allowed rubber trees to thrive in other regions. In addition, the need for labor or trade routes incorporated other non-Amazonian areas into the rubber boom. Labor recruiters, for example, recruited Indians from the Chaco. In addition, many rubber pioneers were former *cascarilleros* who operated from the highland town of Sorata in the department of La Paz. In reality, it is impossible to specify where, for example, the Andes end and Amazonia starts. Ecological and cultural regions operate as a continuum and have extensive transitional zones between them. There have also been extensive commercial and cultural exchanges between these two regions since pre-Inca times. Because of this, this dissertation has gone beyond the concept of the Bolivian Oriente and has incorporated many ecological and historical regions that are not considered as part of the Oriente (Depts. of Pando, Santa Cruz and Beni), such as the Chapare, Caupolicán or Yungas. All of these regions participated in the rubber boom in different ways, so they have been included in the analysis of the rubber boom. Despite regional differences, the term lowland encompasses all of them, since they are far below the heights of the Andes.

In Bolivia, the term Oriente is often used as the opposite of the Andes. Throughout the history of present-day Bolivia, the Oriente has been seen as an antithesis

of the Andes. This is a relatively recent phenomenon. Recent research proves that, before the violent intrusion of the Inca and Spanish Empires, cultural and commercial links between the highlands and lowlands were quite fluid. For a few centuries, these links were interrupted as what is now Bolivia became oriented towards the Pacific and the western highlands.⁸⁰ To a certain extent, the rubber boom re-integrated the different lowland regions among themselves and achieved a degree of integration with some parts of the highlands, particularly the regions of Yungas and Caupolicán.

Throughout the nineteenth century, geographic and scientific explorations went hand in hand with economic interests. After independence, the Bolivian economy continued to concentrate on mining and to be oriented towards the Pacific. The eastern half of the country was indeed *terra incognita*. Starting in the 1840s there was a renewed interest in exploring Bolivia's least known regions. The Bolivian government funded some explorers and encouraged others who were pursuing scientific interests or were interested in potential investment opportunities. As the War of the Pacific severed Bolivia's access to the Pacific coast, there was a renewed interest in Bolivia's access to the Atlantic through the Amazon and Plate Rivers. The cinchona boom first and the Amazonian rubber boom later provided the economic incentive to explore and occupy vast areas of Bolivia's eastern frontiers and to initiate new trade routes towards the Atlantic. An assorted group of individuals participated in this project. The discovery of the link between the Upper Beni River and the Lower Mamoré River in 1880 by the US

⁸⁰ See, e.g., Saignes, *Los Andes orientales*; id. et al., *L'Inca, l'Espagnol et les sauvages*; Barragán et al., "Indios de arco y flecha;" Bouysse-Cassagne, "L'espace Aymara;" Faldín, "La arqueología Larecaja y Muñecas;" Portugal Ortiz, "Informe;" id., *Arqueología*.

physician Edwin R. Heath, illustrates how exploration operated. The wealthy Bolivian rubber entrepreneur Antonio Vaca Díez partially financed Heath's expedition and, in return, Heath "discovered" and claimed vast areas for his patron. Another entrepreneur, Nicolás Suárez immediately followed the newly discovered route and established himself in the strategic rapids of Cachuela Esperanza.

Another important factor in studying the rubber boom in Bolivia is the impact of the *cascarilla* boom. Cinchona was the first commodity to integrate Bolivia's lowlands with the world market. International demand for cinchona to produce quinine to cure malaria triggered a cinchona boom throughout Andean South America during the mid-nineteenth century. In Bolivia, for a few decades, cinchona revenues rivaled silver revenues and Bolivian governments attempted to regulate and protect cinchona production. Protectionism was mostly unsuccessful and foreign competition and depletion of both cinchona plants and labor eventually led to a bust. However, the cinchona boom used indigenous labor from the Andean piedmont first and marginally incorporated some Amazonian groups. Since many *gomeros* were former *cascarilleros*, they continued many of the practices prevalent in the cinchona boom. They used trade routes "discovered" during the cinchona and, since capital was scarce, made extensive use of the *habilito* system. *Gomeros* also inherited the cinchona *mentalité*. They were keenly aware that resources were finite and that resources were subject to boom and bust cycles. As the rubber boom matured, they also became aware of rival rubber plantations in Southeast Asia. As a result, there was little interest in conservation and the rubber boom relied on the constant discovery of "virgin" areas to augment production. The need

of a reliable and constant source of labor also became paramount. In the marginal areas of the Bolivian Amazon, labor was indeed scarce. Using the experience of the cinchona boom and the early rubber boom in nearby Brazil, Bolivians perfected the *habilito* system and also resorted to various forms of more or less forced labor practices, (*enganche*, debt peonage, and the capture of unincorporated indigenous peoples) common throughout Latin America's nineteenth century. The *habilito* system was used to finance the timely delivery of rubber to markets and, in fact, many of the most successful rubber firms obtained their capital by interchanging merchandises for rubber through the *habilito* system. High rubber prices in Atlantic markets made this possible. Through the *habilito* system, individuals and firms were able to obtain rubber with minimal investment and, to a degree, the *habilito* system was also a sort of insurance policy in the risky business of ensuring that rubber reached international markets.

The isolation of Bolivia's rubber areas created a transportation nightmare. Rubber had to travel to Atlantic ports through a maze of rivers of difficult navigation. The indigenous peoples of the Moxos plains had been trained since Jesuit times to row for long distances. They had been marginally employed during the *cascarilla* boom to bring back and forth goods from Bolivian rivers to the Madeira and the Amazon, in some cases as far as Belem (Brazil). During the early rubber boom, they became essential to the *habilito* system. Without Moxo crews, rubber could not be delivered and merchandise advances against rubber could not be brought from Brazil. Starting in the 1860s there was a massive migration of Moxos peoples to the Madeira and the Amazon. Some Moxo migrated voluntarily fleeing the constraints of their traditional towns. Very

often, they were fleeing the pressures of having to provide customary labor for indigenous and non-indigenous authorities. In other cases, indigenous and non-indigenous authorities colluded to remove them against their will. In any case, the rubber boom led to a massive de-population of the Moxos towns. *Patrones* who had access to Moxo crews also abandoned their cattle *estancias* and became *fleteros*. Since neither the crews (who were poorly paid and soon formed part of a form of debt peonage), nor wooden canoes required a significant investment, *fleteros* became very wealthy by keeping the large difference between high transport prices and low costs. In fact, some of the most powerful rubber barons, such as the Suárez clan, started as *fleteros*.

During the *cascarilla* boom, many foreign *casas comerciales* (mostly French and German) had established themselves in Bolivia. *Hevea* extraction, however, was very different from cinchona or *caucho* extraction. It required a relatively settled workforce. Rubber was considerably more difficult to transport than cinchona. Because of this, foreigners never had the prominence they had elsewhere in Amazonia. Locals were able to control vital aspects of the rubber industry such as mastering the transportation links or the procurement of a suitable labor force. Therefore, foreign enterprises often established partnerships with locals to exploit rubber. Even though many Bolivian rubber barons registered their companies in Europe and, to a certain extent, obtained European capital, Bolivia's rubber industry was firmly in the hands of local rubber barons. During the silver boom (1872-95), southern Bolivia's conservative elite, epitomized by Avelino Aramayo, Aniceto Arce and Gregorio Pacheco also controlled Bolivia's ore production, even though they used foreign capital (mostly British and Chilean) to finance roads,

railways and machinery.⁸¹ Suárez Hermanos, the most important rubber enterprise in Bolivia and one of the largest in Amazonia, managed to eventually achieve a monopoly of most of the economy of the region because it achieved a high degree of vertical integration. It managed to control access to labor, it had its own rubber groves, transportation network and it even was self-sufficient in food. This was combined with a network of agents in Brazil and Europe.

Most of the literature on the Amazonian rubber industry has stressed its primitiveness. Prevalent images of rubber barons have vilified or stereotyped them as bloodthirsty frontier rustics. Yet, they were a heterogeneous group that included former *cascarilleros*, *hacendados*, senators and petty merchants. Despite the “primitiveness” of their industry, they achieved remarkable successes. They did indeed feud among themselves and they ill-treated their labor force. However, the degree of links that they managed to master in one of the world’s most remote regions is quite remarkable. They lived in the “periphery” but managed to interact both with the emerging forces of capitalism in Europe and with a distant central government. Few historians, for example, have mentioned the strong links between rubber barons and Bolivia’s Liberal Party. After all, José Manuel Pando, Bolivia’s first Liberal President, had been an explorer of Bolivia’s Amazonia and had strong links with Nicolás Suárez. The relative non-interference of the Bolivian state in the rubber industry, which contrasted with its protectionist attitude towards cinchona, cannot only be explained by the sheer isolation of

⁸¹ See Mitre, *Los patriarcas de la plata*.

Bolivia's rubber areas, it was also an ideological and political posture.⁸² Although Bolivia's rubber barons did not reach the prominence of the silver and then tin mining elites of the highlands, they were not entirely cut off from the political process. At the beginning of the rubber boom, the rubber elites and the state clashed, but, as the rubber boom progressed, they developed a symbiotic relationship. Rubber barons soon realized that, despite initial difficulties, they could use the state to legitimize many of their claims and practices. Nevertheless, compared to other regions of the Amazonian area, the Bolivian state was particularly weak and, in many ways, rubber barons fulfilled many of the state's roles during most of the rubber boom.

The ideological baggage of liberalism, such as the ideal of "order and progress," and some aspects of Social Darwinism and Positivism permeated the public discourse of many of the lowlands' players and, as elsewhere in Latin America, was used to justify many of their actions towards the indigenous majority. Liberalism and the rubber boom converged to produce a distinctive Oriental elite. This elite incorporated *cruceños* and foreigners. After the collapse of the rubber boom, it invested in the city of Santa Cruz or it acquired large parcels of land throughout the lowlands. Since they were rarely incorporated into national life, they developed an irredentist discourse that eventually led to movements for autonomy. Compared to the Highlands's mining silver and tin mining, the rubber industry was too peripheral. It was far from the country's seats of power and it lacked its international connections. Nicolás Suárez had close links to the Liberal Party,

⁸² For protectionist measures towards cinchona during Manuel Isidoro Belzu's presidency (1848-55), see Pérez, "Quinine and Caudillos."

but he only used them to advance his interests at the regional level. No rubber baron was able to be involved in “national” causes or to become a President of Bolivia. Highlanders even played down their involvement in defending the Acre against foreign invasion. This discourse has often been marked by open racism, which has disappeared in the rest of Bolivia.⁸³

The plight of the indigenous majorities of Bolivia’s lowlands during the rubber boom is an essential aspect of this dissertation. The linguistic and cultural diversity of the indigenous peoples of the lowlands makes an assessment of their situation particularly difficult. In addition, persistent stereotypes permeate past and contemporary accounts. Dispelling myths of primitive hunters and gatherers, most of the original inhabitants of the lowlands were very skilled agriculturalists. It is important to stress that indigenous societies were not static “traditional” societies. They constantly adapted to the challenges of colonialism (or neocolonialism) and reacted in different and often paradoxical ways. Rigid classifications concerning language, culture or territory are useful just as guidelines. Since Inca times, many indigenous peoples amalgamated and created new “ethnic” identities, sometimes to flee oppressors sometimes to establish “common grounds” with them. In addition, these identities shifted according to circumstances. As many missionaries observed, the most “civilized” Indians quickly turned into “savages” and very often, “savages” became extremely “civilized.”⁸⁴ There is no doubt, though, that the rubber boom had a profound effect on indigenous societies of the lowlands.

⁸³ For an analysis of the origins and mentalité of the Santa Cruz elite, see Ximena Soruco et al., *Los barones del Oriente. El poder en Santa Cruz ayer y hoy*. (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Fundación Tierra, 2008).

⁸⁴ Cardús, *Misiones franciscanas*; Armentia, *Diario de sus viajes*; id., *Diario del viaje al Madre de Dios*; id., *Descripción de las misiones franciscanas*; Ducci and Pifferi, *Diario de la visita*; Pierini, *Informes*.

Harsh labor, emigration or acculturation destroyed many ethnic groups. In some extreme cases, the horrors of the Putumayo were repeated. On the other hand, by fleeing the rubber boom, many indigenous groups adapted themselves to new environments. There, they often amalgamated with other groups and formed new cultural identities or shared territory with many other ethnic groups, paving the way for today's multiethnic indigenous territories. Unlike in other Latin American countries, the state had a very limited role in "opening up" the Amazonian frontier. Except in some isolated cases, the Bolivian state and army only actively became involved in settling indigenous groups until the 1920s, as was the case in the Chaco. In addition, even though there was a chain of Franciscan missions surrounding the rubber areas, it was not until, again, the twentieth century that missionaries made any inroads with incorporated peoples of the Bolivian Amazon. As in many other areas, rubber barons substituted the state and the church and were in charge of "civilizing" or repressing indigenous peoples with little interference.

One of the major outcomes of the rubber boom experience is that the Beni and the Northeast ceased to be perceived as indigenous areas. The rubber boom brought migration of Creoles and mestizos who intermixed with Europeans and became the elite of the area. This process had started before the rubber boom but, by the end of the rubber boom, the mission culture of Moxos and Chiquitos was under serious attack. The effects of the rubber boom on an extensive area of the Bolivian lowlands are remarkable. As labor recruiters combed a large area, they managed to create serious population imbalances. Throughout much of the rubber boom, agriculture was abandoned in many areas because there was not enough available labor because it had migrated to the rubber

forests. The rubber boom also produced sex imbalances, while the Moxos towns were inhabited by women and the elderly, men were the majority in the towns and *barracas* of the rubber frontier. These population shifts affected areas as different as the Chaco and Caupolicán.

Bolivia's rubber production was relatively small and, despite the concentration of wealth in a few hands, it did not generate any spectacular structures such as Manaus' spectacular opera house or Belem's electric tram system. Some modest urban centers emerged in the middle of the jungle, but most of the population concentrated on the rubber *barracas*. The rubber *barraca* became the most important institution in the Bolivian Amazon and it substituted communities or villages. It was a particular institution, part hacienda, part military outpost, part fiefdom, part "mining camp" or company town. Most of its workers labored for decades without leaving its boundaries and their *patrón*, the *mayordomos* and their *capangas* watched them closely. Since most workers spent their lives in *barracas* and they were the most prevalent form of settlement in the rubber areas, an analysis of how they operated is essential to understand the social history of Bolivia's rubber boom. The particular environment of the *barraca* may explain why, despite oppressive working conditions, there were very few organized uprisings during the Bolivian rubber boom. *Barracas* had a tight hierarchical order that categorized individuals by ethnicity. Most of the workers at the bottom of this order were indigenous peoples. Since *barracas* accommodated members from many disperse ethnic groups and workers labored isolated from each other, solidarity was difficult. The fact that most of the *patrones* and *mayordomos* were white *cruceños* also facilitated

acculturation. Besides, workers did not have access to river transportation and were closely watched by armed guards.

Yet, like elsewhere, workers found ways to fight against their oppression. Workers' strategies ranged from flight to murdering *capataces*. They also used typical "day to day" actions like boycotting production, stealing rubber or alcohol or altogether refusing to work.⁸⁵ Most studies of the rubber boom have not stressed the agency of the workers and have concentrated on oppression. The other side of the coin is that many workers were co-opted using patron/client relationships. The status of *fregués* for example, was granted as a reward but, in reality, there was little difference between the working conditions of *fregueses* and other workers.

The agency of rubber workers went beyond the *barraca*. If they succeeded in running away, they attempted to initiate judicial inquiries against their former masters. By the end of the rubber boom, the debt-peonage and *habilito* systems turned against the *gomeros*. Workers were aware that rubber prices were low and that they could never pay their debts, so they worked as little as possible. *Gomeros* had huge capitals in theoretical debts but, since rubber prices were low, they did not have access to any real capital. Ironically, the work force that had been so difficult to secure became a liability. Since Arnold J. Bauer initiated the debate over debt peonage in Bolivia, there have been many interpretations of the meaning of the term.⁸⁶ What is clear is that debt peonage was quite prevalent during nineteenth-century Latin America and took different forms according to

⁸⁵ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*; id., *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

⁸⁶ See Bauer, "Rural Workers in Spanish America."

geographical location, economic activity and chronology. In Bolivia's rubber industry, debt peonage was the most common labor arrangement. It was initiated during the *cascarilla* boom and remained until the twentieth century. Although it was exploitative, the degree of exploitation varied according to geographical and historical circumstances. Accumulating unpayable debts kept workers in place in the rubber forests, but they also ensured the survival of these workers in the Amazonian environment. Without debt peonage, they did not have access to the imported goods that they craved and to basic necessities. After the collapse of the rubber boom, as rubber prices plunged, workers' debt became a liability. Workers could not pay it back, and the rubber that they collected to pay it back was nearly useless for *patrones*. As a result, debt peonage remained in the Bolivian lowlands longer than elsewhere in Bolivia.

Indigenous peoples formed the majority of the workers in the Bolivian rubber boom but they have been often portrayed as passive victims. Yet, they managed to influence and to shape the rubber boom. Even the process of extracting rubber was indigenous. The crews of rowers had indigenous knowledge that allowed them to navigate among dangerous rivers. *Barracas* used "savage" indigenous people who knew how to cultivate foodstuffs in the Amazonian environment. They were also used as hunters, fishermen and guides to locate potential rubber strands. Evidence also seems to suggest that, at least at the beginning of the rubber boom, indigenous peoples enthusiastically left their communities to work in the rubber industry. The Tacana were fleeing enemy attacks and oppressive missionaries and the Moxo were fleeing the demands of prefects, local hacendados and even indigenous *caciques*.

The rubber boom can be viewed from many angles and this work has attempted to present several aspects of this short yet complex historical cycle in a large geographical area. What is remarkable is not that the rubber boom eliminated many indigenous groups, but that so many indigenous groups managed to survive. There are very few studies of the Bolivian lowlands in the critical years after the collapse of the rubber boom, but evidence seems to suggest that many *siringueros* drifted back to their places of origin. In Moxos, they were incorporated into cattle *estancias* and became debt peons. Yet, their vibrant culture survived and the Moxo continue to be the most numerous group of the Beni. Other groups, like the Tacana also returned to their former mission towns and, according to some anthropologists, “re-tribalized.”⁸⁷ Additionally, many indigenous groups that ran away from the rubber boom disappeared for most of the twentieth century and were “discovered” in the 1950s.

After the collapse of the rubber boom, many rubber entrepreneurs migrated abroad or to Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Others stayed and continued to tap rubber and to diversify by collecting Brazil nuts or timber. The *barracas* survived as the main institution of the area and their owners continued to apply the same *habilito* and debt peonage contracts. Since the Madeira Mamoré railway never reached Bolivian territory, the Bolivian lowlands became increasingly isolated and neither Bolivian governments nor foreign entrepreneurs financed any link to the rest of the county. The economy of the Oriente languished and most of the area’s population did not participate in national politics. The Chaco War made an impact, as the Bolivian army, for the first time,

⁸⁷ Bathurst, “Reconfiguring Identities.”

conscripted many *siringueros* and *mozos* throughout Pando and Beni.⁸⁸ On the other hand, the Bolivian Revolution of 1952 had little impact on the lowlands. It made a gesture of confiscating the last properties of the Suárez clan and then did not apply land reform legislation in the area. Properties in Beni, Santa Cruz and Pando continued to be concentrated in a few hands and the trend toward huge latifundia increased during the twentieth century. One of the effects of the Bolivian Revolution was that it nationalized tin mines and required large amounts of beef from cattle bred in the lowlands to sell to miners in its *pulperías*. As a result, latifundia increased and Beni *estancieros* became even wealthier than in the pre-boom days.

The indigenous peoples of the lowlands were ignored by the Bolivian state and by Andeans until the 1980s. As elsewhere in Amazonia, in the 1980s, ethnic revitalization movements mushroomed and lowland indigenous peoples became increasingly politicized. The relationship with their Andean counterparts was at times strained as old concepts about *chunchos* resurfaced. Many NGOs started to operate among the indigenous peoples of the lowlands and eventually they became indigenous-run organizations. For example, the German anthropologist Jürgen Riester encouraged meetings among different lowland ethnic groups that led to the foundation, in 1983, of CIDOB (Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia). Originally, it was formed by Chiquitano, Guaraní-Izoceño, Ayoreo and Guarayú communities, but it eventually incorporated members from throughout the Bolivian lowlands. Under pressure from NGOs and the international community, the Bolivian government has gradually granted territories to lowland

⁸⁸ Rodolfo Pinto Parada, *Rumbo al Beni* (Trinidad: n.p., 1978).

indigenous peoples, but they have continued to be victims of discrimination and remain among the poorest in Bolivia. Since his election in 2005, Evo Morales has symbolically embraced the indigenous peoples of the lowlands, but Andeans dominate his government. The 2009 Constitution declared all lowland indigenous languages official and stipulated that every department should use Spanish and another indigenous language officially. It also encouraged autonomy among indigenous communities.⁸⁹ Conflicts with the *Media Luna* (the lowland departments that voted against Morales) have exacerbated the plight of lowland indigenous peoples who have to choose between their “Indian” and their “camba” identity. In September 2008 in the former Casa Suárez’s Barraca Puerto Rico in Pando, for example, the local autonomist authorities massacred 30 indigenous peoples who supported Evo Morales. In the 2009 elections, organized under the new Constitution, which included seven seats for minority indigenous ethnic groups, Evo Morales increased his majority to 64.08% of the popular vote (from 53.7% in 2006). At the departmental level, he continued to lose in Santa Cruz, Pando and Beni but managed to gain a slim majority in Tarija. The percentage of votes that he received in the other *Media Luna* departments also increased significantly (49.7% in Pando, 40.1% in Beni and 38.2% in Santa Cruz), showing that his policies towards the indigenous and mestizo population of the lowlands are finally succeeding.⁹⁰

Despite the dearth of resources, the history of the impact of Bolivia’s rubber boom on the indigenous peoples of the lowlands must be told. This dissertation has

⁸⁹ See Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia, *Nueva Constitución Política del Estado* (La Paz: Congreso Nacional, 2008), Art 5, p. 3.

⁹⁰ See <http://padroncne.org.bo/Resultados09/wfmResultados/Nacional.aspx>, for detailed results of the elections.

demonstrated that indigenous peoples had an active role in a historical event that affected their societies profoundly. It suggests that local histories are intertwined with national and international histories. It also shows the complexity of seemingly isolated frontiers. The history of Latin America in the nineteenth century must also use an integrated approach and incorporate as many perspectives as possible to reveal its true texture. Despite a growth of research on the Amazonian rubber boom, there remains a much to be done. Comparative approaches are essential, since the rubber boom did not respect international boundaries. The many indigenous peoples of the Bolivian lowlands also deserve more attention. Monographs of ethnic groups during this crucial period are extremely vital. The work of García Jordán on the Guarayú, Cynthia Radding on Chiquitos or Erick D. Langer on the Chiriguano, documenting the ethnohistory of a particular ethnic group should be repeated for the major indigenous groups of the Bolivian lowlands.

GLOSSARY

Anticipo: A wage advance given by an *enganchador*. Also called *adelanto*.

Arroba: A unit of weight, approximately 11.5 kg.

Balde: A tin container used to gather latex from the *tichelas*.

Barraca: Literally, a hut, the *patron's* residence and center of operations of rubber extraction near a river.

Barracón: A large *barraca*, center of an important rubber enterprise.

Batelón or *batelote*: A medium sized, wooden rowboat, mainly used for transportation of rubber. It could carry up to two hundred *arrobas*.

Bolacha or *Plancha*: A large ball of rubber produced after smoking. It usually weighed 50 pounds.

Buyón: A clay stove with a chimney-like opening at the top and an opening at the bottom. Used to smoke latex.

Cachuela or *Cachoeira* (Port.): Rapids or cataracts produced by rocky outcrops of the Brazilian Shield.

Cacique: A colonial indigenous authority. In the late nineteenth century, it was mostly applied to the traditional authorities of Moxos and Chiquitos. Some ethnic groups, such as the Chiriguano, also used the military term *capitán*.

Callapo: Watercraft made by tying several rafts made of balsawood used to descend the steep rivers of the eastern slope of the Andes. Usually operated by Leco and Mosetén crews and abandoned in the port of Rurrenabaque.

Camba: Originally a Guaraní-speaking mestizo from the lowlands. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an indigenous peasant of the lowlands. At present, a colloquial term for lowlanders in general.

Capanga: (Port.) A thug or body guard who received a salary from the *patrones*.

Casa comercial: A domestic or foreign enterprise engaged in the exchange of rubber for tools and merchandise through the *habilito* system. They were also involved in transportation and finance.

Casa Matriz: The head office of a rubber operation.

Cascarilla, Cascarillero: Cinchona bark, a gatherer of cinchona bark.

Caucho: (Hevea Castilloa). One of the many varieties of rubber. It grows in the uplands and it must be cut down to extract its latex.

Cauchero: A gatherer of wild *caucho*. They were mostly Peruvian.

Centro gomero: The smaller units of a *barraca*, connected to the *barraca* and to rubber trees through *estradas*.

Chaco, chaquear: A slash-and-burn field in the middle of the forest. The action of burning and slashing.

Charque or charqui: Salted and sun-dried meat. In the lowlands, it is usually made with beef or game whereas in the highlands it can be made of llama meat. The same process can be applied to sheep meat and it is then called *chalonga*.

Chuncho: An Andean and colonial term to describe the ethnic groups of the area between the eastern Andes and the Amazon basin. By extension, a savage.

Espundia: Leishmaniasis, a tropical disease propagated by sand flies. It produces skin lesions, if untreated it can lead to disfigurement and the loss of limbs.

Capataz: See *mayordomo*.

Colla: Originally a member of an Aymara chiefdom around Lake Titicaca and the Inca province of Kollasuyu. Later, any inhabitant of the highlands. Often used pejoratively by lowlanders.

Cuartel: A collective, multi-family dwelling in a Jesuit mission.

Curichi: A swampy area left after the rainy season (December to May), usually caused by poor drainage, due to clayish soils.

Enganchador: A labor recruiter for the rubber forests, usually through a strong *anticipo*.

Estrada: (Port.) From “street” or “road.” A path connecting individual rubber trees and *centros gomeros*. Also, the main unit of measuring rubber concessions in Bolivia. An *estrada* was theoretically 150 trees.

Fábrico: The rubber-gathering season during the dry season (May to October).

Fletero: Somebody engaged in the transportation of goods, by either land or river.

Fregués or *freguez* (Port.). Literally, a parishioner. Somebody engaged in a sort of sharecropping agreement with a *patrón*. They received advances in tools and merchandise, but they did not receive a wage. They had to sell their rubber to the patron in exchange for these goods.

Fumigación: The act of smoking latex over a *buyón* rotating a *manga* until a *bolacha* was obtained.

Garitea: A small canoe.

Gomero: See *siringuero*.

Guarayo: Originally used to describe Tupi-Guaraní war-like ethnic groups. In Perú and Paraguay, it is often spelled Huarayo. In the nineteenth century, it was used to describe hostile ethnic groups in the Iténez River and the area around the Beni and Madre de Dios basins such as the Ese'ejja, Itenes or Moré and Pauserna.

Habilitador or *aviador* (Port.): An entrepreneur engaged in the outfitting of *cascarilla* or rubber gathering operations through the *habilito* system. They advanced tools and supplies in exchange for future deliveries of rubber or *cascarilla*.

Huilón (from *huír*, to run away): Runaway *siringuero*, also called *cimarrón*.

Machadiño, *machadinho* (Port.) A short hatched used to tap rubber.

Manga or *Mango*: A wooden long paddle that was covered with layers of latex and rotated over the *buyón* to smoke rubber and produce rubber *bolachas*.

Maloca: A traditional indigenous settlement in the Amazonian basin. Also, a large, collective thatched hut.

Mayordomo: The overseer of a *barraca*. The term *capataz* was also used.

Montería: A canoe, smaller than a *garitea* used for personal transportation.

Mozo: An employee of a *barraca*. They were supposed to receive wages and maintenance (clothing and food) in exchange for any labor in the *barracas*. They were the main victims of the *enganche* system.

Neophyte (neófito): A presumably Christianized inhabitant of a mission.

Palizada: Sharp sticks buried in the sandy riverbeds of Amazonian rivers. A major obstacle to navigation.

Patrón: The owner of a rubber operation and its related activities. He had almost absolute power over his employees.

Picar, picador: To tap rubber trees, a rubber tapper.

Pulpería: The company store, present in haciendas, mines, and rubber estates.

Quina Quina: The Quechua term for cinchona bark.

Quintal: A unit of weight, equivalent to four *arrobas*. (46 kg).

Rumbeador: A pathfinder responsible for locating *hevea* strands in the middle of the jungle. They were mostly Amazonian indigenous peoples, such as Tacana or Araona.

Sernambí: Rubber of low quality. It did not go through the smoking process and had coagulated naturally in the bottom of the *tichelas* or the forest floor. It fetched lower prices than smoked fine Pará rubber.

Siringa: A tree of *Hevea brasiliensis*, or the rubber that it produces.

Siringal: A rubber forest, connected by *estradas*.

Siringuero, Siringueiro (Port.): Somebody engaged in the rubber industry. Also *gomero*.

Tembeta: A wooden or stone adornment worn by men under the lower lip. By extension, a Chiriguano from Cordillera province in the Dept. of Santa Cruz.

Tichela: A container used to gather the latex from a rubber tree. It was attached to the trunk with a *machadiño* and clay. Usually made of tin, *tutuma* gourds or even coconuts.

Tipoy: Female attire throughout the eastern lowlands. Usually made of brightly colored imported cotton fabrics.

Várzea: (Port.) An extremely fertile, seasonally inundated forest along Upper Amazonian Rivers.

Yonomono: A permanent swamp covered with a thick layer of aquatic vegetation.

Yungas: The forested Eastern slopes of the Andes. They share Andean and Amazonian ecosystems.

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