

Rhythms of Everyday Trade: Local Mobilities at the Peruvian-Ecuadorian Contact Zone during the Rubber Boom (c. 1890-1912)

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ABSTRACT

The present article investigates the everyday experience of trade at the Ecuadorian-Peruvian borderlands, in Upper Amazonia, during the peak of the rubber boom (c. 1890-1912). The article looks at this complex and often misrepresented socioeconomic process from the perspective of micro-history. More specifically, the paper offers a rhythm analysis (Lefebvre) of Amazonian trade, and brings to the surface important undercurrents of modern Amazonian history, such as widespread low-level corruption and indigenous agency. It is argued that native mobility during the rubber boom was largely voluntary. In this period, however, the natives became more dependent on manufactured goods. Finally, attention is paid to the everyday practices of traders and government officials in their attempts to profit from the rubber industry. Make do and cunning were their most successful strategies of domination. The microanalysis of economic rhythms opens up innovative avenues of research into the mundane cultural fabric of large-scale processes. The primary sources of this investigation include archival and contemporary published materials, many of which have never been studied before.

Key Words: Amazon, contact zone, Ecuador, everyday life, mobility, Peru, rubber boom, rhythms, rhythm analysis, trade

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INTRODUCTION

In 1897 the *gobernador* of the Ecuadorian Amazon, Enrique Hurtado, was asked by the central government in Quito to produce a report on the state of the rubber trade in the region. The questions included where exactly the wild *caucho* trees could be found, and approximately how many of them could be put into production. Hurtado was also enquired as to the volume of rubber exported from Ecuadorian rivers, and the precise Ecuadorian revenues of the rubber trade. The *gobernador* noted that there was “no capable person” to draw a map of the rubber regions and that rubber trees were “so scattered” that it was impossible to know how many of them could be tapped anyway. As for the exports of rubber, Hurtado estimated that approximately 3,000 *arrobas* (some 45,000 kilos) had left Ecuadorian rivers in 1896 through Iquitos, the Peruvian port of trade, and that no export duties whatsoever had been collected.¹

From Iquitos, a boom city on the banks of the Marañón, as the Amazon is known in its upper reaches, Peru controlled most of the rubber trade conducted in the Upper Amazon. Oceanic steamers called at Iquitos regularly, and smaller motorboats plied the rivers upstream, connecting this remote region with the world industrial economy. On the Napo River, the largest tributary of the Marañón, Peruvians had to deal with regular Ecuadorian complaints regarding ownership of land, rivers and trees. Ecuadorian complaints were based on a set of vague “historical rights”, whereas the Peruvian argument drew from rather more irrefutable “rights of occupation” or *uti possidetis*. As Hurtado’s comments above indicate, Peruvian commerce was undisturbed by Ecuadorian state agents, and indeed the few Ecuadorians in the region traded in Peruvian motorboats and sold their rubber in Iquitos, effectively promoting Peruvian interests. Taxing, however indicative of a functioning state apparatus, was a superficial economic flow. Internally, the rubber boom was driven by a multi-level credit system, whereby traders were indebted to export houses and natives were, in turn, indebted to traders (Barham and Coomes 1994, 37-72).

This paper studies the rubber boom at its peak, in the two decades that span between 1890 and 1912, when the economy crashed following the successful planting of rubber seeds in Southeast Asia. Emphasis is on local dynamics that superseded and complicated both global capitalism and nation-state building. As rubber pulled the basin towards the markets of Hamburg and London, Ecuador and Peru moved eastwards into the

1 Enrique Hurtado to the Ministro de lo Interior, Archidona, 5 Aug. 1897, AGN.

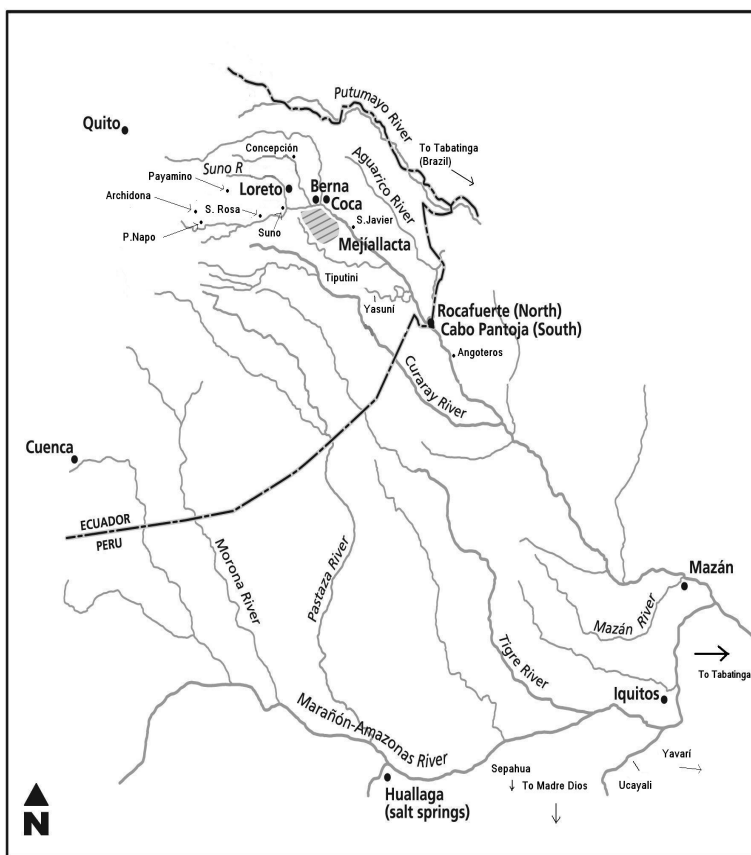
lowland forest. Both Andean state expansion at the turn of the century and the Upper Amazonian rubber boom have received some scholarly attention (e.g. García Jordán 1998; Stanfield 1998; Esvertit Cobes 2008). This article reexamines a vast region and an epoch-making process, using scale-reduction as a method of analysis. In doing so, the article identifies the contours of various hitherto uncharted spatial networks, built upon the lived experience of taxing, transportation, credit, and debt.

The focus is on everyday mobility –the experience of culturally meaningful movement– and the aim is to uncover some of the ‘hidden’ rhythms (Lefebvre 2014) that lay beneath the grand narrative of the rubber boom. As Joe Deville and Gregory J. Seigworth have put it in a recent study of debt and credit, “the everyday empirics of economic life get short shrift and are regularly swept aside as an anecdotal trifle and insignificance by the macro-discourses of economics” (2015, 617). This is in line with an important branch of Amazonian scholarship (e.g. Slater 2002; Nugent 2005) that has been ‘reclaiming the mundane’ for the past fifteen years or so. From a macro-analytical viewpoint, the rubber economy has been rightly described as a gigantic system that involved mass migrations, unimaginable wealth, and extreme violence verging on magical realism (e.g. Stanfield 1998). But the study of everyday life, which is the study of phenomenal experience, confuses the picture of power relations, making the powerful look weak and the weak look powerful.

In the Napo, the mighty rubber economy rested on fleeting moments such as the pathetic donation of bananas for the malaria-ridden troops that were meant to collect rubber taxes and never could. Indigenous autonomy becomes apparent as soon as we move away from the “paradigm of the victim” (Turner Bushnell 2002, 18) and closer to “the thing itself” (Geertz 1980, 120). Microanalysis tends to lead to the conclusion that domination is also afflicted by the burdens of everydayness. “Everyday domination” –or how the powerful make do– remains the underdog of the domination/resistance couplet in the social sciences. What follows is a story of failures, cunning, and lies. Native agency in the face of debt, secret personal agendas, widespread low-level corruption, and lingering rumors are central, if shifty, elements in the history of the rubber boom. In the ordinary experience of space there is an amorphous affective component that needs to be taken into consideration. In this sense, the article situates the Napo River within the current theoretical conversation on mobility, frontier-making, and everyday life (Tsing 2004; Sheller and Urry 2006; Alexiades 2013).

This is an empirical study, nonetheless, based on archival and published

contemporary sources.² The paper opens with an assessment of the size of the rubber economy on the banks of the Napo, which is absent from the academic literature. Then it investigates the petty fiscal encounters that took place in the Middle Napo, and the mundane economic exchanges at the northern frontier of the rubber trade in the upper reaches of the Napo. Two questions will receive special attention: native autonomy and how the traders coped with this and other practical problems.



Map 1. Location of the rubber boom in the Napo River, from P. Napo to Mazán

2 The archives consulted in this investigation are the Archivo General del Napo in Tena and the Archivo Nacional in Quito (AGN and AN hereafter). The former was uncatalogued and the latter was only partly catalogued at the time of this investigation. Peruvian primary sources, namely Larrabure y Correa's eighteen-volume *Colección de Leyes* (hereafter L_yC, followed by the volume and page number) were consulted at the British Library in London.

THE WEIGHT OF THE RUBBER TRADE

The first conclusion to be drawn from scale reduction is that not all Amazonian rivers were reservoirs of wealth. The Napo River itself was a relatively unimportant economic area, although some of its tributaries (Aguarico, Curaray, Tiputini) were used to reach remote rubber regions, including the infamous Putumayo. In terms of tax revenues, the Peruvian authorities estimated in 1908 that there were 20 *contribuyentes* on the banks of the Napo, which ought to pay the Peruvian treasury a total of £152; the smaller Yavarí River, by contrast, had 86 tax-payers, and their potential contribution to the national treasury was £1,807 (LyC, Vol. 14, 247). In 1905, the Peruvian Hildebrando Fuentes, governor of Iquitos, counted 37 settlements between the Marañón and the Aguarico Rivers. Of these, 31 were owned by Peruvian citizens and three by Ecuadorians – Manuel Buenaño, Daniel Peñafiel and José Pasmíño (Barclay 1998, 188-189). Only one of these settlements was exclusively dedicated to the extraction of rubber. The rest combined this activity with others such as agriculture, fishing, flour production, distillation of *aguardiente* (cane liquor) and, in two cases, small-scale cattle ranching as well (Fuentes 1908, 172).

In Peru these places were simply known as *puestos*. In Ecuador they were referred to as *fundos*, and increasingly as *haciendas* as well. Their mixed economies reflected the volume and quality of rubber in the Napo and its tributaries, inferior to that extracted in the Putumayo or Ucayali, and much lower than that found in the Brazilian lowlands. The economies of the Napo relied thus on the trade that existed on the side of rubber. This trade included the delivery of provisions and goods for patrons and above all peons, and in general a regular commercial exchange with Iquitos. Most important was rice, which in the early twentieth century became a staple food in the Upper Amazon, followed by sugar and flour (made of manioc and a Mediterranean import, wheat). Garlic, onions, lard, coffee, milk, liquor, tobacco, kerosene, candles and soap, among others, were also exchanged on a regular basis between Iquitos and the different *fundos*. (LyC, Vol. 18, 147).³ Native peoples (peons), many of them migrants from the Upper Napo, obtained manufactured goods in advance, and in exchange they worked for their patrons in the *fundos*, undertaking agricultural, extractive, and domestic tasks. When the rubber boom ended, only a fraction of this trade survived. By then, however,

3 Much of this traffic comprised canoes, as only a few of the merchants settled on the Napo owned a steam-powered boat.

the *fundo/hacienda/puesto* as economic unit was well established in the region (Moreno Tejada 2015).

As Table 1 shows, the Napo yielded relatively large amounts of rice and sugar, although the Ucayali and Yavari, southern tributaries of the Marañón, were the two most important agricultural centers. Cattle ranching in the Napo was still unrecorded in 1905, although it would soon become important in a number of *fundos*. Rice, flour, cattle and various other products were more important than rubber was. Many rivers of Upper Amazonia had the same problem: they produced rubber but not in the same quantity, and not of the same quality, as that obtained downriver. *Caucho* refers to *Castilloa elastic* trees, that grew inland and individually in the uppermost reaches of the Upper Amazon. *Jebe fino* is the Spanish name for *Hevea brasiliensis*, the tree that made the bulk of the rubber trade, found in clusters near the rivers and in the Brazilian floodplains. *Jebe* was found in the Lower Napo, whereas *caucho* trees grew upriver towards the Andean foothills, that is, into Ecuadorian territory. *Jebe fino* from the “Napo” (see Table 1) was probably found in the lower reaches of its affluents, above all in the Curaray. The Putumayo was the main Peruvian source of rubber, and the only one of these rivers that was not within easy reach of Iquitos. The geographic remoteness of the Putumayo, combined with its sheer economic weight, provide some solid ground for interpreting the atrocities committed against the Huitoto Indians who worked as rubber tappers (Taussig 1984). The vast Napo Valley stood in between the Putumayo’s “culture of terror” and the international export houses in Iquitos. The Napo was indeed an important waterway connecting the two.

Table 1. Peruvian production of foodstuffs, cattle and rubber in 1905

Rivers	Foodstuffs (kg.)			Cattle (heads)	Caucho (kg.)	Jebe fino (kg.)
	Rice	Flour	Sugar			
Marañón	36,394	15,410	9,440	364	711	14,355
Huallaga	3,550	2,900	764	83	--	--
Ucayali	183,355	145,870	51,077	10	51,436	38,411
Sepahua	5,400	2,400	2,180	--	4,005	1,997
Yavari	121,260	64,294	16,401	--	4,916	34,407
Putumayo	13,701	--	5,318	--	1,159	138,477
Napo	25,846	120	4,297	--	2,200	18,979

Source: Adapted from LyC, Vol. 16, 63-64.

Ecuadorians and Peruvians: Secret Rhythms of the Middle Napo

While the heavy impact of the rubber boom in the Amazon as a whole is undeniable, at a close distance we are witness to a rich fabric of micropolitical motives and practical complications. In the Middle Napo, at the border between Ecuador and Peru, corruption was rife and “secret rhythms” (Lefebvre 2014, 27) prevailed over the public flow of rubber and taxes. In 1900 the last Peruvian outpost on the Napo was Cabo Pantoja, on the mouth of the Aguarico River. (See Map 1) The streams forming the Aguarico Valley could be used to reach the Putumayo. In 1902, the Peruvians established a *Comisaría del Napo* in Cabo Pantoja “to protect the extraction of rubber” (LyC, Vol. 15, 638). Commercial traffic along the Napo and its tributaries had increased considerably, and canoes as well as steamers plied up and down on a regular basis. In 1897 there were ten Peruvian steamboats at work between the Lower and Middle Napo. There were also many smaller *lanchas*, their engines feeding on local firewood, which could travel up to Coca and into the tributaries of the Napo (LyC, Vol. 14, 59-60). These launches sometimes belonged to the Peruvian navy but more often they were privately owned. In this case they represented the commercial houses of Iquitos to which the owners of the launches sold rubber. The two that were most active in the Napo were the Casa Marius and Levi and the Casa Israel (Barclay 1998, 138-139).⁴

By 1900 the Peruvian administration was deeply involved in the rubber trade along the Napo, to the extent that all of the Ecuadorian merchants established in the middle and lower parts of the river worked implicitly or explicitly as Peruvian representatives in that region. From at least 1892, the Ecuadorian merchant Javier Morán was paying rubber taxes to the Peruvian authorities in Iquitos, which the Ecuadorians saw as something not unlike treason.⁵ In 1903 at Mazán there was a cattle *puesto* whose owner was an Ecuadorian, Elías Andrade. Andrade’s house was the first stopover in all Peruvian itineraries of the Napo River. Mazán could be reached by boat (Andrade himself owned the steam-powered launch *Perla*)

4 In 1905-1906 the Peruvian navy in Iquitos was comprised of eight steamers, built in iron and with a capacity of seventy to fifty passengers (LyC, Vol. 17, 16).

5 Juan Mosquera to the Ministro de lo Interior, Archidona, 1 April 1892, AN, Ministerio de Gobierno, Oriente. It is worth noting that, in the Ecuadorian patriotic imagination, the whole of the Napo Valley belonged to Ecuador, and that Ecuadorian claims were based on late colonial administrative disputes.

or, from the outskirts of Iquitos, by a seven-kilometer-long overland trail, which Elías Andrade kept open to ease communications (Fuentes 1908, 158-159; LyC, Vol. 7, 516).⁶

These trails, known by the Peruvians as *varaderos*, were overland pathways between water streams, at the end of which travelers could find a small settlement – the *varadero* or pier as such. Traveling upriver along the Napo, and relying on a relatively simple network of waterways and *varaderos*, the Peruvians could reach the distant Putumayo Valley, where the powerful Casa Arana made the bulk of its profit. The trails on the Napo were not necessarily shortcuts. Instead, they were used to avoid the tax collectors of Tabatinga, the last Brazilian outpost in Upper Amazonia, near the mouth of the Putumayo. The Napo was, in short, very much seen as an outlet for Peruvian rubber extracted in the Putumayo. This partly explains the increase of commercial traffic along the Napo from the 1890s (LyC, Vol. 7, 519-520). The mouth of the Aguarico, the main waterway into the Putumayo, was ‘guarded’ by a number of Ecuadorian traders, who effectively defended Peruvian interests. They included Daniel Peñafiel, an Ecuadorian who in 1905 lived in Angoteros, where he traded with rubber. Peñafiel, the Peruvian authorities noted, aimed to open up a *varadero* from Angoteros to avoid the rapids of Campuya, which stood between the Napo and the Putumayo (Fuentes 1908, 161).

Before settling at Mazán, Elías Andrade had dwelt for several years on the Middle Napo, one hour into the Aguarico River. There he lived with his family and ‘his’ Indian peons in relative comfort. Like Peñafiel, Andrade acted as a Peruvian agent. He owned a motorboat and regularly ‘policed’ the junction between the Napo and Aguarico Rivers (Up de Graff 2003, 62). The Ecuadorian merchant had been also involved in an early attempt to establish a Peruvian *Comisaría* in the Aguarico. In 1898, the *gobernador* in Archidona, Enrique Hurtado, sent his own *comisario*, Modesto Valdés, to investigate the rumor that several Ecuadorian citizens were acting as Peruvian representatives in the Middle Napo. Valdés, along with the merchant Rafael Abarca, canoed downriver to the hamlet near the Tiputini River, where Delfín Panduro, another Ecuadorian, lived. Panduro produced a document according to which he had been appointed

6 The distance between Iquitos and the Aguarico could be covered in 20 hours on steamboats, through the *varadero* of Mazán, and in 35 hours along the river. The same rule applied traveling downriver on canoes. A journey on canoe between the Aguarico and Iquitos took, according to the Peruvian estimates, 75 hours and 45 minutes, using an overland shortcut through Mazán – otherwise the journey increased by 20 hours (LyC, Vol. 18, 147).

Gobernador Comisario del Napo by the Peruvian authorities. Apparently, this arrangement had been made following a recommendation by Elías Andrade in Iquitos. Andrade, Panduro told his visitors, had later arrived at his place in Tiputini with an escort of four soldiers and a large Peruvian flag to be planted there, something Panduro allegedly refused to do.⁷

It was then, in 1898, that the Ecuadorian authorities decided to establish Rocafuerte, not far away from Panduro's place. By 1900 the Peruvians were settled across the river in Cabo Pantoja. In 1902, the Ecuadorian *Ministro de lo Interior* in Quito, Miguel Valverde, made a significant effort to furnish Rocafuerte with the personnel and provisions necessary to secure Ecuadorian control over the Middle Napo. Following the Peruvian example, Rocafuerte was given status of *Comisaría Fiscal*, specifically aimed at overseeing the rubber trade.⁸ A dozen military were sent from Quito, and orders were given to deliver arms and ammunition, official things—such as ink, paper and an Ecuadorian flag—and above all provisions. Eighty porters were needed to carry the cargo from the Andes but, as it happened, the local natives were not then available in such numbers, and in the end only the soldiers and some provisions made it to Rocafuerte.⁹

In late November 1902 a recent arrival in Rocafuerte, in a letter to Valverde, described its thirteen-strong population as a “fetid corpse”.¹⁰ Everyone was seriously ill, suffering from malaria. Furthermore, the troops had run out of rice, salt and butter, and they had nothing that could be exchanged for food with the local traders. The visitor said that Delfín Panduro's wife, Virginia Zeferina, had provided the garrison with “free bananas”, a canoe and several peons. But none of this reached the troops as the commander, Ignacio Pérez Borja, traded the bananas and canoe (presumably for rubber) with the Indians. Meanwhile, the Peruvians were “laughing at our misery” from the other side of the river.¹¹ Two years later, the material poverty of the Ecuadorian state in the Middle Napo was to be confirmed in the *Batalla de Angoteros*, a confrontation between Peruvian steam-powered launches and Ecuadorian canoes that left two Ecuadorian soldiers dead, triggering a great deal of patriotic outbursts

7 Enrique Hurtado to the Ministro de lo Interior, Archidona, 6 Aug. 1898, AN, Ministerio de Gobierno, Oriente.

8 Decreto to the Jefe Departamental del Aguarico, Quito, 2 Aug. 1902, AN, Ministerio de Gobierno, Oriente.

9 Miguel Valverde to the Jefe Departamental, Quito, 7 Nov. 1902, AN, Ministerio de Gobierno, Oriente.

10 Juan Ripalda to Miguel Valverde, Quito, 24 Nov. 1902, AN, Ministerio de Gobierno, Oriente.

11 Ripalda to Valverde, 24 Nov. 1902.

in Quito.

As for tax collection, the problem was that it required the sort of continuity and capacity Rocafuerte lacked. Not only were personnel irregular and unmotivated, and their basic resources scant, but also the very size of the river made it almost impossible to exert any control over its traffic. Merchants who passed along the 1.5-kilometer-wide Napo River or who left the equally vast Aguarico with cargoes of rubber towards Iquitos, could easily avoid the Ecuadorian authorities. And if rubber traders were spotted in the distance, their steam-powered boats could leave the Ecuadorian canoes behind, or perhaps end up paying taxes on the Peruvian *Comisaría* instead.¹² However, not all Ecuadorian merchants ignored the Ecuadorian authorities, or not all the time. They played a double game, and worked for Peru for practical reasons, while acting as Ecuadorian merchants whenever it was convenient. In 1905, a Dominican missionary traveled down the Napo with a merchant called Luis Garcés. As he wrote in the Quiteño press later, they spent a month at the mouth of the Villano River, where Garcés collected “great quantities” of rubber. They also met Elías Andrade, Daniel Peñafiel and the Colombian-born Jaime Mejía, who will reappear later in this narrative. The three traders returned from Iquitos after selling rubber worth “more than 100,000 *suces*”, their boats being now filled with *mercaderías*. The only Peruvian authorities they saw, according to the same source, were on the Curaray. In the Napo, the Dominican concluded rather unrealistically, “Ecuadorian trade reigns peacefully”.¹³

Finally, these traders were not all necessarily smugglers, or not all the time, and would pay their taxes depending on who was in command in the region. At least several times, between 1906 and 1909, the Ecuadorian authorities in Rocafuerte fulfilled their intended roles as tax collectors. This coincided with the introduction of the office of *Juez* or *Guarda Fiscal* in the Oriente under Carlos Rivadeneira’s stint as gobernador. Between October and November 1909 in particular, Rivadeneira’s emissary in Rocafuerte, the *guarda fiscal* Colonel Vicente Bravo, managed to collect 118.9 *suces* for the extraction of nearly 4,000 kilos of rubber. But unfortunately for Rivadeneira, Bravo was accused of pocketing tax money and dealing in rubber himself (Garcés 1907, 8-9).¹⁴

12 The Ecuadorian merchants who owned motor launches do not appear to have ever worked as Ecuadorian representatives on them.

13 *La Ley* [Newspaper], 14 March 1905.

14 Comisaría Fiscal de Rocafuerte to the Gobernador de Oriente, Rocafuerte, 25 Nov. 1909, AGN.

Rhythms of the Upper Napo: Mobility and the Credit System as a Moral Economy

Geographic solitude facilitated corruption and multiple types of non-hegemonic mobility. Upriver from Rocafuerte, shifting sandbanks made steam navigation difficult, and canoes were obligatory between Coca and the headwaters of the Napo – the region known as Upper Napo. The transition between steam and canoe navigation had important consequences on the rubber trade: speed decreased considerably and every journey was a challenge to the clockwork rhythms of the industrial world economy. Many canoes were piloted and owned by the natives and most transactions between Indians and non-Indians were based on mutual commitment (Barham and Coomes 1994, 63). Informality permeated the rubber economy to its very core. In the forest, the indebted rubber tapper in his dugout canoe was effectively a free man. Workers could, and did, vanish leaving their debts unpaid. In Brazil, tappers traditionally adulterated the rubber *bolas* with flour and sand, before sending them downriver, towards the scales and accountants in the city (Pearson 1911, 38-39). This degree of autonomy depended on local knowledge (Geertz 1983) and the opportunities provided by the rugged geography of Amazonia.

Upriver too, rubber trees were of a different species, *Castilloa elastica*, much less numerous and much more difficult to reach than the *Hevea brasiliensis* found in the plains, as they grew inland and in isolation. At the turn of the twentieth century *Castilloa* rubber (*caucho*) could be found in the hinterland of Archidona, for instance, but it was of an extremely poor quality. In 1899 Fidel Alomía noted that the only rubber traders in Archidona were the Colombian Jaime Mejía, who was soon to move to the Coca region, and Rosario Muñoz. “The rest”, Alomía wrote, “even though they might gather some [rubber] they do so in such small quantities as to be insignificant” (Alomía 1899a, 23). Around that date *caucho* trees could be found near Ahuano, Suno and Puerto Napo, but it seems that they were few and quickly depleted before 1900. Also in the interior, near Loreto, there were a limited number of *caucho* trees. Unlike *Hevea* trees, which could be tapped methodically for years, one large *Castilloa* tree would be found, fell and exhausted in the course of a single expedition. Finally, Coca and its hinterland had relatively large numbers of *caucho* trees, particularly on the right bank, which was *auca* (“savage”) territory, never colonized. Crucially, steam-powered launches could not go past Coca. Between 1900 and 1910, in sum, Coca and the *fundos* in its hinterland were the northernmost centers of rubber trade on the Napo River. In

the Upper Napo, those who wanted to participate of the rubber industry, Indians and non-Indians alike, had to move towards Coca and beyond.

At the turn of the twentieth century, migrant flows in Upper Amazonia were profoundly altered by the heavy demands of the rubber industry. Up to two thousand Upper Napo natives (Napo Runa), or about twenty-five percent of the population, migrated downriver following *patrones*. Human mobility, though, is a well-documented fact of Amazonian life (Alexiades 2013) and it would be wrong to assume that formerly static livelihoods were thrown into disarray by the mobile requirements of modern capitalism.

Geographical mobility happened on a day-to-day basis, due to the scattered distribution of natural resources, and a historical pattern of interaction with the colonizers. In the Upper Napo, back and forth communications between the forest and designated market places connected to the outside (Andean) world, may be documented as early as the sixteenth century, and probably predates European colonialism (Ortegón 1989[1577], 257-271). The Napo Runa kept themselves at a distance from the white traders and officials, and only visited the *pueblos* (hamlet) occasionally for economic, religious and social purposes. Almost all nineteenth-century accounts, before the rubber boom, remarked on the emptiness of the pueblos (e.g. Simson 1993[1875]). A typical pueblo comprised a clearing in the forest and three or four *chonta*-palm structures. The only more or less permanent residents were a handful of *blanco* (white Andean) settlers. When documents speak of Indians “from” a specific pueblo, they are referring to those native families who lived in the hinterland of that pueblo, two or more hours away, never in the pueblo itself. Until the mid-twentieth century, for instance, church and school attendance were erratic and always depended on the will of the Napo Runa to cooperate with the officials and priests (Moreno Tejada 2012). The main two reasons for the Napo Runa to visit the pueblos were intra-ethnic socialization –nuclear families lived scattered in the jungle– and commercial exchange with the colonists.

Since colonial times, there was a practice known as *ventas forzadas* (forced sales) which involved selling manufactured goods (axes, plates, cloth) to the natives on credit. The phrase was commonly used by government officials and priests to condemn the economic sway of traders over the Indians. When the Napo Runa refused to attend the distribution (*reparto*) of merchandise in a pueblo, a native leader could be sent to leave the goods in their hidden residences or *carutambos* (Villavicencio 1984[1858], 357-358). That is how sales were “forced”, although the term was liberally applied every time the traders were accused to taking advantage of the

Indians. From the late nineteenth century, the bulk of the Napo Runa were indebted to one or more patrons and were expected to move locally or regionally in search of forest products to pay off their debts. Trekking in the wilderness required a degree of practical knowledge that the majority of non-Indians lacked. Very few whites indeed ventured into the dense Upper Amazonian vegetation. There was a moral economy (Scott 1976) in place, whereby the Napo Runa would simply disappear whenever exchange with the white settlers was judged to be too burdensome.

RHYTHMS OF THE UPPER NAPO: MIGRATIONS AND THE QUESTION OF “SEDUCTION”

There is no doubt, however, that the credit system worked, and that it took a whole new meaning during the rubber boom. Credit relations had been in place for centuries and responded to the unwritten rules of coloniality (Mignolo 2007) which, for the purposes of this essay, may be understood as a *longue durée* rhythm of domination. The natives of the Upper Napo were seen and saw themselves as servants. Submission was an embodied practice. Rhythms, Lefebvre has pointed out, are embodied through a process of training or *dressage* (2014, 47-53). Submissive mobility began in the body – lowering one’s head in the presence of a priest, for instance. The Napo Runa took for granted patron/peon relations, and obviously preferred to be given goods in advance. The rubber industry intensified the nature of peonage, shifting the economic and social axis of the region from the old pueblos to the traders who established themselves on the banks of the Napo and towards the middle reaches of the river. Napo Runa everyday life went through a typically modern process of time-space compression: carutambos moved ever closer to the market places, and “work for others” (*tarabana* in Kichwa, see Moreno Tejada 2016) became a regular, not occasional, occurrence. But the newly embodied rhythms of the rubber economy, as we have seen, left much room for improvisation and everyday resistance (see Edensor 2010, 5).

Contemporary accounts speak of Napo Runa being “seduced” (*seducidos*) by traders. *Sedución* denoted an immoral and illegal practice but above all a dishonest one. It meant that some merchants were willing to break the rules and “steal” peons from other merchants, by means of more generous credits, very occasionally by force, and more often by personal

charisma and what white observers interpreted as *engaños* or “tricks”. The price of imported goods in the forest was always inflated and to some extent random, so it was not difficult for traders to turn a minor transaction with the Indians into a long-term attachment (Dall’ Alba 1992, 185). But again, informality was the rule. It had at least three major effects: first, flight into the forest was always a temptation and debts were often left unpaid; second, there was a wide range of characters in the Amazon and, as we shall see, some patrons were more ruthless than others; and third, despite the autonomy provided by the forest as an immense refuge zone, it seems true that deception or “tricks” turned a number of free natives into victims of human traffic. In short, the moral economy of the Upper Napo was partly –by no means completely– undermined by the influx of new traders.

According to an Ecuadorian census, about 1900 the Ecuadorian merchant Daniel Peñafiel was the only *blanco* living in the pueblo of Suno, near Puerto Napo.¹⁵ According to Fuentes’ report of 1905, Peñafiel lived in the *fundo* of Angoteros, in the Middle Napo (Fuentes 1908, 171). This is consistent with anthropologist Alessandra Foletti-Castegnaro’s oral history of the Middle Napo. According to this account (1985, 165-166), Daniel Peñafiel had “seduced” fifty Indians from Concepción, another fifty from Loreto, thirty from Payamino and twenty-five from Archidona, and taken them to Suno to work under his supervision. One year later, the same account notes, Peñafiel moved his peons downriver to the hinterland of Rocafuerte, where they worked as rubber tappers for the next ten years. A similar pattern, involving Napo Runa migrating towards the middle and Lower Napo, occurred regularly from around 1900. By the end of the rubber boom, there were clusters of up to forty Napo Runa families in the Middle Napo, the Curaray, in Iquitos and its hinterland and even in the Bolivian Madre de Dios River (Foletti-Castegnaro 1985, 165-170; Barclay 1998, 238).

Most of the migrations took place in the first decade of the twentieth century, coinciding with the peak of the rubber boom, although the process was already apparent in the late 1880s and early 1890s (Barclay 1998). Jesuit censuses produced between 1884 and 1894 record a drop in the population of most pueblos of the interior and along the Napo, between Santa Rosa and Coca. Father Cáceres spoke of an unusual number of *viudas* (widows) in these pueblos, a pattern observed in other parts of Amazonia that probably did not refer to actual widows, but to households

15 Censo de la población blanca del río Napo desde el Puerto del Napo hasta Rocafuerte, [Tena] ca. 1900, AN, Empadronamientos, Ca. 28 exp. 6.

in which the *pater familias* had left to work in the extractive economies and never returned (Cáceres 1892, 36; Block 1994, 172).

Migratory flows involved individuals, clans and families who, fully aware of the pitfalls and gratifications of the credit system, decided to follow, or hide from, specific merchants. Disappearing into the surrounding forest was as common as setting off downriver towards a *fundo* was. As early as 1892 Cáceres also noted that in Coca, where in the 1870s there were forty families, by the time of his visit there were only nine left. Responsible for this were the “many” rubber merchants in the region, who employed some families and drove the rest into the woods. Also, according to Cáceres (1892, 32), a group of thirty Napo Runa families comprised the entire population of the hamlet of San Javier, beyond Coca, brought there by an early rubber merchant, Juan Rodas. Ethnohistorian Udo Oberem recorded an oral account whereby “more than a thousand men” from Loreto and its hinterland (including Payamino and Cotapino) had moved towards the rubber regions in the early twentieth century (1980, 117). Other sources agree with the assertion that the decay of Loreto and the *pueblos* of the interior, as well as those along the Napo outside the Archidona region, was due primarily to the movement of men and entire families towards the Middle Napo (Foletti-Castegnaro 1985, 65-70). An anonymous letter published in 1908 in the Quiteño newspaper *El Comercio*, and reprinted in a pamphlet later, claimed that some two thousand Napo Runa had by then migrated to the Middle and Lower Napo. Not only the Peruvians but the Brazilians too, the letter continued, employed the Napo Runa as canoe pilots and in *factorías*, where they earned the relatively high amount of two daily *soles* (1908, unpaginated).

Other factors contributed to this demographic shift, though. The very fact that the state neglected or was unable to expand its administrative apparatus beyond Archidona, where the *gobernador* was normally based, also explains the decay of the *pueblos*. Furthermore, it is important to stress that many of the *pueblos* that reportedly “disappeared”, such as Loreto, were only temporarily abandoned. Many Indians left the Upper Napo seasonally to work in the extraction of *jebe* during the dry months, between June and December. Some left permanently and, because they moved towards the sparsely populated border with Peru, they received the approval of the local authorities.¹⁶ Fidel Alomía, a first-hand observer, noted that by 1899 Santa Rosa had disappeared, and so had Payamino and Suno, while Ahuano was virtually non-existent “because its twenty

16 Enrique Hurtado to the Ministro de lo Interior, 13 Feb. 1898, AN, Ministerio de Gobierno, Oriente.

families... do no longer get together” in the *pueblo*, although they still lived in their residences (*carutambos*) hidden in the nearby forest (Alomía 1899b, 6). In 1908, the *gobernador* Carlos Rivadeneira addressed the Quiteño authorities to make the point that the Indians not only migrated towards the rubber regions but also, by their own will and for the only purpose of being left alone, they disappeared into the surrounding forests:

It is not true that the only cause of the Indian depopulation... is that the *riverños* [river dwellers] employ them [*los concierten*] and take them outside this parish, but instead that the Indians migrate constantly into the forest; for it is well known that in Galeras [near Santa Rosa] and other places there are some Indian families from Archidona, hidden [*remontados*] and with no intention of returning to their former residences.¹⁷

Furthermore, Napo Runa emigration from the Upper Napo in the context of extractive economies was under way from at least the 1850s. In 1857 an Ecuadorian merchant persuaded several families from Ahuano to migrate downriver into the Marañón (Stanfield 1998, 75). Patrons employed (*concertaban*) and “seduced” (*seducían*) indebted Indians, moving them and sometimes their families too towards different rubber regions. It also needs to be stressed here that geographic mobility was a quintessential Amazonian feature. The Napo Runa had traveled downriver for generations, in seasonal journeys to the Huallaga River, where the only salt mine in Upper Amazonia was found (Villavicencio 1858, 29-30). Towards the beginning of the twentieth century, as Iquitos grew confirming the Peruvian sway over the Lower Napo, these journeys became less frequent and it appears that after 1908 they stopped altogether, when the Peruvian government granted the exploitation of the Huallaga salt springs to a private company (Oberem 1974, 354).

Napo Runa migrations occurred, then, against this backdrop of continuity and change. Keeping this in mind, there were at least three reasons, other than the obvious search for more and better rubber, why Ecuadorian traders shifted Napo Runa workers towards Peru. First, Upper Napo merchants were often indebted themselves, and traded the debts of their peons with creditors and other merchants in the middle and Lower Napo. This practice was known as the *traspaso de cuentas*, and it did not necessarily happen in the context of *seducción* – it was a legal and increasingly common occurrence in Archidona too. Second, the “semi-civilised” Indians were preferred over the “savages”, as they were more used to work under

17 Carlos Rivadeneira to the Teniente Político de Archidona, La Coca, 8 May 1908, AGN.

non-Indian supervision. In addition, between 1906 and 1910, as Ecuadorian tax collectors arrived in Rocafuerte, several Ecuadorian merchants decided to move to the Peruvian side of the border, and they were followed by their peons (Barclay 1998, 215). Needless to say, traders moved downriver to gain access to rubber trees, and to ease communications with Iquitos.

In the *haciendas* new rhythms emerged, as new economic activities –such as rice cultivation– demanded new skills and new labor routines. Both trader surveillance and indigenous dependency on manufactured products increased. Incidentally, shops (*tiendas*) only appeared in some *haciendas* of the Upper Napo in the 1920s, but the purchase of commodities, such as Western-style clothes, directly from itinerant traders, became more and more common during the rubber boom. But living in the orbit of the *haciendas* did not put an end to native conviviality. All officials and merchants struggled to ‘rectify’ the inner social rhythms of Napo Runa communities. The trader who established the *hacienda* of La Mascota in 1909, located between Coca and Rocafuerte, was forced to let his peons “live a life similar to that which they led in the villages [in the Upper Napo], so that they would not become estranged from their kinsfolk”, and later had to ask them to move their huts to the other side of the river, because the evening drumming was too much to bear (quoted in Porras, 1979, 32-33).

THE RUBBER TRADERS OF COCA: THREE LIFE STORIES

The rhythm of domination appears frail and distorted when we look at it through the uglifying lens of microanalysis. Focus on the rubber barons and their systematic exploitation of native labor –Julio César Arana in the Putumayo, for instance, is a well-known case (Taussig 1984)– threatens to obscure the experience of the majority of traders, who lived precariously throughout the entire period. We have already seen that rubber began to be traded in Coca from the late 1880s. In 1884 Javier Morán reportedly exported 100 *quintales* (10,000 kilos) of *cascarilla* (*Cinchona pubescens*, used in the production of quinine) and 10 *quintales* of *caucho* from Coca.¹⁸ By the 1890s *cascarilla* was no longer in demand. Between 1900 and 1912 there were several rubber traders established in the region. A census from about 1900 counted twenty-nine white families living between Puerto

18 Miguel Lemos to the Gobernador de Oriente, Archidona, 13 March 1885, AGN.

Napo and Rocafuerte.¹⁹ Documents increasingly refer to these river dwellers as *señores riverseños* and *patrones*, as opposed to *blancos* or *comerciantes*. The *señores riverseños* were not attached to the old pueblos, or not primarily, but to their *fundos* and the rubber trade. The volume of rubber they dealt with was in most cases small, yet like their neighbours downriver they survived on a myriad of economic activities. As *patrones*, their main economic asset was Indian debt, which could be bought and sold. Here I will briefly look at three important *patrones*, most likely the most important, of the period 1900-1910 in Coca: Theodore Bruner, a pioneer in the rubber business around Coca; Silverio and Samuel Roggeroni, the two Ecuadorian brothers who inherited Bruner's wealth; and the aforementioned Colombian Jaime Mejía, who by then had earned a dubious reputation.

They were all established at the last frontier of steam navigation in the hinterland of Coca. In 1897, seven kilometres upstream from Coca, the Swiss Theodore Bruner set up a *fundo* he called Bern or Berna, after his hometown. Bruner aimed to make a fortune and for that purpose he traveled to Iquitos, and entered into a debt-merchandise relation with the Casa Marius. Upon returning to Berna, and using some of the products acquired in Iquitos, Bruner engaged a number of indigenous families to work for him as rubber tappers.²⁰ By mid-1900, however, Bruner fell ill and left the Amazon for Europe. In the meantime, two of his peons, Secundino Urbina and Hermelinda Días, were put in charge of Berna. Bruner never recovered and died in Paris. The news was delivered to the Casa Marius in Iquitos, probably through its European offices, and two agents were promptly sent upriver to take possession of Bruner's estate. Upon arriving in Berna, they found Hermelinda and told her that her *patrón* had died and that they had come to make a full inventory of everything Berna contained.²¹

Forty-nine machetes, seventy-six knives and axes, nails, candles, and other objects had all come from Iquitos and many more had been already redistributed among the Indians.²² The peon Secundino Urbina too had sold some of the merchandise himself, *en baratillo*, that is, at a low price, amongst the Indians living in the area. The most valuable assets the agents of the Casa Marius found were 60 *arrobas* (approximately 900

19 [Censo, Archidona, ca. 1900]. AN, Emp. C. 28 exp. 6.

20 Ministerio de Gobierno, Oriente, Moisés Zapata to the Ministro de lo Interior, Archidona, 10 June 1901, AN.

21 Zapata to the M. de lo Interior, 10 June 1901.

22 Ministerio de Gobierno, Oriente, Inventario de las mercaderías... en Berna, Berna, 28 April 1901, AN.

kilos) of rubber and 15,000 *sucre*s.²³ Only that this sum did not actually exist but was indicated in a legal document that stated the value of Bruner's Indian debt, that is, native workforce engaged in a credit relationship with the Swiss merchant. Before setting off downriver with the 60 *arrobas* of rubber, the agents of the Casa Marius sold the debt to a man called Samuel Roggeroni, who had just arrived in the region with his brother Silverio looking for a niche in the rubber industry.²⁴ Rumor of this transaction arrived in Archidona, and the then *gobernador* Fidel Alomía traveled personally to Berna, where he canceled the transaction, and put two of his employees, the *comisario* Carlos Jurado and the *teniente político* Juan Rivadeneira (brother of Carlos) in control. But again, these orders were merely written in a piece of paper with an Ecuadorian stamp on it: the new administrators were not physically in Berna and, as soon as Alomía returned to Archidona, Roggeroni carried on with his business.²⁵

Samuel and Silverio Roggeroni were Guayaquileño merchants of Italian origin. Samuel was based in Archidona, where he distilled *aguardiente*, but along with his brother he also managed to run Berna, located several days downriver by canoe.²⁶ When compared with the living standards of their neighbours in Archidona, the scale of the Roggeroni brothers' rubber business was impressive, although of course rubber was a highly speculative business. In August 1901 the US traveler Hamilton Rice arrived in Berna, a "zinc roofed house of tropical requirements and modest dimensions", where he met with Silverio (Rice 1903, 411-412). On the night of November 4, Rice witnessed the "farewell feast or debauch" of an unusually large rubber expedition, and the following morning "a dozen canoes and some forty Indians" left for a year-long venture to the Tiputini (1903, 412). Five days later, the mouth of the Tiputini was reached and Rice continued his journey alone. The fate of the expedition from that point is not known although five years later, in 1906, Silverio Roggeroni arrived in Archidona from Berna, and asked for compensation for at least part of the profits that resulted from that very enterprise, his brother being now absent.²⁷

A separate incident took place in 1909, when the Colombian Jaime

23 Ministerio de Gobierno, Oriente, Moisés Zapata to the Ministro de lo Interior, Archidona, 10 June 1901, AN.

24 Zapata to the M. de lo Interior, 10 June 1901.

25 Meanwhile, Alomía somehow found another 80 arrobas of rubber, which he quickly sold, most likely to a local merchant.

26 Fidel Alomía to the Comisario de Policía, Archidona, 20 April 1900, AGN; Ministerio de Gobierno, Oriente, 'censo de la población blanca', ca. 1900, AN.

27 Reclamación, Tena, 21 March 1908, AGN.

Mejía was taken to trial in Archidona. As in the case of Silverio Roggeroni's demand, the trial referred to events that had occurred years earlier, namely the alleged sale of three Loreto Indians in Iquitos –Casimiro Papa, Diego Alvarado and Salvadora Coquinche (Muratorio 1991, 110). It only came to the attention of the authorities when a priest called Manuel Román, who had briefly visited the Archidona region in 1908, wrote an open letter to the press in Quito.²⁸ Jaime Mejía had by then acquired a reputation for mistreating natives. In the course of the proceedings, a number of Ecuadorian traders accused Mejía of *seducción*, yet with all the added gravity of the term *esclavitud*, or slavery. It appears that Mejía was a more successful, more ruthless but also more eloquent merchant, and this was obviously resented. A twenty-year-old American adventurer, Fritz Up de Graff, met Mejía and provided some indication of the methods used by the Colombian:

“His plan of campaign was to pay visits to Indian settlements in the vicinity [of Loreto], and advance trade-goods against rubber, collecting the latter on his next visit. He also had a persuasive personality, which served him in good stead when he encountered a canoe-load of Indians laden with somebody else's rubber, for which they had already been paid by the rightful owner. He was a good Indian who could brush aside his tempting offers and get safely past” (2003, 55).

Both Indians and white settlers from Archidona's hinterland testified against Mejía. Samuel Roggeroni was then in Archidona and he declared against Mejía too. The Indian Josefina Vega said that she had heard that the three Indians from Loreto were sold to Mejía and that Salvadora Coquinche in particular had been sold in Iquitos for 250 *sucres*. Rafael Abarca stated that the transaction had taken place with the assistance of Fidel Alomía, the same official who had dutifully traveled to Berna to restore order following Theodore Bruner's death. Finally, Samuel Roggeroni noted that Mejía had indeed stolen Indians from all the “respectful” Ecuadorian rubber traders (Muratorio 1991, 110-111). Whatever the case, Mejía was not punished for this alleged involvement in the sale of the Indians and continued to live and trade normally, if notoriously, in the Upper Napo. Miguel Ángel Cabodevilla, a Capuchin missionary and author, has written that in order to make the rubber business profitable, Mejía traveled to Iquitos with thirty or forty Indians and returned with only ten. The rest, Mejía claimed, had escaped, when in fact he had sold them in that city (Cabodevilla 1996, 237).

28 Miguel San Román to the Teniente Político, Archidona, 13 Feb. 1908, AGN.

Mejía was one of the few merchants in the region who crossed the line between persuasion and violence, hence his reputation. He was established near Coca from at least 1894 or 1895 –he left Archidona after several disagreements with the Jesuits located there at the time– and lived on the right bank of the Napo. The Napo Runa and the majority of traders resided on the left bank, but Mejía wanted to have direct access to the forests inhabited by *auca* (“savage”) tribes. Rubber trees could be found at the headwaters of the Curaray and Tiputini Rivers, and around 1900 a number of traders employed the local natives (*Huao*-speaking groups) as tappers and trackers. There were occasional cases of *correrías* (expeditions in search of native labor) reported around this time, and there is no question that the rubber boom had a heavy impact among that until then had had little or no contact with the whites. Epidemics certainly paid a toll in the local population (see Reeve and High 2012). Rubber trees in the Tiputini and Curaray were difficult to find in the early twentieth century. Also, the *auca* were reputed for their active hostility towards both traders and other neighbouring natives. Napo Runa pilots, for instance, refused to take their patrons into *auca* territory. The *auca* and the Napo Runa had something in common: they both relied on flight as their most successful survival strategy. In short, more often than not the *auca* were nowhere to be found.

The Napo Runa were familiar with Jaime Mejía’s activities in *auca* territory, which they referred to as *Mejiallacta* or “Mejía’s land” (Cabodevilla 1996, 238) (See Map 1). As his trial shows, the Colombian did not reject Napo Runa labour altogether and could easily access the Loreto region from another trading post he apparently kept at the junction of the Napo and Suno Rivers. Not only Mejía but also the Ecuadorian Elías Andrade was active for a while in the Suno area. This probably explains why Loreto, once a relatively successful Jesuit mission, decayed so quickly. The Ecuadorian state was virtually absent and, between 1896 and 1900, the traders simply filled the gap left by the authorities, and engaged the Indians from Loreto in the booming rubber trade of Coca and beyond (Cabodevilla 1996, 235-236).

Up de Graff (2003, 54-61) described the dynamics that took place between Loreto and Mejía’s trading station on the mouth of the Suno River. When the American and his companion, a man called Jack, arrived at Suno in 1897, they initially got on well with Mejía. The two visitors asked about the rubber trade in the Yasuní and the Colombian provided them “with a great deal of information concerning the ways of the Indians and how to handle them”, as well as explaining the “ins and outs” of

the rubber business. Mejía told the two travelers that, if they wanted to participate in the rubber boom downriver, they should hire first some Napo Runa pilots in Loreto. They set off north, leaving their canoe and most of their provisions with Mejía. For three days they marched along the trail that ran along the banks of the Suno River, and found Loreto deserted. Eventually, though, they managed to find the residence of the local chief (*curaca*), who lived some four hours away. “The old man”, Up de Graff wrote, “took an intelligent interest in the welfare of his people, inquiring most carefully as to our intentions” (2003, 55). Finally, following the obligatory distribution (*reparto*) of merchandise as credit advances, Up de Graff secured the assistance of five Napo Runa from Loreto. Upon returning to Suno they found a ghost rubber station, Mejía gone and their canoe and possessions having been stolen. The story goes on to describe how the author, thanks to the fact that “Mejía had not reckoned... that other Indians besides his own knew of his haunts in the rubber-woods”, and passing by two or three temporary shelters, found the Colombian. Mejía, Up de Graff continued, “virtually committed suicide” by reaching for his own rifle when he was being pointed at by De Graff’s .45 Colt (2003, 61). But the young American saw the Amazon as something of a Wild West, and indeed Up de Graff’s account of Mejía’s death was entirely fabricated – his 1909 trial gives sufficient proof of this, and it is known that the Colombian died peacefully in the 1920s (Cabodevilla 1996, 235-237).

CONCLUSIONS

If we are to understand the rubber boom in terms of rhythms, at least three major *beats* could be identified: 1) The rubber commodity chain, which linked the solitary forests of Upper Amazonia with the industrial markets of Europe and North America. 2) Regional geopolitics, whereby Peru and Ecuador fought for hegemony in a context of nation-state building. 3) And those local dynamics –hidden agendas, shifting allegiances, historical inertia– that operated at the level of phenomenal experience. This article has focused on the latter, following Henri Lefebvre’s *Rhythmanalysis*, the French philosopher’s last attempt to capture the motions of everyday life – “that which quite rightly connects space, time and the energies that unfold here and there, namely rhythms” (2014, 28).

The rhythmanalysis of Upper Amazonia reveals a complex fabric of affective economies woven into the “sticky materiality of practical

encounters” (Tsing 2004, 1). In the Napo River, rubber was not plentiful and the economy rested on cunning and make do. Ideological conflicts between Ecuador and Peru were secondary to the day-to-day practice of nation-state building. The Ecuadorian state was practically non-existent and Ecuadorian traders effectively represented Peruvian interests. The example of taxing has been used to illustrate this point. Finally, Napo Runa natives embodied the rhythms of the rubber boom, as a modern version of colonial peonage, but also demonstrated a remarkable degree of autonomy. The merchants who lived in or near Coca were able to establish credit relationships with export houses in Iquitos, and to move relatively large Napo Runa labor gangs towards the regions where rubber abounded. Native mobility was by and large voluntary and the authority of those who wore the mask of power was by and large precarious. The investigation of local economic rhythms, in sum, sheds light on the obscure corners of history that constitute everyday life, and that hardly ever make any headlines.

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