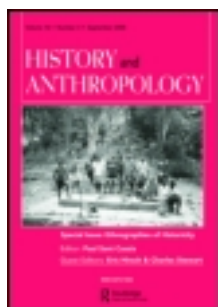


On: 10 October 2013, At: 06:27

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## History and Anthropology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ghan20>

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Published online: 11 Sep 2013.

To cite this article: Daniela Peluso , History and Anthropology (2013): Shajaó—Histories of an Invented Savage, History and Anthropology, DOI: 10.1080/02757206.2013.822372

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2013.822372>

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# Shajaó—Histories of an Invented Savage

Daniela Peluso

*Through multiple stories about Shajaó, an untold history of the Peruvian Amazon unfolds. This article, based on extensive archival research and fieldwork, brings together multivocal accounts about an Ese Eja man who allegedly killed a Catholic priest in 1932 and who, despite the large-scale expeditions sent out to capture him, was not apprehended until 1942. Through ongoing tales of Shajaó, the intersubjective ways in which memory is shaped and employed to influence and make sense of sociopolitical contexts is revealed in the exchanges between a notable “savage” and various economies in different historical settings—the rubber boom, extractivism upheld by debt-peonage, Catholic missionization and today’s environmental service economy. This exploration questions the construction, reproduction and transformation of the multiple, though not always shared, experiential and interpretive frameworks that shape the historical consciousness of individual and collective memories over time. It also suggests that “disremembering”, in archival and oral accounts, reflects a critical political awareness of history’s valid flexibility. Here, narratives are rewoven so that history continues to be told in ways that ensure that “Shajaó stories” never truly end.*

*Keywords:* Amazonia; Historical Consciousness; Colonialism; Missionization; Archives

My point of departure into the past is the present. Each time I return to live in Ese Eja communities<sup>1</sup> in the Peruvian and Bolivian Amazon, the how and why of history is rewoven into new narratives. It is impossible to live among Ese Eja or the villages and towns surrounding them without having heard stories about Shajaó. I watch and listen as Ese Eja recreate and continue histories. In listening to stories and reading about Shajaó, it is important to explore indigenous (Ese Eja, neighbouring

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groups and native federation), local (townsfolks, Dominican mission, regional government and tourism enterprises) and non-local (national, Catholic Church, NGO, and journalist and historian) forms of interpreting history/story and contextualize these within colonial and postcolonial settings. Through my own understanding of Shajaó I hope to unfurl more general Ese Eja histories of who Ese Eja are and to retell of times past as ways of discussing present understandings of colonialism. As Basso (1995) notes, history is distinctly biographical, since the past is mostly recounted as stories about specifically named people. Shajaó's stories allow for multiple interpretations of history, particularly histories of indigenous-"déjà" (non-indigenous, non-Ese Eja) contact and relations. My exploration examines the construction, reproduction and transformation of the shared experiential and interpretive frameworks that shape the historical consciousness of individuals and groups of individuals in changing conditions (Hill 1988; Stewart 2012). It additionally views oral and archival histories and mythologizing as producing narratives that relate the past to present and future social conditions (Bamberger 1974; Friedman 1992; Hirsch and Stewart 2005). Acts of disremembering are efficient political strategies for upholding particular interpretations of history and identity-making (Bacigalupo 2010; Carsten 1995; Taylor 1993) yet they also reflect individual and collective views of histories as open-ended and accommodating relationships to the past. Through multi-vocal stories of Shajaó and close counter-readings of the archives (Zeitlyn 2012), an understanding of "when, how and why people produce stories about this past" contributes towards broader notions of historical consciousness that question "what a society assumes the past to be" (Stewart 2012, 3).

In sum, history/story is not reducible to "what really happened" but includes, excludes and exceeds the totality of processes whereby individuals and groups experience, interpret and create changes within social orders while these individuals and groups also change over time as they actively participate in such changing conditions. Nor is this inquiry a matter of making sense of history but rather to make sense of it in different ways. As Trinh states, "Truth does not make sense; it exceeds meaning and exceeds measure" (1989, 123). As such, I wish to reflect the many truths made out of historical events even if they may or may not have happened in accordance to their retelling, or if their retelling is based on their more riveting features (Gow 2001). Here, I am interested in the famous and infamous Shajaó, remembered and forgotten in distinct ways by many different types of people, as murderer, hero, warrior and savage. I am equally interested in why Shajaó is bookmarked in the temporal spaces of Ese Eja and Madre de Dios histories. It is these various agents, including myself, that keep him alive and towards whom I would like to turn our attention so as to expose less visible histories of Amazonia.

### **The Killing**

In 1932, Fray Manuel, a young Dominican priest, accompanied by an Ese Eja mission acolyte, Meshi, went up the Tambopata River to look for Shajaó to seek his help in setting up a new mission post. When he arrived to Shajaó's camp, Shajaó shot him

twice with a rifle and, with the help of others, finished him off with arrows. Since this was not the response that was expected, there has been much speculation about this murder and Shajaó's intentions.

The transgressive act of killing a priest at a time when authorities expected Amazonians to be compliant, or otherwise retreat, has resulted in the long-lasting continual reconstruction of this act as one that was exclusively defiant and ideological. I first heard of Shajaó in 1988 from a local health practitioner in Puerto Maldonado, the regional capital of Madre de Dios, who remarked "The *only* person around here who ever stood up for our rights was the Ese Eja warrior Shajaó—he decided that enough was enough!" This popular interpretation of Shajaó's killing of Fray Manuel as an insurgent act continues to be remarked upon as individuals try to make sense of it;

Shajaó's killing was a rebellion. He did what Amazonians need to rediscover: the revolt against colonialism, imperialism and the State. He killed the priest for trespassing his land and insulting native religion! He stood for indigenous rights before there was a Federation letting invaders know that he would fight for what belonged to him and his people. For this he is a hero! (Townsperson, Puerto Maldonado 2007)

When in 1993 I began living in Bolivian Ese Eja communities, my knowledge of Shajaó was a common reference to the past crediting me with being knowledgeable about Ese Eja history, and aiding my acceptance. There he was similarly spoken of with animated awe: "a great warrior"; "uncatchable"; "brave" "ruthless" "unafraid of anyone—missionaries, police or military!" Yet I soon became aware of how little was known about the events that surrounded Shajaó's life, capture and eventual death. Therein began my interest in grounding him in Ese Eja histories.

Later that year, when I returned to Peru with my colleague, Miguel Alexiades, we made a point of collecting further information about Shajaó. We found that many townsfolk also had stories, many of them expounding on Shajaó's sheer physical strength and unruliness. The freshly arrived intermediaries of newly formed ecotourism and national park programmes seemed the most interested in Shajaó. Through the instrumental use of Shajaó's name, project leaders hoped to rally indigenous people to take up project agendas. As the director of a national park programme explained, "I am like Shajaó because I too am trying to lead Ese Eja peoples to defend their rights." The head of a small NGO also explained that he hoped Ese Eja would begin to show interest in more socio-political processes as Shajaó had done. However, in the 1990s indigenous leaders themselves mostly avoided using Shajaó's image particularly since for them, he mostly reflected discord at a time when they needed to promote an ethos of collaboration. It was clear that Shajaó meant many things to many people.

### **Ese Eja and Place**

Shajaó was a *Bawajakuinaji*, an ethnonym that refers to Ese Eja who trace their direct descent to any tributary linked to the *Bawaja* (Tambopata) river, notably *Kuishokuei*

(La Torre), *Ibabi'aniji* (Tabar), *Nao'o* (Malinowski) and other tributaries. Descendants of the two other major Ese Eja groups (*Sonene* and *Madidi*) are affiliated with adjacent drainage systems as well: the Heath (*Sonene*) and the Madidi (*Manini*), each with their own language variant. These groups are themselves a mixture of people from different tributaries, many of which intermarried, fought or traded with each other and some who have moved amidst different groups.

The headwaters of these three drainage systems converge in the eastern slopes of the Andes of Peru and Bolivia and as they flow towards the Amazonian lowlands to join the Madre de Dios (*Na'ai*) and Beni (*Kwey'ai*) rivers, they gradually flow away from each other. During the 20th century Ese Eja tended to migrate downriver, settling in the lower reaches of the Tambopata and Heath rivers, as well as on the Beni and Madre de Dios rivers. As Ese Eja moved away from the headwaters, they have also moved away from each other, becoming dispersed over a wide area, with some communities as far apart as 400 km. (Alexiades and Peluso 2003)

The paucity of river traffic in the Tambopata today is deceiving; in the early 1900s there were one or two steamships, and hundreds of canoes traversing this same river. The forests in Astillero (Upper Tambopata) had become an important base for the Inca Mining and Rubber Company, established on the back of the Santo Domingo gold mine (Upper Inambaeri) in Tirapata and later rubber<sup>2</sup> and continued to be significant until the collapse of the rubber boom. The Peruvian government gifted the company 640,000 acres for building an 80 mile trail, completed in 1906, between Cusco and Juliaca linking the Tambopata River to the region and attracting commercial attention (Fawcett 1911; Gray 1996; Greer 1986; Wright 1908). Furthermore, they forged a mule path between Tirapata and Puerto Markham which lowered the transportation costs of rubber allowing transportation to the Pacific coast (Alexiades 1999; Garland and Gepp 1908; Jacobsen 1993; Moore 1984), thus establishing the Tambopata River as a major axis of communication.

Transportation was not the only challenge that faced the Inca Mining and Rubber Company. Many Amazonians of the Madre de Dios and elsewhere were dislocated, enslaved and exploited through a commerce referred to as “trafico de salvajes” (traffic of savages). Ese Eja confirm the existence of numerous rubber operations on the Tambopata River describing how they were often killed or attacked, captured and sold to rubber barons (Misiones Dominicanas 1937, 336). In addition to adults, Ese Eja children were captured and sold to administrators of Inca Rubber by other indigenous groups or rivals (Maticorena 1902).<sup>3</sup> According to oral accounts, some Ese Eja sequestered the children of other non-Ese Eja populations for the rubber trade in Bolivia. The market paid a high price for these children, usually the equivalent of the cost of a gun (Barriales 1973). Yet like the Amazonian rubber industry at large, Inca Rubber, viewed indigenous Amazonians as lazy and unreliable workers (Agle 1903; Woods 1935) and hence, labour was scarce and strategies of enslavement and terror were pursued to control them (Taussig 1986). To alleviate labour scarcity, Meiji Immigration was set up to import thousands of Japanese workers intended to work on the Tambopata River (Masterson and Funada-Classen 2004) yet local

knowledge of the forests and rivers was still useful and therefore, individuals like Shajaó were needed and valued.

Overall human trafficking during the rubber boom was multi-dimensional, some groups moved towards the headwaters to avoid infringements on their freedom, others moved downriver towards the commodities and novelties that cities offered, some attacked the rubber labour camps, others worked for rubber and gold mining barons while others traversed between rural and more populated areas (Alexiades and Peluso 2003; Greer 1986). Simultaneously the Bolivian and Peruvian governments, utilizing the expertise of their commissioned explorers and map-makers and the political and armed manoeuvrings of their key traders and powerful rubber barons and institutions, vigorously forged towards each other to establish the Peruvian–Bolivian boundary line finalized between 1909 and 1912 (Chavez n.d.; Fifer 1970; Toppin 1916). At this point Ese Eja found themselves to be, technically though not in practice, either Bolivian or Peruvian citizens.<sup>4</sup>

These are the stories and histories that remain visibly hidden within dusty archival and rarely uttered oral accounts and that speak of seemingly different Tambopata and Madre de Dios Rivers than the ones seen today. These same rivers are now abound with increasing numbers of environmental entrepreneurs who have set up ecotourism lodges and other ventures oriented towards tourist consumption, and who market these historically lived-in forests as being “virgin” and unspoiled with the stated aim of their preservation.<sup>5</sup> Ecotourists are content in these ceaselessly remote, allegedly unblemished tracts of Amazonia. The same forests, which had been advanced upon by rubber and mining barons, are now officially “protected” by the Manu, Bawaja-Sonene and Madidi National parks. The small local Ribereño communities that live along the Tambopata River still remain sparsely populated and have joined in the ecotourism market by marketing rural “home stays”. Yet these areas continue to be subjected to oil and gas exploration as the state hands out concessions to various national and international prospectors (Ráez 2008). For local peoples and residents, Shajaó is a hero, as he represents the pristine savageness of the rainforest that is projected upon them and still prevails in people’s imaginations. His stories are very much those that contribute towards a persistent magical realism that surrounds histories of labour exploitations of indigenous peoples through the upholding of “mythic features, enclosed as they are in the synergistic relation of savagery and business ... and capitalism” (Taussig 1986, 73). For as long as Colonialism has a savage, it has a right to civilize.

### Shajaó

Shajaó lived in *Kuishokuei*, La Torre River, an affluent of the Tambopata and worked as a boat navigator (“puntero”) on the Tambopata River for Inca Rubber and, following its closure, for the boats that travelled between Puerto Maldonado and Candamo, the highest navigable point where a track would connect to the Andes and the rest of the country (Fernández 1933). Shajaó’s grandson José Mishaja, recounts how knowledge of the area and Spanish fluency were necessary for such jobs. The work required skilled labour, typical of extractive economies that depended on rich local knowledge.

Shajaó had done this work for several years and then moved around the Malinowski, Tambopata and Chunchu rivers before retuning to live in Kuishokuei, which lies upriver from Infierno, the native community where his children and grandchildren currently reside. By this time, Bawaja Ese Eja regarded Shajaó as an “etii” or wise person.

It was precisely during Shajaó’s time back in *Kuishokuei* that the Dominican Mission became more intensely interested in expanding its posts in Madre de Dios (Fernández 1932). Shajaó, as an already experienced cultural broker between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples and fluent Spanish-speaker, was a logical choice when indigenous assistance for expansion was desired. Padre José Álvarez Fernández, who arrived from Spain in 1917, played a key role in the Dominican Mission in Puerto Maldonado, particularly through his keen interest in indigenous peoples, their languages and their less explored lands, rivers and tributaries. Padre Álvarez was dedicated to “the conquest of the savages” (Álvarez, cited in Soria Heredia 1998, 207) and their conversion to Christianity at a time when the Peruvian Ministry of Culture was suggesting that Ese Eja be exterminated on the basis of their supposed inferiority (Barriales 1973). According to Ese Eja and townsfolk, the regional leaders and the general population of Puerto Maldonado held disparaging views towards indigenous peoples and supported the Dominican’s missionizing efforts by donating land to them.<sup>6</sup> As throughout Amazonia, the state encouraged missionization as means by which indigenous peoples could be “tamed” and “civilized”, an endeavour crucial to broader projects of colonization and state expansion (Rubenstein 2001).

Padre Álvarez, still fondly recalled by Ese Eja as “el Padre” was not merely an agent for Christianity but also an “agent of secularization” (Miller 1970, 15) through his involvement with the creation of schools, clinics and the provision of goods. As individuals socialized in secular societies, missionaries look towards science for the explanation of most day-to-day experiences, and valued cause-and-effect explanations over less measurable ones (Miller 1970). Miller observed the irony that rather than to build upon indigenous notions of the “supernatural”, Christian missionary world views placed secularist pressures on indigenous societies. In Madre de Dios, Dominicans were teaching the Bible while simultaneously assimilating indigenous peoples into the institutions of education, medicine and commerce that would eventually be controlled by the state. As such, when indigenous people arrived at a mission post it was unclear if they were interested in Christianity, healthcare or commodities (Álvarez 1939). As an older Ese Eja woman described “When Padre Álvarez was around—who didn’t want to go to mass if he was handing out sugar and sweets? The children would surround him saying ‘Padre I want sweets’ ... this is what they always said.” Padre Álvarez himself expounds upon his calculated method for both luring and rewarding Ese Eja visitors with gifts:

Those who come to settle next to us for good, we can submit to the special methods of the most smooth and rudimentary civilization. At first nothing ... sweets and gifts, laughter and talks, hunting and fishing ... in other words, everything that is not bad and which does not sound of work and sacrifice, until they are convinced that we really love them with total paternal affection. And while they come to realize that next to us they have a secure life and with unsuspected advantages, we continue instructing them in religion ... (Álvarez 1935, 147)

Missions and their priests established paternalistic hierarchical relationships, and were customarily accompanied by an indigenous acolyte (Woods 1935). Undoubtedly, because of Shajaó's work experience with Inca Rubber, his navigation skills, extended kin ties and known leadership in the *Kuishokuei* vicinity, he was an important contact for the mission and became involved with them early on (Fernández Moro 1952). The growing domain of the Dominican mission relied on leaders, like Shajaó, to persuade community members to co-operate with the execution of the mission's plans by contacting and mediating with new groups, building new mission posts and persuading others to congregate at the mission centres. Effectively, if Shajaó could be persuaded to convert to Christianity and work with the mission then his role would become crucial in baiting his extended family and other Bawaja Ese Eja to move to the mission. Although Shajaó would not agree to conversion, prior Fray Manuel's murder, he had cooperated with the Mission and assisted with various projects of theirs and was, according to both Ese Eja and Dominicans, a friend to the mission. His cooperation was very likely reciprocated with the many material goods and social benefits and relations that were customary of mission activities in the 1920s.

Historically, processes of colonization impose notions of "tribes" and "chiefs" (Fried 1975) when seeking to establish the familiar air of hierarchy where it might not exist (Clastres 1987). The mission archives consistently refer to Shajaó as a chief ("curaca") a term that does not accurately reflect Ese Eja political organization, a loosely negotiated arrangement between several *etii*, elders, and reveals an assumption that power can only be recognized if it is concentrated in one person thus rendering a particular individual as representative of and having control over a larger group (Clastres 1987). The Dominican Mission aimed not only to secure a person with authority but also to establish such a person, as they had achieved elsewhere, by strengthening one individual's position over another's.

The mission of San Jacinto in Puerto Maldonado was certainly a place for Ese Eja to visit, be sheltered, receive food, goods and protection in a town that was otherwise hostile and contemptuous towards them. Evidence to support Álvarez' interpretation of Ese Eja visits as indicating a desire to live permanently at the mission is insufficient. For populations characterized by high levels of circular mobility, it was not unusual to set up camp for a few months or a year until moving on and hence, living at the mission was often temporary. At that time, according to the Bawaja Ese Eja, they were moving further and further downriver towards Puerto Maldonado where there was a strong market demand for animal skins that they could amply provide. The rubber boom had passed and it was the selling of skins that Ese Eja speak of when describing extractivist trade in the 1930s and 1940s.

### **Shajaó the Murderer**

It was on the basis of Shajaó's "chiefhood" (as referred to by the mission) and his "friendship" (as referred to by Álvarez) that on 3 March 1926 Fray Manuel García Marina sought Shajaó's help to establish a new Mission Post in the headwaters of the Malinowski river (Fernández 1932). Upon arriving in *Kuishokuei* Shajaó killed



Fray Manuel. Up until this point, individual stories mostly converge yet from here onwards they become increasingly variable. Was Fray Manuel's timing bad? Did *Shajaó* intentionally murder Fray Manuel because he represented as an individual, a priest, an ally to rival Amazonian groups, and/or as a symbol of social changes that were unsatisfactory to many Ese Eja?

According to several Ese Eja oral accounts and to Barriaes (1973), a Dominican priest with access to Álvarez's private diaries, several days before the murder transpired, *Shajaó* and others had returned from a raiding an Arasaere camp in Boca de Inambari where they had stolen canoes and captured women. Therefore, *Shajaó* was awaiting the customary retaliatory raid when the priest approached. Fray Manuel, having just received approval to found a new mission at the juncture of the Tambopata and Malinowski (Nao'o) rivers, headed towards *Kuishokuei* to enlist *Shajaó*'s assistance accompanied by Meshi who happened to live in the Arasaere community that had just been attacked. This could explain why *Shajaó* was apprehensive about their approaching his camp.

According to Fray Manuel's diary, before deserting his canoe since *Kuishokuei* was too low to navigate, he set off by foot to find *Shajaó* and encountered Bakwatawa, a man from *Shajaó*'s camp, who after learning the purpose of his visit proceeded up river to notify *Shajaó*. According to Bakwatawa's, he had warned the priest not to advance because of *Shajaó*'s apprehensive state of mind, quite probable if *Shajaó* had indeed been anticipating a retaliatory raid (Álvarez, cited in Soria Heredia 1998). When the priest arrived, he received two bullets followed by a spray of arrows (Fernández 1933) allegedly perpetrated by *Shajaó* with the help of others.

According to Álvarez' accounts, Pojiasu, one of *Shajaó*'s wives, hit *Shajaó* with a stick screaming for him not to kill the priest because he was "good" (Soria Heredia 1998, 202). There is no mention in Fernández' account of Ese Eja women pleading with the men, whereas Barriaes states that the attacker's women cried and then covered the cadaver with sand. Many Ese Eja second-hand accounts speak of how *Shajaó* and others dismembered the priest and how his arms and legs floated around in a river of blood eventually eaten by fish. Nonetheless, Dominican expeditions were unable to retrieve his body.

Upon hearing the news of Fray Manuel's death, Padre Álvarez expressed envy of his martyrdom, seeing his death as proof that God had intended for their lives to be sacrificed for the sake of the "savages" (Barriaes 1973; Soria Heredia 1998), thus indicating the intensity of his zeal. While death at the hands of "savages" may have represented to them the ultimate form of religious intimacy and communion with God, the Dominican's agenda was a political one, particularly in the way that it established relationships between power and desire, both secular and spiritual. Furthermore, for the Catholic Church, the conversion of "savage" souls counted more than regular souls; they were seen as God's lost yet innocent children. The more brutal the savagery, the more critical conversion in the Americas became (Todorov 1984). For the Dominicans, *Shajaó* signified the pre-eminent "savage" and his conversion and repentance would have symbolized the ultimate political victory.

## The Search for Shajaó

According to Álvarez (as cited in Soria Heredia 1998), no soldiers would dare approach Kuishokuei after Fray Manuel's death. Ese Eja, townsfolk, Dominican reports and local authorities speak of "the search for Shajaó", pursuits that entailed expeditions over territory that remains, to date, secluded and poorly mapped. Ese Eja accounts report the many times and ways in which Shajaó was able to outsmart the search parties that were unable to find him. These shared narratives serve different purposes. For Dominicans they demonstrate Shajaó craftiness as a murderer and troublemaker justifying his unapprehendability, whereas for Ese Eja such narratives reveal alternative possibilities for action during missionization and other colonial processes.

In Barriales' (1973) retrospective, authoritative account on the history of the Dominican mission in Madre de Dios, he explains that following Fray Manuel's death nothing more was heard from Shajaó until Padre Álvarez received a message from him in 1942 asking for reconciliation. He allegedly asked, "Papachi you are good, would you do anything if I saw you? In Maldonado, what would they do to me? Would they remember the past?" (cited in Soria Heredia 1998, 528). Álvarez dispatched a reply telling Shajaó that he was long forgiven but that it would be wise for him not to return because of the authorities. This image, perpetrated by the Dominicans, of Shajaó seeking to return to the "Father" publically served to vindicate the death of Fray Manuel.

In contrast to Dominican accounts that Shajaó contacted Padre Álvarez, Sonene Ese Eja say that after murdering Fray Manuel, Shajaó had become fearful of Álvarez. For Ese Eja, it would be uncharacteristic to overlook a murderous act; however, it would be characteristic to disguise one's anger over it. Revealing anger displays vulnerabilities and creates fear of retaliation or sorcery from or towards others (Peluso 2008). Therefore, for Ese Eja, the absence of Padre Álvarez' anger was not persuasive evidence for assured forgiveness. Instead, it implied a covert plan, one that likely entailed sorcery or capture.

Remarkably, Barriales (1973) omits mentioning the large search parties that the Mission funded and orchestrated with the authorities of Puerto Maldonado in their failed attempts to capture Shajaó. He further neglects mentioning their belief that Shajaó continued to murder and that they thus continued to fear him (Álvarez 1935). The mission's recruitment of rival Ese Eja and military on these expeditions makes it likely that Shajaó, if apprehended, would have been injured or killed since, "the savages were as restless as dogs that smelled meat" (Fernández 1933, 25). Is this the same Dominican Mission that, through the voice of Padre Álvarez, warns Shajaó not to return to Puerto Maldonado for fear he would be arrested?

Since archives themselves are forms of colonization and hegemony (Foucault 1970), it should not be surprising that Barriales intentionally omits to mention the Dominican-funded expeditions that sought to capture Shajaó. A more subversive reading of archives allows us to counter read their omissions (Zeitlyn 2012) and consider that the Dominicans may have thought it appropriate to write about the search for Shajaó soon after it took place, hoping that they would soon capture him, but not later when it was clear that they had not. Similar to the local authorities, Dominican

archives insinuate that Shajaó was “hiding”. I suggest this is meant to veil or justify their failure to capture him. Shajaó certainly retreated when expeditions were sent out to capture him, but it is well established among Ese Eja that during Shajaó’s so-called time of exile his whereabouts were known by his friends and enemies. Shajaó was elusive not because he had killed a priest but because, as rival Ese Eja groups state, he was dedicating himself to stealing goods, raiding his enemies, capturing women and generally not cooperating with others. His living family members explain that he preferred being nomadic and was merely living as others had always done.

Yet, *only* Shajaó’s crimes provoked the Mission into action. For instance, on one expedition they were uninterested in arresting an Ese Eja who had allegedly “killed a policeman, stolen his wife and later beat her to death before robbing the mission in Lago Valencia” (Fernández 1933, 29). Furthermore, two mission reports implicated specific accomplices in the killing of Fray Manuel. Nevertheless, they were interested in arresting only Shajaó.

Moreover, Shajaó had knowledge about non-visible realities. In explaining why Padre Álvarez had failed to kill Shajaó, Shai’jame, the eyamikekua (shaman) explained; *He had a magical spell that bullets were unable to penetrate. Shajaó also killed Yohajé’s wife and a soldier, and why? ... for pleasure* (fieldnotes, 1995). Shai’jame explained that although Yohajé was considered the last “powerful” Ese Eja shaman, Shajaó did not fear him. As such, Shajaó defied powerful representatives of both Ese Eja and Christian non-visible worlds. This threatening and esteemed audacity is what fashioned him as “heroic”, “mythical” and, of course, “historical”.

I suggest that the Mission wanted to maintain an exclusive monopoly on the local economy of awe given its fomenting basis for religious compliance and was therefore troubled by the dual portrayal of fear and respect that Shajaó inspired, a coupling usually coveted by the Dominicans to portray the awesomeness of God. In Asad’s (1983) critique of Geertz, he stresses how it is power relations that establish religious truth. Yet, Shajaó’s successful acts of defiance negated the Mission’s means to secure compliant conduct and damaged their pre-eminence vis-à-vis Ese Eja communities and townsfolk. Historical narratives about Shajaó granted him god-like, mythic and omniscient qualities long before he had died. For Dominicans, Shajaó competed with God’s image while other murderers did not. As Pedro Machuqui, an old Ese Eja friend describes “when they caught Shajaó they beat him like Jesus Christ”, hence, indicating a sense that Shajaó suffered both religious and political persecution.<sup>7</sup> For this, Shajaó could not continue to go unpunished. Álvarez had a covert wish: baptism.

### **The Arrest**

Shajaó was finally captured in Puerto Maldonado *sixteen years* after Fray Manuel’s murder. According to Ese Eja accounts, he had been living for years in Palma Real, a community of relative proximity given the accumulated months, kilometres and peoplepower exhausted by the expeditions that had previously searched for him. All accounts are in agreement with that one of Shajaó’s rivals who informed the military

of his presence in town although who that person was is still open for debate. According to Ese Eja, Shajaó was lured into town by alcohol and bread, still the two main urban indulgences. However, Shai'jame states that Shajaó's indulgences were not typical but rather the outcome of longer processes of entropy; "Shajaó could no longer kill mestizos, he could no longer shoot his bow, for this he went to town ... because now he wanted to die" (Alexiades' fieldnotes, 1994).

Numerous memories exist of the day in 1942 when Shajaó was caught. It is one of the few time-stamps in Ese Eja history, a time well marked in people's consciousness; "I was in school when they caught him, my father saw it happen in Maldonado, his own people delivered him ..." (Machuqui, fieldnotes 1994); "I was the age of young man when I saw Shajaó punished in Maldonado ... he was robust ... he broke the handcuffs, he broke the plane that was to carry him" (Quioshe, fieldnotes 1995); "I was about Ignacio's age ... Shajaó would say ..." "the police/military are nothing, let's go sell animal skins" ... but he was fooled" (Viaeja, fieldnotes 1994).

There is much confusion among Ese Eja and townsfolk about where Shajaó was taken following his arrest. Yet Shajaó's family's accounts explain that he was taken to Cusco and then taken to Puno, which then had legal jurisdiction over Southeastern Peru, where he had died in a jail cell from the effects of freezing temperature. The consensus was that sending him to the altiplano was a deliberate death sentence so they were not surprised when the Mission eventually announced his death.

For Ese Eja of Peru and Bolivia, it is certain that Shajaó's wife vindicated his death. Pojjisu allegedly directed her revenge towards non-Bawaja Ese Eja and the townsfolk of Puerto Maldonado by preparing a poison from the Tambopata forests and letting it smoke in the fire for the winds to carry where she wished. This act purportedly produced an epidemic that hit Madre de Dios "with a vengeance";

When Shajaó was killed his mother and father were still alive ... after his death chicken pox arrived (Quioshe 1995, fieldnotes). Ten to twenty people died at a time ... we fled to the Heath ... but the poison followed us ... it was a massacre ... my grandfather died, my brothers, my uncle, my aunt. Within 5–6 days that Shajaó had died, dead fish were surfacing ... they weren't burying him ... they saw this in Maldonado, even fish in the river died. (Machuqui 1994, Alexiades, fieldnotes)

The epidemics that arrived were devastating. There are memories of entire settlements being wiped out with only a handful of people surviving in each, barely enough to bury their dead. The arrival of illnesses spurred an exodus from the Heath River and elsewhere. Machuqui, an *etii*, was part of an exodus of 48 Ese Eja who relocated to the Beni River in Bolivia. His explanation for his migration offers an alternative narrative to the one I had often heard about his having to flee for committing a serious crime.

With Shajaó's arrest and death the storyline seemed to stop for so many Ese Eja and townsfolk but, of course, through their various retellings some stories never end particularly when new information comes to light.

### Finding Out More

Curious to discover what had happened to Shajaó after his arrest, in 1995 Alexiades and I travelled to Puno. Upon arrival, we immediately inquired about the jail. There had only been one jail in Puno at the time that Shajaó was arrested and it now lay dilapidated and abandoned. It was not very large but its architecture exuded that strong presence of the state even now without its prison guards. It was not difficult to imagine how cold, dark and bleak it must have been for Shajaó to spend his last days there. Yet, a poet/novelist, Edwin Segovia, who was writing a ficto-historical novel about Puerto Maldonado at the turn of the century, told us that a Dominican priest had informed him that “romerías” (healing visitations) were held outside Shajaó’s jail cell, indicating that he was believed to have healing powers.

We proceeded to the public cemetery reasoning that if this were true it could have warranted the preservation of his tomb. However, we came up empty handed amidst many crumbled and unmarked graves. A cemetery ward directed us to the *beneficiencia* (public welfare office). Upon inquiring about death records, we were led to the office of the director. Señor Nuñez, upon hearing Shajaó’s name looked at us strangely and asked, “Who was this person?” When we began to explain that he was indigenous—with this information alone he exclaimed, “The savage from Madre de Dios!!!” He reminisced,

I remember him very well; I was a boy of about ten years when he arrived here in Puno. I remember that they brought him from Puerto Maldonado with an arrow sticking out of his heart! He arrived injured; they brought him straight to the hospital to remove the arrow. Later on he died in jail ... I remember ... I was a young boy ... the prisoners were buried in common pits ... like destitutes... he didn’t have a vault ... Puno was very small then and Puerto Maldonado depended on Puno. (Alexiades and Peluso, fieldnotes, 1997)

This explained why we were unable to find Shajaó’s grave as he would have been buried in a communal grave. With this news, we next visited the oldest newspaper in Puno, *Los Andes*, owned and run by Samuel Frisancho, a lawyer, journalist, editor and cultural promoter whose father had founded the newspaper in the 1928. He also immediately remembered Shajaó, recalling that he had arrived in Puno in 1942 and how well liked he had been. He explained, “Puno was different from the rest of Peru and still is because it is the artistic and folkloric center of the country. Puno has a strong sense of indigenismo and because of this, Puno favored Shajaó” (fieldnotes 1995). Following a tour of his private museum, he showed us an old notebook containing the headlines of all articles published in 1942. We were elated to find two; the first was dated 18 May: “The savage Shajaó from Madre de Dios arrived, charged with homicide. Killed Fray Manuel with an arrow in the Jungle”, the second, dated three months later on August 20 was sadly entitled “The great Chief Sajahoo died in the city hospital.” *Shajaó’s* arrival and departure had made the news. We now knew that he had probably never been in the city jail as had long been imagined in Madre Dios.

We hoped to retrieve these two articles in hope of learning more. Frisancho kept copies of all his newspapers in the two-story adjacent building whose windows were

brimming forth with papers. He explained that the newspapers were not archived and that sorting through them would take weeks and he also seemed reluctant to let anyone do just that. Luckily, he pointed us towards the municipal library which in turn led to our sauntering around the streets of Puno pursuing librarians carrying massive key rings until we finally reached several dark, damp, dusty, cramped and newspaper-filled storage rooms. When we perused the newspapers we were struck by how small a town Puno had been in the 1940s. Apart from reporting the main highlights of World War II each day, the papers would publish a list of first- and second-class passengers arriving by train from Cusco the previous day. It seemed no wonder that Shajaó was news!

The opening of the *Los Andes* article, written in a popular 1940s radio-commentary style, presumes that missionaries had the right to set up mission posts in indigenous territories; in fact it was their “job” to tame the wild Indians:

In one of the last trains arrived Juan Luis Shajaó, chief of the Huarayo tribe in Madre de Dios, custodian of the National Guard under the command of Sergeant Carpio. This savage of the jungles is being tried for killing in the jungle ... Fray Manuel ... with his very own hand in circumstances in which the missionary was doing his job. (18 May 1942)

Surprising us, as we read on, was the news that Padre Álvarez’ wish had been fulfilled. Shajaó had been *baptized* and bestowed a Christian name:

The chief of the Huarayos, Shajaó, is currently lodged in the Hospital having arrived here quite sick due to the change in climate, despite the fact that he remained in Cusco for many days prior to his arrival, where he was baptized with the name of Juan Luis, with Juan de Luchi Lomellini, a wealthy merchant, serving as the godfather. Chief Shajaó is relatively old but his appearance shows he is still in full form, with a gentle countenance instead of a savage one. He shows a certain amount of friendly curiosity toward those who come to visit him and does not appear to be the savage individual who is guided by primary instincts: undoubtedly the travels during his trip and the different cities, have helped him begin to adapt to the environment which surrounds him, since he travelled from Maldonado to Cuzco by airplane and from there to Puno by train. (1942)

Shajaó as a baptized Christian and having experienced the rare luxury of flying in an airplane was indeed a *civilized savage*. Padre Álvarez was in Marcapata when Shajaó was imprisoned and the Monseñor in Lima dispatched him an urgent message: “Shajaó prisoner in Cuzco. Look for him immediately and do for him what you can so that he feels that we are his brothers and friends” (Sarasola 1942, 153). Padre Álvarez rushed to Cusco and spent one month by Shajaó’s side in jail where he states that Shajaó was sad, cold and thinking only of his death. The mayor and prison guards incredulously watched the momentous lengthy conversations that took place between Padre Álvarez and Shajaó culminating with Shajaó allegedly asking to be baptized (Barriales 1973). There are no accounts of how Padre Álvarez’s chose Shajaó’s baptismal “godfather”. Lomellini was the son of an elite wealthy merchant famous for having advised Hiram Bingham about Macchu Picchu and running a commercial enterprise which exported animal hides (Bingham [1922] 2006), many of which came from Madre de Dios and may have been collected by Shajaó or others who commonly

worked through the *enganche*, a barter-credit system that accumulated raw materials in exchange for goods or store credit (Varese 1972). The baptism, glorified as both a “miracle” and a moment of “vengeance”, took place in the Convent of Santo Domingo in Cusco where Padre Álvarez allegedly cried tears into the baptismal water (Sarasola 1942, 156). They parted ways when Shajaó proceeded to Puno.

*Los Andes* reports astonishment that Shajaó did not have the demeanor of a savage, something explained away as a by-product of his “travels”;

He does not know how to speak Spanish, instead he expresses himself in a special dialect of the Huarayo tribe that Sergeant Carpio understands relatively well and uses to translate what Shajaó wants to say... He reveals that the Chief is of good temperament, not a complainer, and like a child for whom on all of his travels the different things and places call his attention and give him a certain amount of joy and happiness as though as if each moment he is receiving new toys (18 May 1942)

Curiously, Shajaó forgot how to speak Spanish and yet the Sergeant somehow speaks Ese Eja. The racist reference to Ese Eja as a “dialect” rather than a language is nonetheless an advance from the first explorers who thought natives of the Americas did “not know what to speak” (Todorov 1984).

*Los Andes* portrays Shajaó’s isolation, lack of resistance and how through the act of baptism Shajaó receives proper civilized apparel:

... They have changed his clothes because they found him in his savage feathers and in Cuzco his Godparents gave him clothes to cover himself; in the entire trajectory since they caught him he never demonstrated he wanted to escape nor resist; he is an entity that goes with the flow of circumstances. (18 May 1942)

It may have been resourceful of Shajaó not to attempt an escape since it would have likely failed. Or perhaps Shai’jame, the shaman, was correct when he confided that Shajaó had lost his strength and wanted to die. Shajaó’s alleged appearance before Padre Álvarez soon before his arrest might also corroborate this. However, whether Shajaó’s had meditated his destiny or not, his charisma served him well. After working with Inca Rubber, the Dominicans and others he may have been aware that he had an advantage: the other’s fascination with the savage;

At our request Sergeant Carpio is asking him a question ..., about the cause of his misfortunes and right away he understands and says that it is because he killed Fray Manuel with an arrow and afterwards he signals to his chest, expressing that the arrow fell through the frail missionary’s chest and furthermore he continues to argue as if to justify his attitude, indicating that there was something that the missionary wanted to take from him referring to his own fellow people ...; but at this point they interrupted us, since other people have arrived and are interested in knowing him and we take leave, impressed with Shajaó presenting himself like a person who is not a savage. (1942)

Puneños, as Frisancho indicated, were fascinated with Shajaó and used a relativistic framework to justify his actions. He is remodelled in the image of an indigenous rebel among Andean intelligentsia who themselves are influenced by the intellectual auspices of Andean indigenismo (Varese 1996). Shajaó had indeed succeeded in charming them:

In conclusion Juan Luis Shajaó, Grand Curaca of the Huarayos ... doesn't realize what has happened to the missionary, since surely for him his doing was one of many familiar acts among ... the members of tribes, to kill among themselves when they steal women from each other ... and that his morale is truly savage, because among them they do not even have the notion that killing someone is a crime. The Grand Chief is being judged and soon there will be a Hearing in our Correctional Court, we offer to inform our readers about the unraveling of this hearing and the destiny of Juan Luis Shajaó a great character of the Jungles of Madre de Dios. (Los Andes, 18 May 1942)

### Death of a Savage

After further inquiries, we learned that the trial never took place because Shajaó was too ill. On 17 August 1942, a mere three months after his arrival, Shajaó's death from "acute bronchial-pneumonia" was announced in *Los Andes*. Despite his mythic reputation, according to Dominican accounts, Shajaó did not die in jail as the resistant warrior that he is remembered to be but rather as a sick, compliant, Christian hospital patient known for entertaining those fascinated with savagery—an appearingly "docile" body (Foucault 1979).

Sor A Ma (1942, 191) confirms what Segovia had told us about the "romerías" [pilgrimages] in Puno indicating that Shajaó's perceived healing powers;

His deathbed was converted into a romería. The entire town of Puno stood in waiting for him. The Dominican missionary nuns took care of him. They watched him dying and with sadness. He would call out for Padre José to the nuns who cared for him; "Padre is not coming, I will die". A few days later he said; "yes, Padre is not coming again" and he repeatedly called out "Tatachi" ... what could Shajaó have wanted to say?

### Bringing News Back

In 1995, everyone crowds around us in Infierno, the Bawaja Ese Eja community where Shajaó's children, grandchildren and close relatives still reside. There is excitement and silence as they watch a video of our trip to Puno and listen to our commentaries as we look at the old jail and hospital. Most people are surprised that Shajaó did not die in jail or are surprised that *we believe* that he did not die in jail. And the news about Shajaó's Christian baptism appears to be a momentous surprise.

It is improbable that Padre Álvarez had not previously passed on the news of his spiritual and political vindication as epitomized through Shajaó's baptism, or that such news would have faded away. Yet, now, 17 years since we first circulated the newspaper articles describing Shajaó's fate, this information again remains disregarded as he continues to be remembered as a "warrior" resistant and defiant till his grave. Shajaó is not held responsible for what happened *after* his arrest. By only remembering his rebellious and elusive acts Ese Eja and others write the *real* history of Madre de Dios. As such, the Dominican's final version is superfluous and "disremembered", in a mastery of selective forgetting that Amazonians often employ as way of coping with the demands of the present.<sup>8</sup>



Each time we return, the how and why of history will have already been rewoven into new narratives where Shajaó is continually resurrected in his lasting image as an insurgent. A recent Brazilian PhD dissertation portrays how Shajaó “rebelled against the priests because he knew that they were killing his people” (Uribe 2012, 65). A young Ese Eja leader laments on facebook about how Shajaó died in the hands of the law while defending the rights of all native peoples. An ecological station immortalizes him with their name, *Centro Experimental Ecológico Shajaó* as does an ecotourist lodge, *Casa Hospedaje “Shajaó”*, in a community on the Tambopata River. Canoes and moto-taxis are also named after him. A local artist made a bust of him and its unveiling became a special public occasion for a discussion on anarchy where I noted the absence of any Ese Eja. The press hailed a native federation Harakmbut leader as the “reincarnated” Shajaó ignoring his adversarial relationships with Ese Eja communities. Shajaó remains “within and against his own culture” and that of dominant societies (Rubenstein 2002, 59). Those who learn of Shajaó latch on to him hoping to gain his power.

## Conclusions

Ese Eja narrative activity is important precisely because it is not posited within ideas of history as unidirectional or unfolding continuums of progress. Partial and imperfect memories shape historical consciousness showing the past as being flexible yet valid and not as remaining “*behind* us” but instead “*with* us” since the crafting of memory resides in the present (Ingold 1996, 64). Shajaó histories, whether archival or recent, do not pretend to tell the whole past. Stories draw our attention to the intersubjective ways in which memory is shaped and employed to influence and make sense of socio-political contexts. Moreover, lost to this text are the on-going interactive dialogues in narrative historical storytelling among narrators and listeners often encompassing bodily and vocal gestures, laughter, exclamations, mime, interruptions, side-conversations and other interpretive referents while the narratives are simultaneously reconstructed and repositioned. These malleable features of oral history punctuate an awareness of its non-fixity and persist in keeping history animated. Ese Eja are aware that narratives have changed in living memory since their stories openly gain and lose details and embellishments. Yet their significance remains the same: “If once upon a time people believed in the story and thought it was true, then why should it be false today?” (Trinh 1989, 125). Science in its search for the truth has equated narratives with fables (Lyotard [1984] 1997) and thus shaped the separation and conflict between different styles of knowledge transmission. For Ese Eja, multiple stories of Shajaó, even those they may not agree with, do not stand in contradiction to each other but rather contribute to a powerful rendering of an enigmatic man, one who continues to live on in rural and urban imaginations.

Memories of Shajaó reveal how time cannot mould him into a docile being. Despite his arrest and subsequent baptism, Ese Eja and others choose to uphold, embellish, minimize, disregard or forget certain parts of his story. Through disremembering in Ese Eja tellings and interpretations of history, Shajaó cannot be subjugated by state

desires. Such social remembering and forgetting uphold sociality (Battaglia 1993) in the face of dominant power relations showing agency as “an aspect” that is acted upon in particular situations, in this case through the way his stories are transmitted (Laidlaw 2010, 147). Similarly, this “excavation” of Dominican archives demonstrates how written documents can also encourage forgetting through selective omissions of suppressed events and voices (Zeitlyn 2012, 461) as a means of maintaining such domination.

According to Jenkins (1991) the only choice for (post)modern history is to choose between a history which is cognizant of its makings and a history which is not. Such individual or composite subjective versions of reality emerge from “an interactive, interpersonal field of interpretation, planning and the formulation of goals, as well as the comprehension of consequences as they are spoken about with others” (Basso 1995, 300). Yet, here I am equally interested in why Shajaó is bookmarked in the temporal spaces of Ese Eja and Madre de Dios histories, a question which Birth (2006) reminds us can only be answered by exploring the “the ongoing flow of social discussions and internal dialogues that tie representations of the past to identities, ideologies, and political economy” (208). Shajaó histories tell us about an individual who resisted Ese Eja and non-Ese Eja forms of control, unwilling to be enslaved by the political and economic power struggles of the time in which he lived and continues to live on in our memories. He remains unchanged through the various economies of raiding, mission life, animal skin trade, rubber camps, extractive activities, military expeditions, the creation of national parks and ecotourism. As indigenous and regional leaders, artists, ecologists and others try to take hold of Shajaó’s image hoping to rightfully claim him to their personal causes, they find that they can never quite grasp him.

Each time Shajaó is invoked he represents an individual who outwits colonialist power relations; each time he is resurrected, he vanquishes postcolonial attempts to reproduce him. In this elusive circuit of commodification, the images of Shajaó continue to compete with that of Padre Álvarez as they similarly appear on municipal websites as great personages in Madre de Dios history.<sup>9</sup> Currently, the Dominican lobby within the Catholic Church is endeavouring to canonize Padre Jose Álvarez as a Saint (Aciprensa 2007). Because of this, materials previously unavailable have now been made public. It is both startling and impressive that a recently released *magna opera* about Padre Álvarez entitled “Papachi Ese Eja Dominican Missionaries and Huarayos: an Interrupted History” (Alonso Ordieres and Arbaiza González 2008) ends on page 739 with the story of the death of Shajaó. While the continued use of the pejorative term *huarayo* emphasizes the church’s *uninterrupted* distance from Ese Eja, it also shows how they continue to seek to capitalize on Shajaó’s image by using his conversion as a defining success. Yet, in listening to and reading Shajaó’s stories we may indeed say that history has not ended here, not for Shajaó nor Padre Álvarez who contend as martyrs in articulations of historicities struggling to “wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it” (Benjamin 1969, 254). Their histories are part of larger histories that have brought them together and apart. As various actors proclaim Shajaó’s legacy as part of their own present and future, they continue to create tensions between memory and history, a tension that certainly

existed while Shajaó was still alive. Yet even now as his image is purposely appropriated, it can never be fully tamed or civilized.

### Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all individuals who have openly shared their stories about Shajaó. I am profoundly indebted to Ese Eja friends for welcoming me in their communities. My research was supported by grants from the the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Social Science Research Council and Fulbright. I owe thanks to the FENAMAD, CIRABO, MUSEF, Los Andes Prensa and the Puneño Municipal and Salamanca Dominican archive collections and to the contributions of three anonymous reviewers and the H&A editors. I am especially grateful to Miguel Alexiades for his participation and inspiration in the journey of Shajaó and this text.

### Notes

- [1] Ese Eja, a self-denominated ethnonym for a lowland Amazonian group with whom I have conducted over 60 months of fieldwork who comprise about 2000 individuals living in eight communities along the rivers Beni, Madre de Dios, Heath, Orton and Tambopata, in the border regions of Bolivia and Peru. Most Ese Eja plant swidden horticultural fields, hunt, fish, gather and extract and process forest resources for their own consumption and commercial trade and variably engage in labour with townsfolds.
- [2] Mutual shareholders founded Inca Mining Company, 1896 (Clayton 1999), followed by Inca Rubber; referred to as both separate and joint entities, later becoming Inca Mining and Development (Woods 1935). Astillero is located at the river's upward navigational limit point (Fawcett 1910).
- [3] Masias, Alexiades' fieldnotes, 1990.
- [4] National documents were issued from 1940 onwards.
- [5] For example, see [http://www.go2peru.com/tambopata\\_travel\\_guide.htm](http://www.go2peru.com/tambopata_travel_guide.htm); <http://www.tambopat lodge.com/index-2.htm>; accessed 2 February 2013.
- [6] Ese Eja are referred to by a variety of pejorative names such as Huarayo ("savage").
- [7] Alexiades' Fieldnotes, 1994.
- [8] Amazonians often remodel the dead to reflect values in the present (Taylor 1993). Taylor also refers to a pan-Amazonian "genealogical amnesia" that Ese Eja do not practice concerning individuals dead for over 20+ years.
- [9] <http://portal.madrededios.com.pe/index.php/autoridades-politicas?start=238>.

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