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Abstract

The Javari Valley Indigenous Territory in Western Brazil has the greatest concentration of uncontacted human groups on Earth. A recent report by Brazil's National Foundation for the Indian (FUNAI) reports 9 confirmed and 4 unconfirmed uncontacted groups in the Javari Valley alone. FUNAI defines isolated or uncontacted peoples as "the indigenous groups that have never established permanent contact with Brazilian national society, which distinguishes them from other indigenous groups that have already made permanent contact." Since 1987 FUNAI has prohibited entry into the Javari Valley in the hopes of protecting its vulnerable uncontacted inhabitants from disease and conflict. Unfortunately today the area is threatened by loggers, oil companies, and narcotics traffickers operating with virtual impunity in neighboring Peru. In this thesis I will analyze relevant local media articles, government studies, and NGO publications in an attempt to evaluate whether FUNAI's current efforts are an adequate response to the increasingly severe threats of forced contact.

Disciplines

Anthropology

UNCONTACTED PEOPLES OF THE JAVARI VALLEY, BRAZIL

Alex Tickle

4/23/2013

ABSTRACT

The Javari Valley Indigenous Territory in Western Brazil has the greatest concentration of uncontacted human groups on Earth. A recent report by Brazil's National Foundation for the Indian (FUNAI) reports 9 confirmed and 4 unconfirmed uncontacted groups in the Javari Valley alone. FUNAI defines isolated or uncontacted peoples as "the indigenous groups that have never established permanent contact with Brazilian national society, which distinguishes them from other indigenous groups that have already made permanent contact." Since 1987 FUNAI has prohibited entry into the Javari Valley in the hopes of protecting its vulnerable uncontacted inhabitants from disease and conflict. Unfortunately today the area is threatened by loggers, oil companies, and narcotics traffickers operating with virtual impunity in neighboring Peru. In this thesis I will analyze relevant local media articles, government studies, and NGO publications in an attempt to evaluate whether FUNAI's current efforts are an adequate response to the increasingly severe threats of forced contact.

Today one can still find human communities that do not maintain permanent contact with modern industrial society. Written reports or even the occasional photo of such communities provoke a strong reaction among Westerners. We are at once amazed by the continued existence of such exoticism and disturbed by the likelihood of its immediate and permanent disappearance. Brazil's National Indian Foundation (Fundação Nacional do Índio, FUNAI) is tasked with protecting several such uncontacted groups in the Javari Valley in western Amazonia. FUNAI is responsible for ensuring that no unauthorized persons enter this official indigenous territory, which is a massive logistical challenge. Over the course of my research I have concluded that FUNAI's no-contact policy is reasonably effective at protecting uncontacted groups within the Javari Valley but that the future of those peoples is subject to external threats out of FUNAI's control.

First I will examine the history of the Javari Valley and its inhabitants in order to give some context to the current situation of these uncontacted groups. Then I will briefly outline FUNAI's role in the territorial protection of the Javari Valley before discussing the challenges facing the *isolados* on both sides of the Brazil-Peru border. Next I will examine several encouraging recent developments related to the protection of uncontacted groups. Finally I will discuss the prospects for success of FUNAI's no-contact policy and the significance of such a success.

Of course no human society is truly uncontacted in the sense that it has never seen any human or material representative of modern industrial society, and so the label "uncontacted" can be misleading. I prefer to use the Portuguese term *isolado*, which simply means isolated. FUNAI defines *isolados* as "those indigenous peoples that have never made permanent contact with national society, which distinguishes them from groups that have made such permanent

contact” (Vaz, 2011). In 1970 the Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro established four stages of contact: *isolado*, intermittent contact, permanent contact, and then integration in national society. “Recently contacted” groups are characterized by their vulnerability. FUNAI considers “recently contacted” any groups that have made permanent contact but have limited comprehension of the behaviors and values of the majority national society and are therefore vulnerable to threats to their physical, social, and psychological integrity” (Vaz, 2011). Thus we must place the subjects of this thesis on the extreme edge of what is in reality a broad continuum of contact.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted by the General Assembly in 2007, establishes the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination. According to this declaration indigenous societies ought to be given the choice of living traditionally on the own lands with as little or as much interaction with the global market as desired. In reality this ideal has proven extremely difficult to implement. In the case of the *isolados* it becomes almost impossible. There has been considerable debate over whether allowing *isolados* to remain in isolation is realistic or even desirable. Since virtually all *isolados* are at least vaguely aware of another society beyond their territory their continued isolation is often interpreted, especially by the Brazilian government, as a conscious decision.

One complicating factor for *isolado* self-determination is disease. The *isolados* do not have immunity to many disease carried by members of national society. A virgin soil epidemic could kill upwards of 50% of a given *isolado* population within months, and this is clearly not understood by those *isolados* who might choose contact. This scenario has unfortunately replayed itself in dramatic fashion in the roughly 500 years since Columbus. A modern example would be the pneumonia outbreak among the Matís of the Javari Valley after contact was

initiated in 1978. In the 1980s more than half of the Nahua died following contact forced by the US oil company Shell operating in Peru. Even when modern medical teams are present contact has disastrous results. In the 1980s Petrobras prospected for oil in the Javari Valley, which led to the deaths of several isolados and FUNAI workers before Petrobus finally ceased operations (Octavio, 2011). Anthropologists are still debating the effects of a single researcher, the notorious Napoleon Chagnon, among the previously uncontacted Yanomani of Venezuela in the mid-1960s. While charges of exacerbating a measles epidemic or furnishing firearms to informants may be baseless, Chagnon himself has admitted the devastating effects that globalization has had on Yanomani communities (Chagnon, 1992).

Unfortunately for the isolados of the Javari Valley, their precarious island of refuge from the forces of globalization is increasingly under threat. For centuries the extreme isolation of their lands has made resource extraction impractical. The Javari Valley lies on the western edge of the Brazilian state of Amazonas, on the border with Peru (Figure 1, pg 33). The Javari River is a tributary of the Solimões branch of the upper Amazon. Virtually its entire length of 1184 kilometers serves as the border between Peru and Brazil. The Javari Valley Indigenous Reserve encompasses 85,444 square kilometers (roughly the size of Austria) to the south and east of the Javari River. To the northwest of the reserve near the mouth of the Javari are the towns of Atalaia do Norte, Benjamin Constant, and Tabatinga. Much further upriver is the small town of Angamos on the Brazilian bank. A hundred kilometers south of the reserve is the city of Cruzeiro do Sul in the Brazilian state of Acre. 160 kilometers northwest of the reserve lies the major Peruvian city of Iquitos, the largest city in the world not accessible by road. The Javari Valley reserve is one of the largest in Brazil.

The remote location of the Javari Valley and the ferocious reputation of its inhabitants left the region relatively untouched by non-natives until the late 19th century, and therefore comparatively little is known about area's history. Historically there has been a tendency among outsiders to assume that the hunter gatherers and simple horticulturalists like the isolados found in the remote corners of the Amazon have lived that way for thousands of years. More recently evidenced has arisen that suggests that most indigenous peoples of the Amazon belonged to societies with much greater degree of social complexity at one time or another. The esteemed French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss concluded that the hunter gatherer and simple horticulturalist societies studied by ethnographers in the Amazon would have been unlikely to have developed their exceedingly complex kinship systems had they not been descendants of a much larger polity (Lee and Devore, 1968). Recently unearthed archaeological evidence of high population densities along Amazon and its main tributaries seems to validate early conquistadors' accounts of large urbanized stretches of the Amazon's banks with gaps of only a few kilometers between major towns (Mann, 2006).

The increasing use of rubber in industrial products led to a rubber boom throughout Brazil, and by the 1870s rubber tappers reached the Javari. Throughout the Amazon indigenous peoples were enslaved by mestizo rubber barons and forced to collect increasingly unrealistic quantities of rubber upon pain of death. Natives died in catastrophic numbers of overwork, disease, and mistreatment. The ancestors of the modern isolados were likely among those who fled to the remote headwaters of the Javari and the Juruá to escape the rubber barons based along the main tributaries. By the 1910s Southeast Asia had successfully seized control of the international rubber market, resulting in a near collapse of the Amazonian economy. Many rubber tappers left the Javari but those that stayed continued their bloody yet practically

undocumented conflict with some of the remaining natives until the 1970s. The exodus of the isolados during the rubber boom led to a fragmentation of their social structure, a shift towards less intensive agriculture, and likely reduced ritual (Silva do Nascimento, 2011). In the 1960s and 1970s there were almost 50 deadly incidents reported. The local authorities typically only registered white or mestizo deaths. When a group of isolated Korubos were contacted in 1996 one third of them had lead fragments in their bodies. In 1970 the Brazilian oil firm Petrobus initiated operations on the Brazilian side of the Javari, which led to formal contact with the Matsés.

Today the Javari Valley Indigenous Territory is currently inhabited by five main recently contacted groups, as well as 14 distinct isolado groups for which little anthropological information is available. There are more than 3,000 contacted indigenous residents of the reserve and the isolado population of the territory has been estimated at over 1,000 (Anonby and Holbrook, 2010). The Kanamari live on the eastern edge of the reserve and are more assimilated into Brazilian society than most of the other groups. Unfortunately they suffer from alcohol abuse and spent much of the 20th century working for non-natives under near-slavery conditions. Their language is unlike the other languages of the Javari in that it does not belong to the Panoan language family (Anonby and Holbrook, 2010).

The Marubo are the largest group of the Javari. Many of them live permanently in the town of Atalaia do Norte. As the largest group they hold significant influence in the Indigenous Council of the Javari Valley (CIVAJA), a political entity that includes representatives of the valley's indigenous communities. The Marubo have had considerable experience with outsiders but still live in traditional communal houses called malocas and practice traditional religion, including the ritual use of the hallucinogenic ayahuasca plant.

The Matsés (distinct from the Matís) live on both sides of the upper Javari, mostly outside of the reserve. Matsés villages are located in Peru and three in Brazil. Two isolated groups of Matsés still live to the east of the Javari River. The Matsés are centered around the town of Angamos along the Javari. Though the town is small there is internet access and daily flights to the Peruvian city of Iquitos on the main trunk of the Amazon. The Peruvian Matsés have been studied extensively by the anthropologist David Fleck, who concluded that they were rapidly assimilating to Peruvian national culture (Anonby and Holbrook, 2010).

The Matís were contacted in 1978 and promptly suffered a devastating pneumonia epidemic. At their population nadir of around 60 members they stopped practicing their religion, although now that their numbers have rebounded somewhat the younger generation is being instructed in the traditional rituals. They have reputation for being consummate hunters and frequently hunt with a enormous blowguns.

The Korubo, also known as the “caceteiros” (“headbreakers”) for their violent interactions with outsiders, live in the northern part of the reserve, along the Quixito River. In 1996 FUNAI made first contact with a group of about 25 Korubo who split off from a much larger, still isolated group. Not much is known about Korubo culture or subsistence because so few of them have been contacted (Anonby and Holbrook, 2010). Though of course very little is known about the other various isolado groups, basic similarities in the types of crops grown and the styles of structures built have led FUNAI anthropologists to conclude that most of the 14 isolado groups are of the Panoan language and cultural family, and thus likely similar in culture and social structure to the local contacted groups.

Brazilian policy towards isolados has changed drastically in the last 25 years. In June of 1987 a man named Sydney Possuelo organized a meeting between 15 fellow sertanistas, or

professional backwoodsmen employed by FUNAI to locate, contact, and protect isolated indigenous communities. They recognized that historically the sertanistas had worked in the service of development to remove indigenous peoples from lands coveted by public or private interests. Contact and removal of indigenous peoples had had invariably disastrous results for the indigenous. Those that survived the initial epidemic quickly sank into poverty. Communities disintegrated, traditional knowledge disappeared, and people rapidly became dependent on the market economy. At this 1987 meeting of sertanistas it was decided that contact with isolados was to become a last ditch option. In order to protect isolados from any and all contact it was necessary to demarcate all land held by the isolados (Vaz, 2011). The sertanistas also acknowledged that isolados “are cultural, human, and historical patrimony not just of Brazil, but of all of humanity” (Vaz, 2011). In response FUNAI created the General Coordination of the Isolated Indians (CGII) to realize this new policy. Sydney Possuelo was the CGII’s first director and has held strong influence over isolado policy ever since.

This isolado unit assumed its current form in 2009 as the General Coordination of the Isolated and Recently Contacted Indians (Coordenação-Geral dos Índios Isolados e Recém-Contactados, CGIIRC). The CGIIRC now operates a data bank of “references” which include sightings of isolados, reports of conflicts, physical evidence of isolado presence, and village locations taken from overflights. In 2009 as well the CGIIRC was restructured to operate 12 Ethno-environmental Protection Fronts (FPEs), or teams of professionals responsible for monitoring and protecting specific isolado references. Today the Javari Valley has its own FPE (Vaz, 2011).

In Peru, policy towards its isolados has a very different history. Conflicts between isolados and Peruvian loggers and rubber tappers in the 1960s resulted in a violent military

campaign which included aerial bombardment of a Matsés village in Peru in 1964. Although Peru's 1920 constitution defended the rights of Andean and coastal indigenous populations, it was not until 1957 that the Amazonian indigenous were afforded similar legal protection. In an attempt to "civilize" its Amazonian peoples Peru attempted to give each individual title to ten hectares and thus break already contacted indigenous communities into nuclear families (Silva do Nascimento, 2011). Though rumors of *isolados* in more remote areas of the Peruvian Amazon abounded the government generally ignored their presence.

Today in Brazil there are roughly 220 contacted indigenous peoples speaking 180 languages. In Brazil's 2010 census roughly 817,000 people (or .4% of the country's total population) identified themselves as indigenous. Article 231 of Brazil's 1988 constitution guarantees the rights of Brazilian Indians to live traditionally on their own lands. As a result of land demarcations about 400,000 of those 817,000 indigenous live in 653 discontinuous reserves which total 107 million hectares, or 12.5% of Brazil's territory. Of these 653 reserves eight are demarcated exclusively for recently contacted or isolated peoples (Vaz 2011). There are currently 160 land cases pending.

The process of demarcating an *isolado* territory is naturally quite complicated. First, historical or ethno-historical accounts of the *isolados*' presence in a specific area are reviewed. Informants are typically brought to the site to verify previous accounts. Once FUNAI is reasonably convinced that the *isolado* group exists, localization of the group in question and delimitation of their lands takes a minimum of three years. FUNAI must exercise extreme caution and be cognizant of the *isolados*' seasonal movements so that investigative teams can examine inhabited areas after the *isolados* have left. Investigators record their findings with photos and video but do not remove objects from the site (Vaz, 2011). Once the *isolado* reference

is confirmed it is assigned to an FPE responsible for its protection. If the isolado territory is not located within an already demarcated reserve then a land demarcation proposal is forwarded to Brazilian lawmakers.

The CGIIRC currently coordinates 12 FPE's in eight Brazilian states. These 12 FPEs employ a total of 240 functionaries in the field. Each FPE is responsible for specific references (and thus specific geographic areas) and is composed of a coordinator, field workers, and a medical team. These FPEs vary in terms of the number of references for which they are responsible, the infrastructure available in their jurisdiction, and the resources at their disposal (Vaz, 2011).

In October 2009 the FPE of the Javari Valley organized a 12-man expedition to locate isolados in the northeast Javari valley among the unexplored headwaters of the Rio Boia. In charge was Franciscato Rieli, a man with 22 years of experience locating isolados. On their way to this remote area the expedition found a small ferryboat used for illegally mining gold from the riverbed. During the expedition the already contacted Katukinas physically described the isolados they had visual and audio contact with. The isolados were short, wore their hair long, paint themselves with a red dye. Rieli also heard an unconfirmed story of isolados kidnaping a Katukina women for a day ("Expedição da Funai inicia entrada na selva," 2009). By looking for specific signs in the vast forest the men confirmed that isolados had in fact been living in the area. A sequence of bent-over branches, for example, marks a trail. The 2009 expedition showed that the isolados periodically wandered as far as 40 kilometers from the border of the Javari Valley. The team did not, however, gather enough evidence for more land demarcation ("Expedição acha vestígios de isolados," 2010). This expedition is good example of the multipurpose nature of FPE expeditions. Each expedition investigates reports of intrusion,

attempts to localize isolado populations, and checks in on already contacted indigenous communities, often administering medical treatment.

In 2011 Fabrício Amorim, the coordinator of Javari Valley's FPE, announced that a new group of isolados estimated at 200 individuals was found in the Javari Valley. Clearings used by the isolados for growing cassava were spotted first by satellite, then confirmed by overflight in a small aircraft ("Brasil confirma la existencia de otro pueblo indígena aislado," 2011). Amorim concluded that these clearings are less than a year old because of the condition of the straw and corn fields. As of 2011 FUNAI recognized 14 distinct groups of isolados in the Javari Valley, eight of which have been confirmed by overflight or ground expedition ("Funai identifica novo povo isolado," 2011).

These isolados of the Javari Valley are facing a number of threats from the Brazilian side of the border. First, the abysmal health condition of the contacted indigenous of the Javari Valley is a significant source of risk because they serve as carriers for deadly modern diseases. Since 2001 strong epidemics of malaria and hepatitis B and D have torn through communities of contacted indigenous in the Javari Valley ("Deputado, 2009). In 2009 FUNAI admitted that Brazil's National Health Foundation (FUNASA) "has shown itself to be incapable of providing adequate healthcare to the indigenous of the Javari Valley, and this deficiency has resulted in high morbidity rates and a complete lack of control over basic health conditions" ("Lideranças da Terra Indígena Vale," 2009).

The Brazilian non-profit organization Center for Indigenist Work (CTI) has released detailed reports on the health situation of the Javari Valley's inhabitants. Since 2000 15% of the contacted Korubo have died, mostly from Hepatitis B and D. Eight percent of all inhabitants of the Javari Valley reserve (a total of about 4,000 inhabitants) have died in the last decade (Arisi,

2010). As of 2011 there was still no plan to vaccinate the entire valley against some of these preventable diseases. FUNASA's failure to meet the healthcare needs of Brazil's indigenous and serious accusations of corruption have led to its restructuring into the Special Secretary for Indigenous Health (SESAI), but so far the transition has been extremely slow (Coelho, 2011).

Poor health among already contacted groups becomes more serious for isolados because many already contacted groups come to Atalaia do Norte to receive government financial assistance. While they are in the area they hunt and fish both for subsistence and commercial purposes on neighboring Korubo lands. Many contacted indigenous pity the isolados and leave manufactured goods, clothes, and food for them, all of which could carry harmful germs. FUNAI has pleaded with them to stop but these sorts of behavior are difficult to control. They also raise the risk of conflict between isolados and contacted peoples. In addition, extreme droughts in the last decade have significantly altered the migrations of isolados, bringing them closer to major tributaries and therefore closer to contacted villages ("Mudanças Climáticas," 2009).

There have also been a number of troubling incidents of violence between contacted groups and isolados. In 2009 isolados stole tools from the Kaxinawa in Brazil. In 2010 a young boy at the village of Monte Salvado in the Madre de Dios region of Peru was gravely injured by an arrow fired by isolados, though he ultimately survived ("Perú: Indígenas en aislamiento hieren de gravedad a joven," 2010). In 2012 FUNAI investigated rumors that three Kanamari adults and two children were killed by isolated Korubo. Further conflict has been noted between the contacted and isolated groups of Korubo. Also in 2012 Kaxinawa from Aldeia Praia do Carapanã complained of two contacts with isolados in a single week. The Kaxinawa were afraid of violent confrontation, as the isolados always appear armed and in groups of about 15. Though the Kaxinawa in this particular village number over 600, they are afraid that the isolados will steal

their metal tools (“Líderes,” 2012). If the violence intensifies FUNAI may be placed under increased pressure to contact the isolados for the sake of pacification.

Recent threats to the isolados of the neighboring Brazilian state of Acre are especially disturbing because they may very likely appear in the Javari Valley as well in the near future. José Carlos Meirelles is a Brazilian sertanista who lead the FPE along the Elvira River in Acre until 2011. He had worked for FUNAI since 1971. In 2009 he found arrowheads unlike those of the Brazilian isolados, which he believes serve as proof that Peruvian isolados are fleeing to Brazil. Later a Google Earth image of a clearing in the middle of the forest suggested that Peruvian isolados had crossed the Envira River into Acre as a result of the devastation of the Matsés Reserve in Peru. In the Acre region there are an estimated 600 isolados divided into three groups. Two of these have been in the area for some time and are likely of Pano ethnicity based on the appearance of their communal structures.

The group of Peruvian origin lives near Santa Rosa, a municipality in Acre. The group, known as the Mashco-Piro in Peru, was spotted first by satellite and then confirmed with an overflight. The Mascho-Piro are actually two groups of between 60 and 70 individuals each. They differ from the other two main groups that have been in the area longer in that they live in large communal houses with less individual family areas. All of the Acre isolado groups grow mandioca, banana, mango, and corn. Most of the isolados’ malocas are located among the headwaters of the Xinane and Riozinho tributaries of the Envira River. All are about 100 km away from one another which suggests that each group is its own distinct entity. Isolado clearings can be as large as five hectares. In last five years FUNAI has done two overflights to drop machetes so that isolados do not go solicit them from their neighbors (“Funai e Governo do Estado, 2012).

The movement of Peruvian *isolados* into Brazilian *isolados*' territory could provoke violence and instability. Meirelles consistently called local and state authorities to inform them of the gravity of the situation but he believes that the problem will only be resolved once *isolados* on the Peruvian side are left in peace. According to Meirelles logging, mining, and coca production are the three greatest threats to the *isolados*' security. Much of the wood logged is mahogany. Mahogany logging is illegal in Brazil due to the endangered status of the mahogany tree, but some still occurs within the Javari Valley. In a 2009 interview Meirelles explained, "as long as there are people ready to pay a fortune for wood, there will be people logging mahogany, wherever it is. The world needs to know that every American buried in a mahogany casket has a few dead *isolados* beside him" ("Flechas indicam fuga de índios," 2009).

Equally disturbing has been the Brazilian government's rather passive reaction to the instability in Acre. On July of 2011 the FPE Elvira base at Xinane was invaded by a group of around 40 armed Peruvian *naro*-traffickers. All of FPE Elvira's men had time to escape thanks to a radio warning from the contacted Ashaninka. Xinane lies about 32 kilometers from the Peruvian border. Almost a week later a Brazilian Federal Police helicopter arrived at Xinane. The *narco*-traffickers scattered and the police were only able to arrest one suspect, the Portuguese drug-trafficker Joaquim Fadista. Fadista had previously been caught throwing 20 kilos of cocaine into the Rio Envira by FUNAI but had been extradited to Peru. Meirelles was extremely frustrated that the military did not show up with more force. He implied as well that had this area been within specific strategic economic development zones demarcated by the Accelerated Growth Program (PAC), the army would have showed up in force immediately. Meirelles strongly condemned the Brazilian government's slow and half-hearted reaction to the incident in an internet post while he and four FUNAI employees returned to the base to await

reinforcements (Frente de Proteção dos Índios Isolados da FUNAI,” 2011). It took the military a full week to reach the scene. Carlos Travassos, the head of CGIIRC at the time of incident, said that the Peruvians were carrying isolado arrowhead fragments in suitcases, which he feared meant that they had already massacred some isolados. He had also heard rumors that mercenaries were contracted by loggers and narco-traffickers to clear the forests of isolados (“Presuntos narcos peruanos,” 2011).

Unfortunately, this hesitancy to act on behalf of the isolados is not limited to the local government of Acre. In a 2012 interview the sertanista Sydney Possuelo expressed his disappointment with the administration of current Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff and her Workers’ Party more generally (Moon, 2012). Though strong environmental and indigenous rights legislation is in place, Dilma is trying to rush huge development projects without consulting anyone. The most controversial example of this is her insistence on immediate construction of the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam on the Xingu River, despite the fact that the dam would inundate Kayapó land. She seems reluctant to yield even in the face of much international protest.

Former president Lula da Silva’s administration was not much better. In 2004 Possuelo criticized the director of FUNAI for suggesting that Brazilian indigenous peoples already held too much land and was promptly sacked. During the Lula administration Brazil’s oil lobby won lots of contracts via the PAC accelerated growth programs. In 2009 the National Petroleum Agency began investigating the production potential of the upper Juruá in Acre without informing local indigenous communities. The firm GEORADAR was contracted to conduct seismic exploration very close to the southwest border of the Javari Valley reserve. Because the operations did not actually occur on indigenous land the National Petroleum Agency was able to

bypass indigenous consultations and an extensive environmental impact study. FUNAI informed GEORADAR that it was operating in an area with isolados references, but the warning was ultimately ignored with no action taken by the Brazilian authorities. The inhabitants of the Javari Valley were later informed a posteriori of the operations (“Nota do CTI sobre a atividade petroleira,” 2012). This incident, while not overly threatening in itself, demonstrates the willingness of the Brazilian government to bypass legislation that would otherwise protect indigenous rights in order to pursue economic development. The fact that FUNAI could not convince the authorities to halt a private corporation that was clearly breaking the law is troubling.

In 1991 FUNAI expelled missionaries from all indigenous territories, but some religious fanatics have threatened to contact isolados in order to “save” them and bring them Christian civilization. Luz, an evangelical preacher from Missão Novas Tribos, believes he has a constitutional right to preach to anyone and that Brazil’s laws keeping him out of indigenous territory are “persecution” (Melanez, 2011). Traditionally the church, loggers, and miners have all collaborated to dispossess isolados of their land, often in the name of religion. Although the missionaries constitute a relatively minor threat to the well-being of the isolados, they are yet another faction keen on ending the isolados’ isolation.

Narco-traffickers take advantage of the extreme remoteness of parts of the Amazon to grow cocaine and marijuana. Narco-traffickers are often heavily armed and have proven themselves willing to use lethal force against isolados in the event of an encounter. In 2011, Brazil’s federal police seized 937 kilograms of cocaine and 173 kilograms of marijuana in the state of Acre alone. In August of 2012 they seized 1.1 tons of marijuana, the largest seizure yet in the state. These seizures indicate that narco-traffickers are very active along the Peruvian

border (Marinho, 2012). In 2012 Brazilian police destroyed a Peruvian cocaine lab on the Peruvian side of Javari River (Lyons, 2012). Today cocaine production combines Colombian expertise, Brazilian money, and Peruvian labor. The drugs are grown in Peru, smuggled across the border, and then shipped down the Amazon to fuel the Brazilian cocaine market, which is second in size only to that of the US.

Brazilian *isolados* are not insulated from development and instability on the Peruvian side of the border. Peru has a history of allowing loggers to operate illegally in indigenous and environmental reserves. In 2008 the Peruvian government was embarrassed by documents proving that it had prior knowledge of 12 illegal logging camps in indigenous territory of which it had previously negated any knowledge of (“Los indígenas aislados de Perú podrían desaparecer,” 2008). A Wikileaks release revealed that Peruvian authorities falsified permits for illegal loggers (“Wikileaks,” 2011). Aerial photos taken by the conservation organization Round River Conservation studies proved the existence of four logging camps within Peru’s Murunahua reserve (“Fotos aéreas,” 2009). Unfortunately Peruvian loggers also make their way into Brazil. Asháninka tribal members on both sides of the Brazil-Peru border found evidence of illegal logging extending into Brazilian territory. In 2009 FUNAI opened a new post near Marechal Thaumatorgo to protect mahogany reserves from logging (“PF cria posto de controle,” 2009). The high prices, resulting in part from high US demand for mahogany, encourage illegal logging (“Demanda de madeira,” 2010). In 2010 FUNAI confirmed the shooting death of an *isolado* by loggers in the state of Acre (“Índio isolado é assassinado,” 2010).

Today 70% of the Peruvian Amazon is covered with oil and natural gas concessions that crisscross indigenous territories, including that of *isolados*. Oil and natural gas extraction requires considerable infrastructure and thus creates a significant potential for unwanted contact.

The effects of even minimal infrastructure can be surprisingly far-reaching. The animals hunted by construction crews are often seed dispersers, which affects the composition of the forest and complicates traditional subsistence. The Ashaninka in the Brazilian state of Acre denounced Petrobras in 2008 for looking for oil in land occupied by Peruvian *isolados* across the border. One concession designated as Lot 137 (Figure 2, pg 34) is located within the Matsés Reserve on the upper Juruá River in Peru which was intended to protect the *isolados* (“Os Ashaninka,” 2008). A 2008 report on oil and gas concessions in the western Amazon explained that “national governments delimit specific geographic areas or “blocks” that are zoned for hydrocarbon activities, which they may lease to state and multinational energy companies for exploration and production” (Finer, Pimm, and Keane, 2008). These concessions result in deforestation for roads, occasional oil spills, wastewater discharge, and increased access for loggers, miners, and commercial hunters. The western Amazon already has about 180 such lots. Peru’s 64 Amazonian lots now cover 72% of the Peruvian Amazon, and all but eight have been created since 2004.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples guarantees to indigenous communities the right to free, prior, and informed consent regarding extraction, but many South American governments have decided that only consultation is necessary. In 2006 Peruvian Law 28736 (Law for the Protection of Isolated Peoples in Voluntary Isolation) created a loophole for natural resources deemed by the state to be in the public interest. The US, Canada, Europe, and China are all heavily invested in Peruvian oil (Finer, Pimm, and Keane, 2008).

Peru gave the Anglo-French firm Perenco permission to drill in indigenous territory. Perenco announced plans for a new pipeline to transport the more than 300 million barrels of oil under its concessions (“Oleoducto letal,” 2010). Such a pipeline would require significant deforestation. In 2011 there were reports of new oil activity in the upper Jaquirana river region in

the southwest corner of the Javari Valley. Pacific Rubiales Energy is currently operating in Lot 135 in Peru, an area with confirmed *isolado* presence. The firm's published plan includes 789 kilometers of seismic lines that criss-cross the location of a FUNAI *isolado* reference number 28 and 134 clearings for helicopter landings (each 60 meters by 40 meters). This infrastructure will support a workforce of up to 500 that will remain in the region for six months ("A empresa petrolera Pacific Rubiales Energy," 2013). Peru had made an explicit promise not to expand the massive Camisea gas project east into *isolados'* lands, but in 2012 it was seriously considering doing it. The state-run firm Petroperú plans to explore for gas in Nahua-Nanti reserve. These developments clearly demonstrate Peru's willingness to allow firms to operate in areas with at least some credible evidence for the existence of *isolados*.

Peru is also currently planning to build a road between Puerto Esperanza and Iñapari which would open up the border region to increased development. Another more ambitious project supported by the Peruvian government since 2009 is a road connecting the town of Cruzeiro do Sul in the Brazilian state of Acre with the Peruvian town of Pullcalpa. Both roads would cross indigenous territory and therefore their construction would be illegal under current Peruvian law. However, if the Peruvian congress declares the roads to be a "national necessity," the existing laws could be overridden. Many non-indigenous Peruvians led by the controversial Italian padre Miguel Piovesan support the road as a means to reduce their isolation. But about 80% of the affected region's population is actually indigenous and few indigenous support the road's construction ("Estrada," 2012). The South American Regional Integration Initiative in 2000 has led to proposals for an Interocean highway that would slice right through the western Amazon. Brazil is a strong supporter of regional integration as has taken a leading role in its

facilitation. However, development along the Brazil-Peru border would gravely threaten the *isolados* (Silva do Nascimento, 2011).

Arguably the most troubling aspect of Peruvian policy is the highly antagonistic relationship between the Peruvian government and indigenous groups. In 2001 Peru's Amazonian indigenous were formally recognized for the first time with the creation of the National Commission of Andean and Amazonian Peoples, which was renamed in 2005 to the National Institute for the Development of Andean, Amazonian, and Afro-Peruvian Peoples (INDEPA). However in 2007 Peruvian president Alan García dropped INDEPA from the rank of ministry and subordinated it to the Ministry of the Woman and Social Development. Inconsistent and unstable indigenous policy continued throughout García's presidency (Silva do Nascimento, 2011). In 2009 his environmental minister Antonio Brack declared that resource extraction would not be halted without verification of *isolados*. In response to the government's plans for resource extraction the Peruvian indigenous organization AIDSESEP blockaded the Napo River with cables and canoes to deny access to the Anglo-French firm Perenco that had already invested \$2 billion in its concession in the area. AIDSESEP demanded better legal protection of their land rights and a demarcated reserve for the *isolados*. But ultimately Perenco surpassed the blockade and continued to deny existence of *isolados* within their concession ("Indígenas bloquean un importante afluente," 2009). Violence broke out between indigenous protestors and armed police in Bagua, resulting in the deaths of 30 police and civilians ("100 días después," 2009). Local grass roots protests have not been effective at keeping out corporate operations.

AIDSESEP has also accused tourism operators in game reserves adjacent to *isolado* populations of allowing tourists to leave clothes for the Mascho Piro *isolados* and even planning

excursions with the hope of making contact. These allegations are reminiscent of the recent Andaman Islander scandal in which video emerged of an Andaman women dancing in front of tourists for food. The British newspaper the *Observer* made anonymous phonecalls to Peruvian operators requesting information on human safaris and found that several were willing to arrange such encounters (Hill, “Human Safaris,” 2012).

Despite the challenges facing FUNAI and the *isolados*, there are several reasons for optimism. The most important reasons for optimism are the excellent theoretical legal protection guaranteed to the *isolados* by Brazilian law and the existence of distinguished and experienced organization like FUNAI charged with enforcing them. The *isolados* also have their share of charismatic advocates willing to risk their careers for *isolado* protection. Possuelo and Meirelles are two of the most vocal supporters of *isolado* self-determination. In addition to spending decades in the rainforest protecting *isolados* both have found effective ways to communicate the plight of the *isolados* to an international audience. Though both men have considerably less influence on FUNAI policy now that they have left the organization, their newfound independence from Brazilian politics allows them to speak more freely to the public in Brazil and around the world. Possuelo and Meirelles are also particularly media-savvy. Possuelo often advised the *Matís* to wear facial ornaments while in front of cameras to strengthen the “authenticity” of their image as indigenous peoples and thus the resonance of that image with non-indigenous audiences. Both men have written defenses of *isolado* self-determination that appeal to the growing nostalgia and romanticism of an increasingly alienated modern society. In 2011, Meirelles wrote, “I think it’s important for humanity that these peoples [*isolados*] exist. They are the living memory that it’s possible to live another way” (Milanez, 2011). In 2010 Possuelo released an open letter in defense of the rights of *isolados* in which he insisted that, “the

isolados must live. They are our purest essence, our most vital impulse. A world without them would not be worth living in. There will be no forgiveness for this great tragedy that we are perpetrating against ourselves and the planet” (Cingolani, 2011). This emotional argument for the symbolic value of the isolados’ continued existence will be invaluable in the public relations battle over Amazonian development.

Recent years have also seen an encouraging increase in international cooperation on the protection of isolados. In 2011 nine Colombians traveled to the Javari Valley to participate in FUNAI fieldwork in isolado territory. In 2012 there was a conference in Brasilia with the theme “Exchanging experiences about Methodologies of Protection and Legislation” promoted by the Treaty Organization of Amazonian Cooperation (OTCA). Participants met to trade methodologies and develop a coherent regional strategy. FUNAI also regularly invites other South American countries to visit its isolado departments (“Países amazônicos,” 2012).

NGO campaigns to raise awareness about the isolados have also had important results. Survival International’s petition to stop the Perenco pipeline is widely believed to have prompted Peru to ask Perenco to develop an anthropological “contingency plan” in case of contact (“Piden a Obama,” 2010). In 2010 Survival International sent a letter to UN Special Investigator James Anaya detailing Peru’s opening up of isolado land to oil production (“Survival lanza una advertencia,” 2010). The greatest impact came from a 2011 image of isolados taken by FUNAI workers and released by Survival International (Figure 3, pg 35). In 2011 ConocoPhillips agreed to abandon Lot 39, possibly in response to a petition led by Survival International and signed by over 50 other NGOs (“Petrolera ConocoPhillips,” 2011). Survival International even distributed pamphlets to Macchu Pichu tourists to raise awareness about development on isolados’ land in the same valley.

In the last few years Peru has taken some steps to develop more progressive *isolado* policy. In 2010 the Peruvian government excluded a lot from auction that was located in the Madre de Dios indigenous reserve, which was an important reversal of previous policy (“Perú: Prohíben petroleras,” 2010). In May of 2011 the regional government of Madre de Dios declared the *isolados* to be an important cultural patrimony and explicitly promised to respect their rights (“Perú: Ordenanza ratifica protección,” 2011). In August the Peruvian national congress ratified the Law of Previous Consultation, which guarantees to indigenous communities the right be consulted before any government actions that could affect their lands (“Perú aprueba ‘histórica’ legislación,” 2011). In 2012 INDEPA denied Perenco’s requests to continue operations in its Loreto concession. INDEPA cited Perenco’s inadequate anthropological contingency plan in case of contact (Hill, “Oil Company,” 2012). Also in 2012 the Madre de Dios regional government opened up a security control post in Diamante to protect indigenous land. Peru also seems to be cracking down to an unprecedented extent on illegal logging. An illegal logging operation in Manú National Park was raided by the National Services for Protected National Areas and its loggers arrested. 3000 board feet of wood were confiscated and the culprits will serve three to six years (“Madereros ilegales,” 2012).

Indigenous political mobilization is slowly gathering momentum in the border region. Historically indigenous political organization has been crucial to attempts to assert land rights in South America. The Macuxi, for example, used their significant political influence to negotiate one of the largest indigenous reserves in Brazil, the Raposa Serra do Sul Indigenous Territory in the state of Roraima. The Matsés, who live in communities on both sides of the Brazil-Peru border, have begun to conduct regular binational meetings between indigenous leaders based in Brazil and Peru (“A verdadeira integração binacional,” 2011). With a size of 500,000 hectares,

the Matsés' indigenous reserve is Peru's largest (Silva do Nascimento, 2011). Their most recent concern has been the threat of oil extraction operations in the area (Ladeira, 2011). In a 2011 interview Meirelles suggested that a binational park protecting all the isolados' land would be effective and would serve Brazil's interests by allowing it to protect the fragile headwaters ecosystems of important tributaries (Theole, 2011). Cooperation between indigenous groups on both sides of the international border in protecting their territory is an excellent sign.

The contacted indigenous groups of the Javari Valley formed the Indigenous Council of the Javari Valley (CIVAJA) in 1990 independently of FUNAI. Its first meeting took place in Atalaia do Norte, in which indigenous leaders complained of high taxes required to pay for a radio network meant to report intrusions to FUNAI (Nuebler, 2009). In 2009 leaders of 30 groups of Matís, Marubo, and Kanamari of the Javari Valley met to discuss protection of isolated Indians at the Javari Valley FPE's base. The CGIIRC and CTI were also present, along with other regional indigenous groups. The CGIIRC hoped to better understand the contacted peoples' reasons for occasionally leaving items for the isolados. During three days of discussion, tribal leaders were asked for their opinions regarding the benefits and shortcomings of the Javari Valley FPE. Alternative subsistence methods for already contacted peoples that might reduce pressure on isolados were also discussed (Ladeira, 2009). The indigenous inhabitants of the Javari Valley play a crucial role in territorial protection because they are the only people with a permanent presence within the reserve.

A holistic look at the situation of the Javari Valley's isolado groups over the past few years suggests that FUNAI was reasonably successful in ensuring their well-being. Despite FUNAI's deficit in manpower it has managed to avoid any major incidents in the Javari Valley. Part of the problem with assessing FUNAI's success is that not all encounters between loggers,

narco-traffickers, and oil workers and isolados are reported. Similarly, it would be difficult to detect an epidemic among the isolados.

Currently threats from loggers, narco-traffickers, and oil workers are only significant outside of the Javari Valley itself. There is a buffer zone of Peruvian contacted and isolado groups that is currently bearing the brunt of resource extraction. Though Peru has made some progress on the recognition of indigenous rights, its commitment to those rights in a climate of rising oil and gas prices will certainly be tested. And although the integrity of the Javari Valley indigenous reserve is unlikely to be seriously compromised by the Brazilian government, instability at its peripheries could exacerbate territorial conflicts within the reserve and leave isolados with an increasingly small area in which to hide. If this pressure continues unabated we may well see isolados eager to make contact because these tensions have become insufferable.

FUNAI has established a sophisticated and effective system for locating, identifying, and protecting isolado populations. Unfortunately, the most pressing threats to the well-being of isolados are no longer within FUNAI's control to prevent. FUNAI has been shown to have very little authority outside of the legally demarcated reserves. The Brazilian government's slow response to the sacking of a FUNAI post in Acre and its refusal to bring a private contractor to court over blatantly illegal activity both demonstrate that it has other priorities at play in the western Amazon. If FUNAI's mission is undermined by Brazil's own development policy there will be no more barriers to contact. The fate of the isolados has long since been out of their own hands and is rapidly slipping out of FUNAI's.

What would be the significance of the extinction of the isolados, of Possuelo's unforgiveable tragedy? Many would likely call it genocide, or at the least a major humanitarian failure. But if the isolados are to be saved it will not be out of respect for some inviolable right to

self-determination. Defending the human rights of a few thousand isolados to live unmolested in a reserve the size of Austria while millions of South Americans live in poverty and could readily benefit from cheaper natural gas or hydroelectricity will become increasingly difficult. Though one might argue that the profit gleaned from the exploitation of these lands will likely be concentrated into a few private hands, it will certainly be accompanied by a higher standard of living for many. Instead, the isolados ought to be protected because they are, in Meirelle's words, "the last free people on earth" (Theole, 2011). They constitute virtually the only human societies that remain beyond the reach of global capitalism and function completely independently of the modern state and economy. This is highly significant for two reasons.

First, in the next hundred years there is a distinct possibility that exhaustion of natural resources, widespread ecological destruction, and subsequent social chaos will force the global system to drastically decentralize, even if only temporarily. To deny this possibility in the context of current scientific opinion would require faith in human innovation so profound that one might even be tempted to call it hubris. The existence of functionally independent decentralized communities like those of the isolados will be invaluable, even if only as abstract inspiration. Though of course the practical lessons in sustainability and decentralized political authority that we can glean from the isolados are obviously limited by vast discrepancies in the sizes of our respective populations, the loss of the isolados, like the loss of any cultural diversity, will diminish our ability to adapt to a changing world. A few generations after contact the isolados, like many indigenous societies contacted before them, will likely be incapable of hunting without a rifle. How many generations will it take for them to become as dependent on the global system as Americans, for whom a week without electricity is a national emergency? The destruction of the isolados would be the symbolic sacrifice of the same decentralized

cultural traditions that would allow us to weather the coming crisis in favor of the short-term economic interests that are ultimately causing it.

Second, with the extinction of the *isolados* modern society will have finally assimilated all fundamental contradiction. Critiquing the alienation of modern life will become meaningless because there will be no alternative, nor the living memory of such an alternative. Humanity will come to mean exclusively the modern man, because truly independent tribal life and the distinct worldviews it engenders will cease to exist except as historical curiosities. We will risk mistaking the behavior of modern man for human nature and thus perpetuate the myths of a Hobbesian state of nature and the inevitable tragedy of unlimited wants and limited means. Critique of modern society becomes impossible when Herbert Marcuse's "technological rationality" becomes the only rationality, and all other criteria are rendered meaningless (Marcuse, 1964). The dialectic between industrial and tribal societies may one day be a powerful tool for social change, but only if one society is prevented from devouring the other.

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Figure 1 – General map of the Javari Valley Indigenous territory

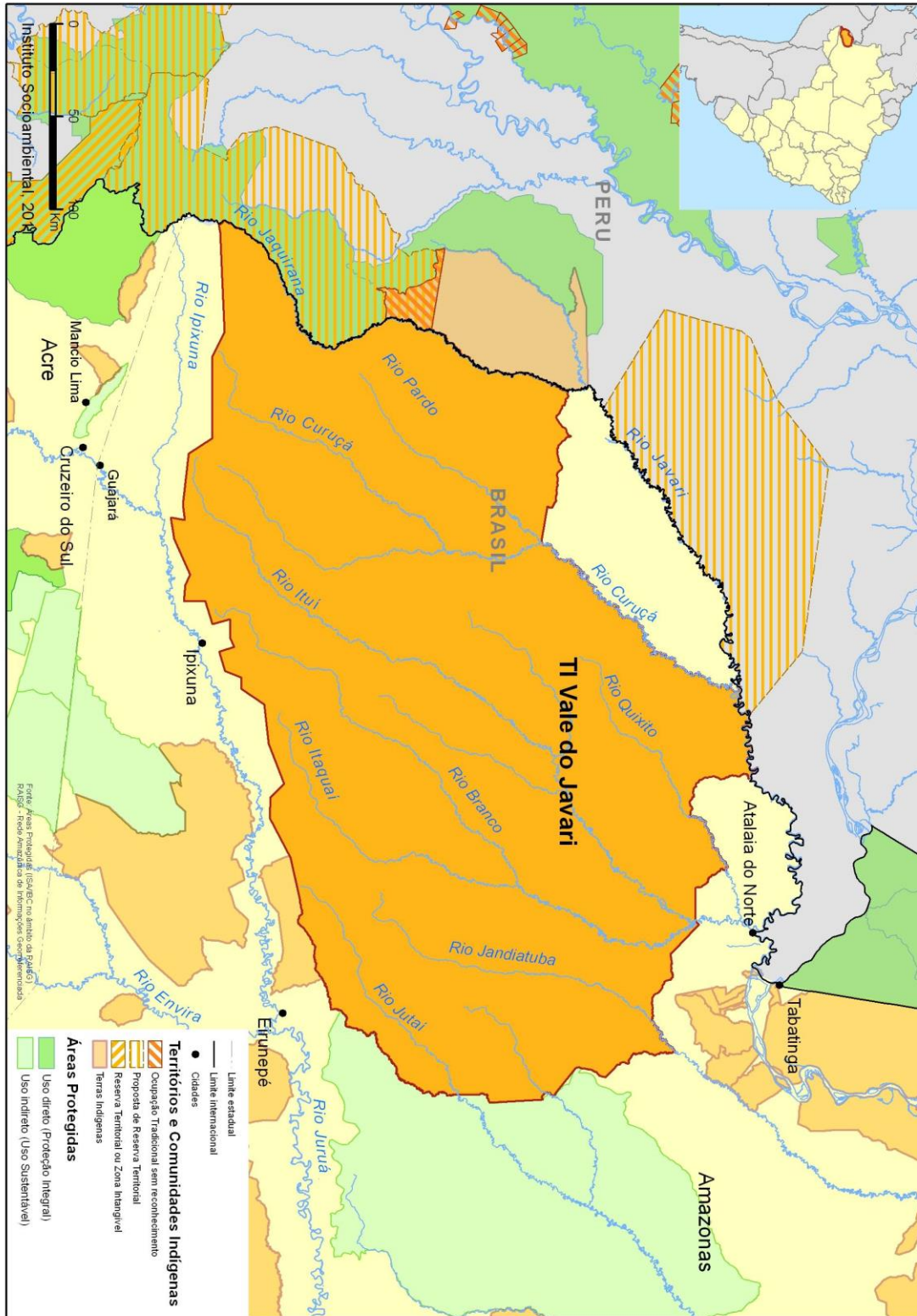


Figure 1: “ Situação da saúde indígena no Vale do Javari continua grave e inalterada.” *Xingu-Otomo.net*, February 4, 2012. <http://www.xingu-otomo.net.br/situacao-da-saude-indigena-no-vale-do-javari-continua-grave-e-inalterada/>

Figure 3 – Photo of isolados in Acre, Brazil



Figure 3: “Photo of uncontacted tribe.” *National Geographic*, July 5, 2011.
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