

# THE LAST OF EDEN

On one of the last islands of intact rain forest in Brazil's eastern Amazon, the Awá Indians face the seemingly inexorable eradication of their home. Even the legal victory that deeded them the land hasn't stopped the ruthless felling of trees by forces they can't even comprehend. Photographer SEBASTIÃO SALGADO captures the Awá's world, while ALEX SHOUMATOFF hits the forest trails with the most endangered tribe on earth

**STANDING TALL**  
Awá men and boys,  
in the Território  
Indígena Awá, in the  
Brazilian Amazon.

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teractions are going on that our contingent from the modern world is dead to.

Pirai starts to speak in Portuguese, his voice full of gravitas and emotion. “We are Awá,” he says. “We don’t succeed in living with chickens and cows. We don’t want to live in cities. We want to live here. We have much courage, but we need you close to us. The Ka’apor and Guajajara”—neighboring tribes the Awá have testy relationships with—“are selling their wood to the whites. We don’t want their money and their motorcycles. We don’t want anything from the whites but to live as we live and be who we are. We just want to be Awá.”

Then Iuwí gives an impassioned speech in Awá, which none of us understand, but his words have such conviction and pride they bring tears to my eyes. Two courageous Awá men, father and son, in their prime—there are not many others here in their demographic, nowhere near enough to take on the *madeireiros*, the loggers who are killing their trees and their animals and are now within a few miles of here, and the thousands of other *invasores* who have illegally settled on their land and converted a third of their forest to pasture. I think of all the speeches like this given by brave natives in the Americas over the last 500 years, who were trying to save their people and way of life and world but were unable to stop the inevitable, brutal advance of the conqueror and his “progress,” and how this is probably what is going to happen here, to this remnant tribe in its endgame.

The Awá are a distinctive-looking, diminutive forest people, smaller than any of the dozen other Amazon tribespeople I have met. Reduced size is adaptive in a rain forest. You can move around more easily and unobtrusively. Not only humans but other species are smaller in rain forests. The older Awá, like Pirahá, have long scruffy hair and broad grins. Despite all their vicissitudes, they seem to have a happy outlook—they’re just glad to still be here, and what they can do for the others is to show it with their big smiles. Some of the women and kids have beautiful faces, long and narrow at the chin, their noses long and curved down at the end, their dark, almond-shaped eyes gleaming with interest. They are more like Ainu or

Quechua, indigenous people from Japan or the Andes, than muscle-bound bruisers of Amazonia like the Xavante or Kayapo.

Some of the kids look a little inbred. There is a lot of marriage between close kin here, there being no one else to marry. And there being more men than women, some of the women have several husbands—polyandry, a rare marital arrangement, found most famously in Tibet. But some of the men have several wives, so there’s polygyny too. There seems to be a lot of flexibility in who sleeps with whom. In fact, an Awá woman is not thought to get pregnant from one man—she has to have sex with several men, generally three. Reproduction is a collective, cumulative effort, and all of the men who sleep with her are the father of her child: plural paternity, the first I’ve ever heard of this.

Two days earlier I had set out from São Luís, the capital of Maranhão, the easternmost state in the Brazilian Amazon, on the Atlantic coast of northern Brazil.

After driving south, into the interior of the impoverished state for 300 miles on increasingly sketchy roads, and walking through glorious rain forest for a couple of miles, I reached the ethno-environmental protection post of Juriti, in the roughly 289,000-acre Território Indígena (T.I.) Awá. The Awá of Juriti are made up of three groups who were contacted for the first time in 1989, 1992, and 1996, and, with the children they’ve had since then, their population is up to 56. There are still 100 or so Awá who remain uncontacted. One of the three known isolated, or *isolado*, groups—there are probably more in the other last islands of Maranhão’s rain forest—is closely related to Juriti’s 1996 group, who had decided they had had enough of life on the run, which has been the Awá’s survival strategy for nearly 200 years, and a successful one until now, with their forest shrinking and the modern world closing in, and there being nowhere else to go. The Awá of Juriti still go out in the for-

**AT WORLD’S END**  
Pirahá, an Awá elder. Below, Brazilian soldiers cutting up illegally harvested wood.



## THE MODERN FRONTIER HAS BEEN EATING AWAY AT THE AWÁ’S LAND FOR 40 YEARS.

est and hunt every day and have the same basic outlook and beliefs that they did before they were contacted. Their only concessions to modernity are that they wear clothes most of the time, grow some crops, and hunt with guns, except for a few of the old men, who still prefer their bows.

The Awá are among Brazil's more than 800,000 "Indians," who belong to at least 239 different cultures and speak roughly 190 different languages, yet are only 0.4 percent of the country's 200 million people. Modern Brazil is a fractious, joyous mix of classes, races, and ethnically distinct regional subcultures, with a very rich 1 percent, a middle class that has been stuck in neutral since the global recession, and a dark-skinned proletariat, millions of whom have nothing—no home, no job, no land, no opportunities. So many realities at odds with each other, and most of the population under 25 and idealistic and anxious about what the future holds. This anxiety and the desire for real change and a decent government not riddled with corruption are what triggered the massive, spontaneous, countrywide demonstrations last June.

It is astonishing that there are still uncontacted native people in such a devastated part of the Amazon. The modern frontier, with its chain saws, bulldozers, loggers, squatters, and cattle ranchers, has been eating away at the Awá's rain forest for 40 years. Illegal logging roads have penetrated to within a few miles of where one of the three known bands of *isolados* roams. Survival International, the tribal peoples' champion, has classified the Awá as the most endangered tribe on earth. FUNAI, Brazil's National Indian Foundation, has put the Awá in its most vulnerable "red alert" category.

Survival International reached out to the photographer Sebastião Salgado, and he invited me to join him on this expedition, whose purpose is to shine a global spotlight on the plight of the Awá and to persuade Brazil's Ministry of Justice to evict the *invasores* so the Awá and the forest they depend on can be left in peace. There is no time to lose. All the bureaucratic hoops seem to have been jumped, a process that began in the 1970s. In 2009, an expulsion decree was handed down by a federal judge in São Luis—who described the situation as "a real genocide"—but that was overturned. In 2011, Judge Jirair Aram Meguerian ruled that the Brazilian government had to evict the illegal loggers. But they are still there, an anarchic collection of families, some of them rich *fazendeiros*, or ranchers, with satellite dishes and solar panels on their roofs, but most of them *posseiros*, dirt-poor, landless, illiterate squatters living in mud

huts with roofs of *babaçu*-palm fronds. The Ministry of Justice has to give the order for the eviction operation, which will be a joint endeavor involving police, army, FUNAI, and the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources. The ministry is understandably reluctant to carry it out, because things could turn violent, and because many of the *invasores* are among the millions of homeless, jobless Brazilians, the very people the ruling Workers' Party is committed to improving the lot of. In addition, much of the land in Maranhão is owned by a small oligarchy of extremely wealthy ranchers who have their hands in much of the logging and are not sympathetic to the Indians.

It's been 10 years since T.I. Awá was demarcated, and 8 since it was officially deeded to the tribe, and 2 since the expulsion decree, and nothing has happened except that more *invasores* have arrived and more trees have been cut. There's already a 12-mile slice that's been taken out on the T.I.'s southeastern border—I drove through it, and hardly a tree has been left standing—and it's going to be very hard to get the *invasores* out of there.

Carlos Travassos, FUNAI's chief of general coordination with uncontacted and recently contacted Indians, who is with us, tells me that of Brazil's roughly 239 tribes the Awá *isolados* are one of only three who are still nomadic. They hunt with bows and arrows and gather fruit, nuts, and honey in the forest. They don't have villages or grow anything, and they don't want anything to do with the outside world, which they are aware of—their family members having been killed by its guns and diseases—but not to the extent that they know that they are living in a country called Brazil, or what a country is, or that they share a planet with seven billion of us *kanai*, the Awá word for everyone who is not one of them.

#### Where the *Isolados* Roam

There are 66 uncontacted tribal groups in the Brazilian Amazon, according to FUNAI, and another 30 or so unconfirmed ones—more than anywhere else in the world—and Carlos Travassos is certain others will come to light as the last fastnesses of the rain forest are penetrated. FUNAI's *sertanistas*—backlands experts—as they were called, used to do the delicate and dangerous job of making contact with them, but its policy since 1987 has been to not initiate contact, to have nothing to do with the *isolados* unless absolutely necessary, and to intervene only if the tribespeople's well-being and ability to live their way of life are affected. Travassos, who is from São Paulo and did

his first fieldwork in one of its *favelas*, or slums, is only 33 and full of energy, and he cares passionately about these people. From 2007 to 2009 he was stationed in the Javari Valley of Brazil and Peru, which has the greatest concentration of *isolados*, perhaps as many as 16 different peoples. He has a video on his laptop of some Korubo shouting from a riverbank in 2009. Four hundred Korubo, in three groups in the Javari Valley, are still uncontacted. The men are extremely muscular. Their weapon of choice is a seven-foot club. They have clubbed seven FUNAI employees and 100 loggers and other *invasores* to death.

The Awá have killed a few invaders, most recently a logger they found on an illegal trail three miles from Juriti in 2008, but they are a gentle, unaggressive people, Travassos tells me. We talk about how "uncontacted" doesn't really convey the reality. Most of the uncontacted villages spotted from the air have banana plantations, and the banana was brought to the New World by the Portuguese, so there must have been some contact somewhere along the line. "Autonomous" and "stateless" have been suggested as alternatives, but there are millions of people in those categories who are at least marginally in the modern world, so those terms don't really work, either.

Salgado and I agree that this is not only about the Awá. It is time for all the people in their situation—the Indians in Brazil's 688 Terras Indígenas, the 370 million indigenous people in the world, 40 percent of whom are tribal, who have been treated abominably for centuries on every continent by the Europeans who came, saw, and conquered—to be valued and cared about. This is their moment, and one hopes we can help, and the moment seems to have arrived in Brazil just as I did. In the days leading up to our trip, Terena Indians clashed with ranchers in Mato Grosso do Sul, south of Amazonia (the reason being that the Ministry of Justice took the land from the ranchers and gave it to the Indians, to whom it rightfully belonged, then gave it back to the ranchers), and some Terena set several of the ranchers' compounds on fire. The Federal Police were sent in and one of the Terena was shot dead. Simultaneously but unrelatedly, 30 Kaingang Indians, the demarcation of whose *terras* in the southern state of Paraná has been getting nowhere, took over the Workers' Party's headquarters, in Curitiba, and Kayapo and other tribespeople have occupied the site of the Belo Monte dam, on the Xingu River, an ill-conceived boondoggle that will put much of their homelands underwater. Recently, more than 100 Mundurucú Indians took over FUNAI's headquarters, in Bra-

# THE LOGGERS WHO ARE KILLING THE AWÁ'S TREES AND ANIMALS ARE WITHIN A FEW MILES.

sília, Brazil's capital, where we met with its president two days earlier.

The minister of justice, José Eduardo Cardoza, says the Força Nacional will contain or put down these Indian revolts, and the ministry oversees the agency—FUNAI—that is supposed to be looking out for them. As Antônio Carlos Jobim put it, Brazil is not for beginners. A large segment of the population thinks the Indians are *malandros*—lazy good-for-nothings—who don't contribute anything to the society. Why should they, only 0.4 percent of the population, have 13 percent of Brazil's land surface when millions of Brazilians have no land at all? The *ruralistas*, the conservative ranchers, have a powerful lobby in the Congress in Brasília, and the mining and timber companies are dying to get onto the Indians' land. There is a bill to open the T.I.'s to mining and logging "in consultation" with their Indian occupants but not giving them veto power, and another to take the responsibility for demarcating future T.I.'s away from FUNAI and give it to Congress, and the *ruralistas* are pushing for the existing T.I.'s to be re-demarcated and reduced.

To see what the Indians' lands would look like if the *ruralistas* get their way, we only had to look outside our pickup truck's window on the journey to Juriti. The Amazon rain forest used to cover the western half of Maranhão, but now 71 percent of that is gone, according to the latest satellite images, and more than half of what remains is in the T.I.'s, which are altogether 13 percent deforested (T.I. Awá itself is more than 30 percent deforested). All day long we drove through thick, lush pasture, dotted with white, humped Nelore zebu cattle, grazing in what was once thick, lush rain forest.

#### Never Stand Under a Howling *Guariba*

During my 10-day stay in Juriti, I get into a routine of going out into the forest each morning with Patriolino Garreto, one of FUNAI's three rotating *chefes de posto*, and whatever Awá he can round up who are interested in joining us, which is only the teenagers. Patriolino is a local 58-year-old country boy who has been

working at the Juriti post since 1994. He doesn't speak Awá or know much about their culture. "Os mitos deles só eles que sabem," he tells me as we climb up to the ridge above the village—they are the only ones who know their myths.

"*Paca, anta, queixada, veado, guariba*"—Patriolino reels off the names of the Awá's main prey: agouti, tapir, peccary, deer, howler monkey. "Our forest in Maranhão is full of delicious meat," he says, "but so much of it is gone." Loud drilling directs us to a huge black woodpecker with a red crest and white cheeks tearing into a dead tree. We stop to watch a procession of 30 leafcutter ants, each carrying a vertical flake of leaf many times its size—mulch for their fungus gardens—enter one of the tunnels into their subterranean colony under a five-foot-square dome of bare earth. Soon afterward we find ourselves in a space maybe 100 yards square in which eight or so male pihas are screaming their hearts out, hoping to entice nearby females who are looking for partners. These competitive-display gatherings are known as "leks." None of the pihas, small gray birds in the *continga* family, are visible in the dense jungle foliage, but the collective din of their piercing whistles is earsplitting. The pihas own the soundscape of the Amazon rain forest. One of the Awá boys does a perfect imitation of their two-note shrieks, which sound like greatly amplified catcalls. Even the birds are fooled, and thinking a new male has joined their lek, they answer him excitedly and even more shrilly.

The Awá are masterful mimics of the birds and the monkeys. This is an essential skill for people making their living in a rain forest. Patriolino says that when you hear a piha it means water is nearby, and, sure enough, we come to a *brejo*, a little swamp of *açaí* palm, whose dark-blue berries have antioxidant properties, and are a big item in health-food stores around the world. On the midslopes above the swamp, thick columns of magnificent, towering angelim trees—andira, one of the species the loggers are after—shoot up every couple of hundred feet, and on the ridge we find one that has been marked for cutting, probably by Guajajara working for the *madeiros*. The barbarians are unquestionably at the gate.

The boys climb a vine way up into a

flaring-buttressed sapopema tree, which is how they get honey, but we come to another towering sapopema in the middle of the forest that has been felled with a chain saw. Patriolino explains that some of the Awá borrowed FUNAI's chain saw and dropped the tree to get the honey in its crown so they wouldn't have to climb it. I ask Patriolino if an Awá hunter saw a mother tapir—a relative of the horse with a short, prehensile snout; it's the largest land mammal in the neotropics—and her calf, would they think, with the game getting so scarce, now that they are hunting with shotguns and the *madeiros* are too, maybe they should let them go? Do they have any concept of wildlife management? Patriolino says, "No. They don't think that way." A tapir feeds the entire village for a week.

A shotgun pops in the distance. Iuwí has shot a *guariba*, a howler monkey, the Awá's main source of protein. The boys also find the honey of some *tiuba* bees in the hole of an *inari* tree, scoop it out, wrap it up in one of the broad green leaves of the arums proliferating on the forest floor, cut a strip of *pauari* bark, which they use as a cord to tie the bundle up with, and one of them slings it over his shoulder. "The forest gives the Awá everything," Patriolino says.

Iuwí emerges from the forest with the carcass of the howler. Howlers are so important to the Awá that they give them a special classification, closer to humans than other monkeys are. Their howling bouts at dawn and the end of the day sound like wind rushing out of the portals of Hades. Patriolino says you never stand under a howling *guariba*, because it will shit on you.

#### Bands on the Run

The Awá were originally from Pará, the next state west, part of a wave of Tupi-Guarani hunter-gatherers who came from south-central Amazonia sometime in the mists of prehistory and settled in the lower Tocantins Valley. When the Portuguese arrived on the scene, 500 years ago, the Awá had villages and plantations and were in a more or less constant state of war with their neighbors the Ka'apor. The Portuguese enslaved them and gave them smallpox, and

THE FOREST USED TO COVER  
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**71 PERCENT GONE.**



**OPEN SEASON**  
The destruction  
caused by illegal  
logging goes  
deep into the Awá's  
supposedly protected  
territory.



**RIVER OF DREAMS**  
Awá children and teenagers. This young generation of Awá is already being influenced by the modern world.

perhaps fleeing a revolt on their subjugators' plantations between 1835 and 1840 called the *Rebelião da Cabanagem*, which took 20,000 to 30,000 lives, they fled east to Maranhão. Having learned how vulnerable they were as sedentary agriculturists, they became hunter-gatherers, who could break camp and take off in minutes. The first documentation of their presence in Maranhão was in 1853. By 1900 they had moved into the traditional space of the local people, the Guajajara, who are the largest tribe in Brazil, more than 20,000 strong, and have been in contact the longest, since some French came upon them in 1615. Being much less numerous, the Awá had to keep a low profile and melt into the forest. It was impossible for them to secure and defend land for growing crops. By the time the first Awá were contacted, in 1973, they had lost all their farming skills and interest in farming, and even the knowledge of how to make fire. But this was not cultural devolution, as has often been written about the peoples who had sophisticated cultures on the Amazon River itself and fled up to the headwaters of its tributaries and became hunter-gatherers. It was adaptation. And now the Awá are going to have to adapt again—to the modern world. The contacted ones already are.

In the 1940s, cotton became Maranhão's new crop, and a wave of colonists flooded the interior. The Guajajara, Tembe, and Ka'apor—some of whom were indigenous, others of whom fled east when the Awá did—entered into relations with them, but the Awá stayed hidden from the national society. Many Awá died between 1960 and 1980, particularly after Brazil's military dictatorship took over, in 1964, and instituted a policy of "assimilating" the indigenous people that included exterminating the recalcitrant ones, those standing in the way of "progress" and national unification. The government dropped bombs on them and fed them sugar laced with arsenic. Many of the atrocities were exposed in the 7,000-page Figueiredo report, in 1967, which led to the dissolution of the Indian Protection

Service, whose employees had committed many of them, and the founding of FUNAI as well as Survival International, which was started in 1969 by a group of Brits horrified by a story in the London *Sunday Times Magazine* about the genocide in the Brazilian Amazon. There are stories about Awá being massacred over the years: during the construction of two highways across the state in the 70s; by builders of the 550-mile-long railroad to the iron-ore mines in the Serra Carajás, in Pará, in the early 80s, and the settlers who poured in in its wake; by refugees from the drought in Piauí; by the *pistoleiros* of ranchers; and by loggers. Most recently, in 2011, an eight-year-old Awá girl from one of the *isolado* bands in another T.I. reportedly wandered into a logging camp and was tied to a tree and burned alive as an example to the others. But more Awá, according to Travassos, have died of colds and at the hands of their traditional enemies, the Ka'apor.

#### The Last Frontier

Back from our walk in the forest, we stop in the village. Several of the women are sitting in their hammocks, beading bracelets and necklaces. The village is really squalid, with discarded rags, decomposing garbage, and bones of old meals strewn all over the place. The Awá are not used to living in fixed settlements and haven't learned basic hygiene like sweeping the compound every morning. A number of infant wild animals, orphans of those shot by their husbands that the women have adopted almost as surrogate children—to the point of suckling them—are lashed to posts: two adorable golden-brown *quatis*, ring-tailed coatimundis; a bug-eyed little night monkey; and a mangy, deranged-looking black-bearded saki monkey.

The Awá are getting used to my being here. Takwaré, a teenager, gives me their Neymar-style haircut, cutting the sides close and leaving the hair on top and in the back. (The kids must have seen Neymar, Brazil's reigning soccer god, playing on television on a trip to the health clinic in Santa Inês, halfway between here and São Luís.) Every time I see him after that, he asks, "Quem corto seu cabelo?"—Who cut

your hair?—and I shout, "Takwaré!," and he convulses with laughter. Awá humor is based on repetition. They're already being sucked in, subverted.

I visit Pirahá, who has a dozen arrows tucked under his *babaçu*-frond roof, each of which he spent days on and is a work of art. They are meticulously crafted of strong dark-brown bamboo called *tenkara* and have two kinds of points. One is like a spearpoint, but made of wood, with razor-sharp edges, and is for the big game—tapirs, peccaries, deer—while the other has a barbed point for monkeys, agouti, and birds. The young men are no longer hunting with bows, and in another generation the art of arrow-making will be gone. The young Awá in the three other villages are 10 to 20 years farther down the road to "progress." So there's a sense of futility that I pick up after a while in some of the FUNAI people who are with us. "What are we doing here? What can we really do for these people?" one confides. "Why are we risking our lives when they're going to lose their culture anyway? Whenever I leave this place, I weep." On the porch there are three rifles and a stack of loaded clips in case *madeireiros* or *pistoleiros* decide to pay a surprise visit. The Amazon frontier is still very Wild West.

One afternoon, as I sit in my room at the post, Takwarchia, one of the elders, appears at the window with a big grin. I show him the catalogue of a show on tribal people called "No Strangers" that was at the Annenberg Space for Photography, in Los Angeles, earlier this year, and Takwarchia lets out an appreciative "AHHH!" each time I turn the page to a new picture. Then we start teaching each other our languages. I point to my nose and say "Nose," and he watches how my mouth moves and says "Nose." Then he points to his nose and says "*Epiora*." In short order, Takwarchia and I have 50 words in common.

I am not getting a particularly mystical or spiritual vibe from any of the Awá. This is another Western fantasy, like the noble savage and the idea that tribal people are great conservationists. Iuwi, Pirai's son, who spoke so movingly at our welcome and shot the howler monkey, has started to ask me for my Swiss Army knife,



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contradicting his father's statement that the Awá are not interested in anything we have. Every time I see him he asks, or rather states, "You are giving me that knife." This is only natural. You see these amazing things the *kanai* have, and you want them. But giving things to tribal people can create discord and a culture of dependence. It is one of the first things Carlos Travassos went over with us before we arrived. We were not even to share any of our food with the people at Juriti. I know all about this problem. Thirty years ago I went into a rain forest in Madagascar with a local young man who knew all the birds cold, which he had taught himself from their calls and glimpses of them in trees, and even knew their Latin names, while the people in his village farmed and rarely went into the forest. He was a natural-born naturalist and a sterling young man. When I was leaving I gave him my little Nikon binoculars. Years later I read that he had been killed by the villagers, who were envious that he was getting so many things from the tourists.

## Cosmic Famine

**P**igs have been found. Wild pigs—*queixada*. The village takes to the forest. Uirá Garcia, a 36-year-old anthropologist at the University of Campinas, who speaks Awá and spent 13 months here researching their hunting, kinship, and cosmology, has flown up to help us understand them. Uirá is a light-skinned black man from Rio. The Awá classify him as "another kind of *branco* [white person]." He and I join two men, two women, and three of their pet *quatis*, whom they have unleashed from the posts. They're the size of large kittens but have no trouble keeping up with us on our day-long, eight-mile slog through the forest. We cross a log bridge over the 20-foot-wide Rio Carú, which runs below the post and the village. A huge morpho butterfly, flashing creamy white and blowtorch blue, melts into the dappled shadows ahead of us. "The forest is alive for the Awá," Uirá explains. "They know exactly where they are at all times. Everywhere there is a story. 'This is where I killed a *paca*.' 'This is the tree I found honey in.'" He shows me a

map of their trails that he made with some of the hunters. There are dozens of trails, each with a different purpose. Some are only used seasonally. One goes to a place two days away where there are many *copaçu* trees. They take it only when the *copaçu* is in fruit.

We sit on a log, the first resting-place, where they always stop, 45 minutes out. The men have gone on ahead to find the pigs, while the women are amusing themselves with the little *quatis*, who have boundless curiosity and nervous energy. One has poked its long snout and its entire body except for its elevated, excitedly twitching tail into my backpack. The women keep flinging the *quatis* into the forest with peals of laughter, and they keep coming back for more. "The *quati* is most intelligent," Uirá says. "If you let it go days from the village, it finds its way back. It follows the human scent. When it gets big, it becomes too aggressive to keep and goes back to the forest and joins a band. The hunters recognize the ones that are former pets and don't kill them."

One of the women imitates the call of a *macaco prego*, a capuchin monkey, which she hears in the distance: the same note seven times. But it is not a monkey—it's her husband, trying to locate her. Uirá starts to explain the Awá's extraordinary take on their forest universe, the intricate web of correspondences and reciprocities they have with the plants and animals. "Every Awá is named for a plant or animal," he explains, "with whom he has a special relationship for the rest of his life. Every species of tree has an animal that is its owner. The *araras*, parrots, are owners of the *araucaria* trees. The *guaribas*, the howlers, are the owners of the *uwariwa* trees. The other animals that eat the fruits of these trees have to ask permission of the parrots and the howlers, and the whole forest is structured this way (a floresta é todo demarcado deste jeito). There is an underworld of ex-humans—ancestors of their enemies, the Guajajara, who fell through since-covered holes and are still living—and a heaven with magnificent beings called the Karawara, who come down to earth to hunt and get water and honey. With the game disappearing, there will be a cosmic famine, because it won't be the

end of just the Awá but the Karawara too. The end of the forest will be the end of the cosmos. There will be a famine on earth and in heaven."

We hit the trail, which becomes fainter until finally, after a couple of miles, we are bushwhacking, slashing through *mata de cipò*—vine-infested jungle—with machetes. The men appear. They have shot one of the capuchins and a *quati*, which they leave with the women, and they go off again to keep looking for the pigs. We reach a beautiful spot on a little stream and stretch out on its banks. One of the women bathes, sitting in the water with her curvy back turned to us, like a Gauguin. There really is an emerald forest, and we are in it. But as we are basking in what is left of the afternoon, Uirá is stung by four wasps, and one gets me on my left thumb, which quickly swells. A hundred different things can get you in the emerald forest. The Awá are most afraid of the ghosts of the dead—the bad part of you that doesn't go to heaven, the anger that you have to have to be able to hunt and kill your brothers and sisters the animals—who are drifting around in the forest and making otherwise unexplainable noises and are responsible for all illness, misfortune, and death.

## Muito Irritados

**I**want to visit Tiracambu and Awá, two of the other, more acculturated Awá villages, but the already barely negotiable road through the invaded part of the T.I. is washed out, so I take a skiff with a two-horsepower engine down the Rio Carú, the skiff that brought Augustin do Violão to spell Patriliono as *chefe de posto* last night. Another reason I want to go to Tiracambu is to meet Karapiru, the most famous Awá, the poster boy of Survival International's campaign. His family was attacked by some ranchers in 1991. His wife and son were killed, another son captured, and he was shot in the lower back but managed to escape and spent the

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**BOY WONDER**  
The young son of Pirai, in his father's arms.



next 10 years alone on the run, until a farmer found him in Bahia, 400 miles south. An interpreter was brought in to persuade him that he would be better off letting FUNAI take care of him—he would eat much better, and his health needs would be taken care of—and the interpreter turned out to be his son, who had survived the assault and recognized his father from the bullet scar in his back. Travassos says Karapiru is a stand-up guy, *uma ótima pessoa*, supercalm and unassuming. Now in his 60s, he still hunts every day, with his bow.

The river snakes east, describing the border of T.I. Awá, on the left, and T.I. Carú, on the right, another reserve, created primarily for the Guajajara, more than 8,000 of whom live there, but also several hundred Awá, including one of the uncontacted bands. The milky river is full of stingrays, caimans, anacondas, and piranhas. T.I. Awá ends, and the left bank becomes the domain of the *caboclos*, the mestizo river people who live on the Amazon's thousands of tributaries. My driver, 20-year-old Jessel, is a *caboclo*, but he looks completely Indian. I ask him which tribe he is descended from, and he says, defensively, "Sou Brasileiro"—I'm Brazilian. He tells me that the *caboclos* have nothing to do with the Guajajara, who are good-for-nothing *malandros*. They have big plantations of marijuana, which came from escaped slaves in the 18th century, and smoke it ritually, to make contact with the spirits.

After two more hours Jessel pulls up to a dock, and we say hello to Jessel's aunt, whom we find in the kitchen of her mud *babaçu*-thatch hut. It's a cozy scene; apart from kerosene lamps and flashlights, a jug for filtering water, and a radio, a step away from the Indians, like a sod-roofed homestead on the American Plains 150 years ago. The aunt serves us *cafézinhos*, little cups of sweet black coffee, and delicious little pink bananas. She radiates the kindness and unflappable calm of the *gente humilde*, Brazil's poor people. It is the country's transcendent quality. You find it even in the urban slums.

Back on the river, every 500 yards there is a stack of *maçaranduba*—Brazilian redwood—on the *caboclo* side, waiting to be picked up and taken to the buyers downstream. After three more hours we pass, on the Guajajara side, a dozen long, freshly milled and squared pieces of wood, roughly 20 feet by 30 inches by 30 inches. These must be destined for a more high-end customer, maybe in the States. The trafficking of Maranhão's timber is going on right in the open, and nothing is being done about it. This is the reality. Logging is the mainstay here, and no one has come up with an economic alternative. The majority of the mayors of the state's municipalities are *madeiros*, and the only trees that are left are in the T.I.s. This is why

the expulsion of the *invasores* from T.I. Awá has been taking so long. There is no political will to carry it out.

A few minutes later, we reach São João do Carú, the municipal seat and regional trading center, which is only 19 years old. Before that it was the *hakwa*, or hunting territory, of one of the Awá's clans. The settlement of this region was very rapid. Teenagers cruise the main drag on dirt bikes.

I spend the night at a flophouse for ranch hands, and in the morning Cicero Sousa, who runs people and supplies to FUNAI's posts around the state, shows up in the same spanking-new silver Mitsubishi with unreal off-road capabilities that he drove me down from São Luis in, and we set off for Tiracambu with João Operador, the third of Juriti's rotating *chefes de posto*, who is coming along to replace a broken grindstone. After hours of nothing but pasture and cows—and Cicero at one point saving our lives with a last-minute swerve that avoids a head-on collision with a huge truck barreling around a blind curve on the single-lane paved road—we reach the Rio Pindaré, which describes the southern border of T.I. Carú. The 550-mile railroad to the Carajás iron mines runs along it through what was Awá land. Survival International prevailed on the World Bank and the European Union, which were lending more than \$1 billion to Vale do Rio Doce, the company that was building the railroad and developing the mines, to make it a condition that all indigenous tribes' land in the Carajás railway corridor be demarcated. This resulted in the creation in the early 1980s of the half-million-acre T.I. Carú and the million-and-a-half-acre T.I. Alto Turiaçu, to the northwest, which some 50 Awá share with the Ka'apor and the Tembe. Carú and Alto Turiaçu were not contiguous. Between them was what eventually, in 2005, became T.I. Awá, whose creation was fought every step of the way and dragged on for 20 years. It was at various times going to be about 500,000 acres, then around 130,000, and finally ended up being about 289,000, by which time much of it was devastated.

Every couple of miles there is a little *povoado*, a town along a railroad that sprang up as people who worked on the tracks brought their families, and then others came too. A lot of Awá were killed by these settlers. Now the *povoados* have streets and houses and stores with electricity and running water. We stop at one so I can buy ammo for the Awá of Tiracambu, which I have to do because Cicero and João Operador can't. This is one criticism I have of FUNAI. It converts the Indians from bows to guns, which makes hunting much easier, but then the game gets depleted, and after a few years the hunters have to make, in the case of the Awá of Juriti, a day's lope from the village before they can find a tapir or a peccary. Equally insidiously—and in the long run of dubious bene-

fit—the conversion forces them into the cash economy, because they have to have ammo. FUNAI provided the Indians with ammo until last year, when, perhaps fearing their increasing militancy, or to save money, the Brazilian legislature enacted the Indigenous Peoples Disarmament Act. The Indians can keep their guns, but they have to buy their own ammo, and the only way they can do this is by selling their trees to the *madeiros*, in the process selling themselves down the river. Putting the Indians in this situation does not seem to have been very well thought out, or humane, or in the best interests of the people FUNAI is supposed to be there for. It brings them into the economy, which they were doing fine—even better—without, then it leaves them high and dry. This is why I have to spring for the ammo, a prerequisite for any visitor. I had to buy some for the Juriti Awá too, so they can kill more animals and continue to upset the equilibrium they had with their eco-system when they used bows. But to ask the Awá to go back to bows is no more realistic than asking people in the modern world to give up their cell phones.

A few settlements later, Cicero turns onto a path that goes through the bush down to the river. Tiracambu's *chefe de posto*, José Ribamar Silva Rocha, is waiting on a sandbar with a skiff to pole us across. We walk up a ways to the *posto*, which has electricity from a line across the river. The modern world is right on the other side: every hour on the hour, 24 hours a day, a two-mile-long train whose cars are heaped with iron ore destined for Europe and China passes. It is a terrible, grating noise. The Awá call it "the Train of Fear" because it has scared all the animals away.

José has an old-time European face and in his black Wellingtons and with his hair in a little ponytail he looks like a character in a Thomas Hardy novel. He tells us that for three years two brothers, Aoréh and Aoráh, lived up the hill. Nobody knew what tribe they belonged to. They spoke *uma língua desconhecida*—an unknown language. Maybe they were *isolados* from around Paragominas. There were several groups until the ranchers wiped out all the forest. Aoréh died in São Luis of cancer of the stomach, and Aoráh is up in Awá Guajá, the Awá village in T.I. Alto Turiaçu.

After dinner Tiracambu's leadership, half a dozen young men and a few girls in their late teens and early 20s, come from the village, and Cicero tells them why we are here. I am a journalist from a place very far away called America—it would take at least two years to walk there—and would like to meet Karapiru. And João Operador has brought a new grindstone for the rice huller, the machine that takes the chaff off the grains of dry rice these Awá grow.

Several of the young leaders have three

horizontal black lines from the juice of the genipap tree painted on their cheeks. Guajajara warrior lines, which many of the young Brazilians who have taken to the streets are wearing, except that they are green. These slashes apparently migrated from the Guajajara to the national society and have been the insignia of Brazilian protests since 1992.

In the morning, João Operador tries to change the grindstone and discovers it's the wrong size. The young leadership comes from the village with the answer to our petition. We gather on the porch of the *posto*, and one of them, who is wearing a monkey-claw necklace over his T-shirt, says no visiting *brancos* will be allowed into their village or to talk to Karapiru until we talk to Soteiro. Hélio Soteiro, who also came with us to Juriti, is the FUNAI officer in charge of the four Awá settlements and the three *isolado* groups. He answers to Travassos—he's Cicero's boss—and is based in São Luis. Cicero says he has conjunctivitis, which is very contagious to the Indians, so he can't come to see them until it clears up. Plus he is in charge of the operation to expel the *invasores* from T.I. Awá—his main preoccupation at the moment.

"We are going to sell our rifles," the leader tells us. "What good are they? Because we don't have ammunition and we don't want to sell our trees like the Guajajara are doing." I show them the three boxes of shotgun shells I have brought for them. They are the wrong caliber. These Awá have 12-gauge shotguns, and the Juriti hunters have 20-gauge ones. So my offering does not sway them. The leader continues to enumerate their grievances. They don't have gas for their chain saw and generator, and there are six more things. So that's that. "They were  *muito irritados*," Cicero says as we head out in the truck.

These Awá boys have been learning about militancy and activism from the Guajajara. FUNAI's popularity in Tiracambu is clearly not high at the moment. Already the young leadership has thrown out the Catholic missionaries of CIMI, the Indigenous Missionary Council, after deciding that their presence was, all in all, not good for the Awá—the services its missionaries were providing had a hidden agenda, to get them to renounce their animism and their own big guy in the sky, Maira, and to come to the Lord and be saved from eternal hellfire.

FUNAI's popularity is even lower in the other village, Awá. The young leadership there is even more *irritado*. A few days ago a woman in the village died of visceral leishmaniasis, which is fatal unless treated promptly and properly, and it wasn't. So they have taken one of FUNAI's vehicles as compensation for her preventable death. Cicero thinks there's no point in schlepping over to Awá, because it would be like walking into a hornet's nest. According to Uirá Garcia, the village's 150



**LOST AMAZON**  
The Awá live mainly in three T.I.s—Territórios Indígenas—in northeastern Brazil.

inhabitants are divided into the progressives, who are militant and fighting for their rights, and the traditionalists, who are even more traditional than the Awá of Juriti. They go off into the forest for two or three months at a time.

While we are pondering our next step, Cicero gets a call from Soteiro and announces that the mission is aborted. We have to return to the *posto de vigilância* immediately. The *posto de vigilância* was built six months ago at the entrance to T.I. Awá and is where the expulsion operation, if it ever happens, will be run out of. Things are heating up. Four truckloads of *invasores* have gone to São Luis to protest to their *deputado* about their impending eviction. They're asking that 8 of the 12 miles they've invaded be given to them—there's nothing left of the forest, so what good would they be to the Indians?—claiming that where they are isn't in the T.I. anyway, and demanding that the whole thing be re-surveyed. This is what happened in 2011 when the government issued the decree to dismantle their houses, fences, roads, and other works: the *invasores* made a lot of noise and threatened violence, and the government backed off. We have to go back because there are only two people at the *posto*, and Cicero has to supervise the repairing of the road so Salgado—who is on a tight schedule and can't take the river—can get out.

I was hoping to interview some of the

*invasores*, but Cicero doesn't think this is the moment. It could be dangerous because they are *superirritados*. It sounds like I've reached the point of diminishing returns, and another Amazon adventure has concluded. Cicero drops me off at a place where I catch a van to São Luis, and from there I fly down to Rio, my 10 days among the Awá already seeming like a dream—but an unforgettable one.

#### Cult of Progress

My thoughts keep returning to the *isolados*. How unified are they in their resolve to have nothing to do with the modern world? Do they have arguments about what to do? Their conversations, their campfire stories, must be very interesting.

In March, a FUNAI team went up the Igarapé Mão de Onça to check on the *isolados* there for the first time since 1997, when there were nine of them, and found evidence—a recent fire and a lean-to with fresh *babaçu* fronds—suggesting they were still there. But in June, the team went back and could find no sign of them, but discovered new logging trails only a few miles away. Leonardo Lenin, the leader of the FUNAI team, fears the worst.

Back in Brasília, there are encouraging signs that Justice Minister Cardoso may enforce the expulsion decree. In June, 300 soldiers and 46 vehicles were brought in to shut down the *madeiros* in T.I. Alto Tu-

## Amazon Tribe

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riaçu. Seven illegal sawmills were decommissioned, and thousands of logs were destroyed. Cardoso says the soldiers will next be moved to T.I. Awá and reinforced with the troops who carried out the long-delayed and only partially successful expulsion of the *invasores* from the Xavante's territory last year. Operation Awá, the eviction of the 1,500 families, will be carried out by the end of the year.

I hope so. I would love to come back and

learn more about the Awá's amazing cosmology and record the birds and the monkeys and their flawless imitations of them. Brazil can't afford to lose the Awá. Mankind can't let any of these last tribal people who live off the bounty of their forest, reef, or desert and are an integral part of their eco-systems, along with all the other species, disappear. These last 350 Awá are precious. As Octavio Paz observed, "The ideal of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress, impoverishes and mutilates us. Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that

disappears, diminishes a possibility of life." □  
*For further information about the Awá, visit [survivalinternational.org/awa](http://survivalinternational.org/awa).*

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