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Thousands Once Spoke His Language in the Amazon. Now, He's the Only One.

By NICHOLAS CASEY DEC. 26, 2017

INTUTO, Peru — Amadeo García García rushed upriver in his canoe, slipping into the hidden, booby-trapped camp where his brother Juan lay dying.

Juan writhed in pain and shook uncontrollably as his fever rose, battling malaria. As Amadeo consoled him, the sick man muttered back in words that no one else on Earth still understood.

Je'intavea', he said that sweltering day in 1999. I am so ill.

The words were Taushiro. A mystery to linguists and anthropologists alike, the language was spoken by a tribe that vanished into the jungles of the Amazon basin in Peru generations ago, hoping to save itself from the invaders whose weapons and diseases had brought it to the brink of extinction.

A bend on the "wild river," as they called it, sheltered the two brothers and the other 15 remaining members of their tribe. The clan protected its tiny settlement with a ring of deep pits, expertly hidden by a thin cover of leaves and sticks. They kept packs of attack dogs to stop outsiders from coming near. Even by the end of the 20th century, few outsiders had ever seen the Taushiro or heard their language beyond the occasional hunter, a few Christian missionaries and the armed rubber tappers who came at least twice to enslave the small tribe.

But in the end it was no use. Without rifles or medicine, they were dying off.

A jaguar killed one of the children as he slept. Two more siblings, bitten by snakes, perished without antivenom. One child drowned in a stream. A young man bled to death while hunting in the forest.

Then came the diseases. First measles, which took Juan and Amadeo's mother. Finally, a fatal form of malaria killed their father, the patriarch of the tribe. His body was buried in the floor of his home before the structure was torched to the ground, following Taushiro tradition.

So by the time Amadeo wrestled his dying brother into the canoe that day, they were the only ones who remained, the last of a culture that once numbered in the thousands. Amadeo sped to a distant town, Intuto, that was home to a clinic. A crowd gathered on the small river dock to see who the dying stranger was, dressed only in a loincloth made of palm leaves.

Juan's shaking soon gave way to stiffness. He drifted in and out of consciousness, finally looking up at Amadeo.

Ta va'a ui, he said at last. I am dying.

The church bell rang that afternoon, letting villagers know that the unusual visitor had died.

"The strange thing was how quiet Amadeo was," said Tomás Villalobos, a Christian missionary who was with him when Juan died. "I asked him, 'How do you feel?' And he said to me: 'It's over now for us.'"

Amadeo said it haltingly, in broken Spanish, the only way he would be able to communicate with the world from that moment on. No one else spoke his language anymore. The survival of his culture had suddenly come down to a sole, complicated man.

An Unexpected Burden

Human history can be traced through the spread of languages. The Phoenicians spanned the ancient Mediterranean trade routes, bringing the alphabet to the Greeks and literacy to Europeans. English, once a small language spoken in southern Britain, is now the mother tongue of hundreds of millions across the world. The Chinese dialects are more than a billion strong.

But the entire fate of the Taushiro people now lies with its last speaker, a person who never expected such a burden and has spent much of his life overwhelmed by it.

"That's Amadeo there: Almost no one understands him when he's speaking his language," said William Manihuari, watching Amadeo fish alone from a canoe on a recent day.

"And when he dies, no one is left," added José Sandi, a 12-year-old boy who watched as well.

The waters of the Peruvian Amazon were once a vast linguistic repository, a place where every turn of the river could yield another dialect, often completely unintelligible to people living just a few miles away. But in the last century, at least 37 languages have disappeared in Peru alone, lost in the steady clash and churn of national expansion, migration, urbanization and the pursuit of natural resources. Forty-seven languages remain here in Peru, scholars estimate, and nearly half are at risk of disappearing.

I came to the river outpost of Intuto, 10 hours by speedboat from the nearest city, to figure out how the Taushiro, like so many other cultures, had been brought to this kind of end. The journey began in forgotten linguistic papers and historical sketches. It even led me to storm-ravaged Puerto Rico, where a retired Christian missionary rummaged through the last existing pictures of the Taushiro, nearly coming to tears as she looked through them for the first time in years.

And it brought me here, to the banks of a silty brown river, where the cumulative experience of the Taushiro people swung alone in a hammock: A man around 70 whose memory was fading and whose grasp of the language was slipping away because he had no one to speak it with.

“At any moment I might disappear, my life will end, we don’t know how soon,” Amadeo said stoically. “The Taushiro don’t think about death. We just move on.”

He knows that’s not true, that there is no moving on for the Taushiro anymore. It leaves him exasperated, at times wondering how much of the blame is his, or whether the extinction of his people really matters at all.

“Sometimes I don’t care anymore,” he said.

The Taushiro were among the world’s last hunter-gathers, living as refugees in their own country, wandering the swamps of the Amazon basin with blow guns called pucuna and fishing from small boats called tenete. To count in their language, they had words only for the numbers one, two, three and many. And by the time Amadeo was born, their population had shrunk so drastically that they had no names in a traditional sense: Amadeo’s father was simply iya, or father, his mother iño, or mother, his sister and brother ukuka and ukuñuka.

Languages are typically passed down through families, but Amadeo broke his apart decades before he realized what the consequences would be for his culture and its place in history. He still has five children, dotted across the Americas. But after his wife left him in the 1980s, he put them into an orphanage when they were still young, thinking it was safer than a life in which children were abducted by traffickers or lost to war. None of them lived with him after that. They never learned his language.

“For those languages that are in this critical situation, many times it seems their fate is already sealed — that’s to say, it’s hard to ever recover a language at this stage,” said Agustín Panizo, a government linguist trying to document Taushiro. “Amadeo García, he wants Taushiro to come back. He wants it, he dreams of it, he longs for it, and he suffers to know that he’s the last speaker.”

Now Amadeo lives alone in a clapboard house behind the town’s water tower, spending many of his final days drinking. Desperate to speak and hear whatever Taushiro he can, he sits alone on his porch in the morning, reciting the only literature ever written in the language — verses of the Bible translated into Taushiro by missionaries who sought to convert the tribe years ago. Ine aconahive ite chi yi tua tieya ana na’que I’yo lo’, he read aloud one morning. It was the story of Lot from the Book of Genesis. Lot and his family become the sole survivors of their city when God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot loses his wife when she looks back at the destruction, against the instructions of God.

Amadeo lives alongside the people of Intuto, but not with them, often passing them in a quiet stupor. Mario Tapuy, 74, who met Amadeo as a child when he lived in the forest, said he had tried many times to draw Amadeo out of the bar to teach others the language.

Mr. Tapuy, who speaks his own indigenous language, Kichwa, said he had realized years ago that the future of Taushiro would come to down to Amadeo, regardless of whether he wanted the responsibility.

“I told him many times,” Mr. Tapuy said. “He listens, but it doesn’t record in his brain.”

I had arrived in Intuto with a linguist named Juanita Pérez Ríos, who had known Amadeo for years and introduced me to him that day. In the evening, Amadeo wanted to speak to his son Daniel, who lives in Lima, the capital, and Ms. Pérez lent him her phone. It had been many months since the father and son had spoken.

“I fell on my knees in the jungle,” said Amadeo. “I’m limping a little.”

“You need to be careful,” said Daniel.

The two spoke in Spanish, which was sometimes difficult for Amadeo.

“My brothers told me you’ve been getting a little drunk,” Daniel chided him. “You need to stop that now.”

Then a pause.

“I love you a lot, understand?” said Daniel. The phone clicked.

Amadeo sat in his home for a few minutes, looking into the night as the sounds of the forest grew louder. Families could be heard in the distance, cooking dinner.

“They say they love me, but they never come,” he said.

An Age of Rubber, and Slavery

The problems began with rubber.

The Taushiro and other indigenous groups had long harvested a sticky white substance that leaked from certain trees and coated their clothes, making them waterproof. But by the 19th century, Europeans had discovered the utility of rubber as well, setting off a boom.

European and American companies descended into the jungles, forcing indigenous populations into slavery to tap the rubber while building huge palaces on the lands left behind. The deadly Age of Rubber had begun in the Amazon.

In many areas, as much as 90 percent of the indigenous population died from disease and forced labor, researchers say. Thousands moved into newly settled cities. But the Taushiro, along with many other tribes, took another route: They decided to disappear.

Amadeo’s early memories from the hidden Taushiro settlement of Aucayacu remain in the haze of a place where writing was unknown and no records were kept, not even of his birth, which he thinks was sometime in the 1940s. His first memory was walking naked through the forest in a storm, the rain trickling down his body.

Contact with the outside world was rare, and often violent.

First came a rubber tapper in search of slaves. Wielding machetes and rifles, he found Aucayacu with four of his men and ordered the tribe to work. Amadeo and his family spent grueling days draining rubber from tree trunks and sculpting it into blocks to be sold by the trader downriver.
The tapper forced Amadeo's married sister into a sexual relationship, then nearly beat her to death with a piece of wood. Her husband threw a spear through the tapper, who was never seen there again.
Before long, another rubber tapper came in his place. Perhaps learning from the fate of his predecessor, the new tapper decided to give his rifle in exchange for work, rather than turn it against the Taushiro.

He also gave them something else. Unable to distinguish among his workers, he lined them up and gave them Spanish names: Margarita, Andrés, Magdalena, César, Antonio. The youngest boy was called Amadeo. With no surnames, the Taushiro were each given two: García García.

Taking On Christianity

One day the ground began to tremble and the world took another step toward Amadeo.
It wasn't an earthquake, but the seismic testing equipment of the Occidental Petroleum Corporation, an American company that had come to Peru. Rubber had long declined in the Amazon. Now the foreigners were after oil.
Word spread among the drillers that an indigenous group was hiding on one of the tributaries of the Tigre River. Occidental soon sent a plane and a lookout with binoculars to locate the tribe.
It was the first time Amadeo had seen anyone fly. It was 1971.
"They were so close to the ground you could see their faces looking at us," Amadeo said.
With the coordinates of the Taushiro in hand, contact was inevitable. But rather than sending one of its own, the oil company turned to a group of Christian evangelists with an unusual mission.
The Summer Institute of Linguistics had been founded four decades earlier by an evangelical minister who wanted to translate the Bible into every language still spoken. By the 1970s, the group had become a fixture in forests of Latin America, often under government contracts for literacy programs.
Contact — followed by conversion — was the ultimate goal of the Christian linguists. The mission sometimes proved deadly.
In 1956, after dropping gifts to the uncontacted Waorani people, five missionaries were speared to death by the tribe on a riverbank in Ecuador. Undeterred, the institute sent a sister of one of the dead missionaries to try once more with the Waorani, who let the outsider and her family live among them. The tribe converted.

In 1971, Daniel Velie approached the edges of the Taushiro settlement, making his way past the booby traps and barking dogs. From the back of a canoe, he hauled out a heavy device to make the first recordings of their language.
But the Taushiro were in no state to speak.
An illness had swept through the village. When Mr. Velie arrived, seven Taushiro were near death. He pulled out a first-aid kit and gave them penicillin, the first antibiotics the Taushiro had taken. When they recovered, he took down the first 200 words of a Taushiro glossary.
Using hand gestures, the group conveyed their appreciation to the missionary. But Mr. Velie wanted something in return. He eventually asked for Amadeo, who was thought to be in his 20s at the time, to return with him and start teaching the language to others.
"They said yes, Amadeo could go; they were so thankful to have been saved," said Nectali Alicea, the linguist soon put in charge of the Taushiro project by the language institute. "It was medicine that was the key."
Ms. Alicea was a young Puerto Rican social sciences graduate. She had already embarked on missions to Mexico as part of her training with the institute, which taught her the structures of languages at its annual summer boot camp in Oklahoma.
For Ms. Alicea, as with many of the missionaries, the languages were a bridge to Christianity.
"You cannot evangelize in Spanish," she said.
One of her pictures from 1972 shows Amadeo stepping aboard a plane for the first time, en route to the institute's compound outside the Peruvian city of Pucallpa. A new world of firsts was opening up: of roads and sidewalks, of chicken, which he had never eaten before. He slept on the floor, unaccustomed to a bed. For days on end, Ms. Alicea took dictations of his language to prepare to meet the Taushiro in the forest.
She arrived at their secret camp that June with a missionary doctor from Georgia, his wife and their son for a two-week visit. The Taushiro clan welcomed the strangers and the recording technology they brought, along with medicine, machetes and food.

"The father would embrace me and not let me go," Ms. Alicea wrote in her diary of one of the Taushiro men. "I would forget my land and stay here, he said."
She began to follow some of their conversations, learning enough Taushiro to ask one man in the clan why he never swam. Despite living off the river, the Taushiro avoided even wading in it, washing themselves from the safety of a canoe. The man explained that under the water lurked a horde of boa constrictors, waiting to strike.
Ms. Alicea and the missionaries with her stripped down to their underwear and jumped into the river, laughing and splashing.
"When they saw us in the water, something changed," Ms. Alicea said, adding that the event had caused the Taushiro to question their long-held beliefs. "They asked us how we did it. And we said: 'Because we have a Spirit that is stronger than the boa.'"
Ms. Alicea produced a Bible.
Years before, the Taushiro had taken Christian names. Now they were taking on Christianity itself.

A Life of Isolation

When Amadeo, the youngest of the Taushiro, arrived with a girl named Margarita Machoa, declaring that she would be his wife, there was a sigh of relief in Aucayacu. The Taushiro line was continuing.
“She fell in love with me,” said Amadeo, recalling how he and Margarita had played with her toy dolls after meeting.
Amadeo was a grown man. Margarita was 12 years old.

Amadeo soon wound up in jail, arrested at the request of the girl’s father. He said Margarita was too young to give Amadeo her consent.
In the end, it was Ms. Alicea, the linguist, who brokered Amadeo’s release, arguing that Peruvian law allowed indigenous men to marry according to their customs. Converting the clan to Christianity was possible, Ms. Alicea felt, but the changes could go only so far.
“It was typical among natives; I had seen this with Candoshi, with the Sharpras people,” Ms. Alicea said. “They had such small girls with the oldest men. At least this was better.”
Within months, Margarita was pregnant with Amadeo’s first child, a girl they named Margarita. The baby was the first of five.
Amadeo and Ms. Alicea continued their work recording the Taushiro language, fighting pressure from the missionaries to move onto other groups. Amadeo had given Ms. Alicea a Taushiro name, ukuka, or sister, and she called him ukuañuka, or younger brother, in return.
During the birth of his last son, also named Amadeo, Ms. Alicea cut the umbilical cord by the side of the river. The two were becoming inseparable, working long hours to document Taushiro words.

“She would ask, ‘What is this called?’” Amadeo recalled. “‘How do you say nail? How do you say toe?’”
Amadeo taught his children the ways of the clan, particularly David, Daniel and Jonathan, who were becoming quick with blow guns and spears. On early mornings, he took them to gather the palm leaves they had left near termites’ nests the day before. The leaves were covered in insects — bait for fishing, a technique the Taushiro had used for generations.
Yet the dangers of the forest were always present.
“My father would say before we went to sleep, ‘Remember, a tiger can come for you,’” Jonathan said, using a common word for jaguars.
Taushiro culture, especially its language, proved isolating for Amadeo’s wife, Margarita, who came from a different tribe and was unable to communicate with anyone in Taushiro. She couldn’t even speak with her own husband, except in broken Spanish. She spent long days alone with her children, sometimes screaming at them or giving them beatings in frustration.

“Since she was married young, she wasn’t grown up,” said her daughter, also named Margarita, who remembers being thrown out of a canoe by her mother when the girl could barely swim. “It’s not the same to play with a doll as it was to play with flesh and bones.”
In 1984, after their fifth child was born, Amadeo took the family to a village where he worked construction for several months.
Neighbors said the couple argued frequently. They could hear Margarita’s screams when Amadeo beat her.
Margarita, her daughter said, had gotten into a relationship with a man her own age. When Amadeo learned of it, he attacked her again.
It was the last beating she took from him.
“She left that night and said nothing,” the daughter said.

Leaving the Forest

Their mother’s sudden departure devastated the family. Without her, Amadeo became the sole caretaker of five children. The division of labor between the genders had been strict among the Taushiro, with men spending the day hunting for food and women raising the children.
“I knew nothing about how to care for them,” Amadeo said.
With his relatives in Aucayacu dwindling from old age and disease, Amadeo decided to leave the camp for the missionary compound near Pucallpa, several hundred miles away. His children, he didn’t realize at the time, were leaving the forest for good.
In the city, Amadeo sank into despair — and into alcoholism. In town, liquor was suddenly available.
“He got drunk, he insulted people,” said Mario Tapuy Paredes, a friend at the time.

Still, Amadeo held onto the project that had anchored most of his adult life, documenting Taushiro with the missionaries. He and Ms. Alicea had moved beyond a basic dictionary and grammar books into the first translations of the Bible, including parts of Genesis and sections of New Testament books like the Gospels.
But for the language to survive beyond books, it needed to be taken on by Amadeo’s children. And it was becoming unclear whether he could keep them safe, let alone teach them Taushiro.
One day when Amadeo was out of the house, Margarita, then 9, was approached by a woman offering her food. She followed the woman to a taxi, which sped away with her. Ms. Alicea called the police, who rescued the girl from a boat launch where her abductor had planned to put her into a child trafficking ring.
The abduction shook Amadeo. Feeling overwhelmed, he eventually decided to put the children into an orphanage.
It was a lonely and troubling time for them. But in 1989, a social worker came to Ms. Alicea with a request. With 40 children, the orphanage was overextended, and Peru’s Maoist rebels, the Shining Path, were staging massacres in nearby cities.
Could Ms. Alicea, the orphanage asked, adopt the Taushiro children herself? Ms. Alicea, then in her 50s, would now become the mother of the world’s last five Taushiro children.
There was an obstacle, however. Her own mother, in her 70s, was growing ill in Puerto Rico. Ms. Alicea wanted to return to care for her.

This confronted the linguist with the most difficult choice of her career: to save the Taushiro language and culture, or to save the children she had known since their birth and grown to love.
The contradictions were lost on no one.

First Amadeo, one of the last of his people, who had spent his adult life trying to ensure that his language endured, had given up his own children, virtually guaranteeing that they would never pass it along.
Then Ms. Alicea, who had devoted herself for nearly two decades to documenting and preserving the Taushiro way of life, was taking its few remaining descendants to a distant country, to be raised in an entirely different culture that would effectively erase their own.
"I was Christian first," she said, explaining that her principal duty was to the welfare of the children.
Ms. Alicea's decision to move the children to Puerto Rico remains a shock to linguists who know of Taushiro, arguing that her choice all but guaranteed its extinction.
"I have never heard of an equivalent story elsewhere; in any academic circle, that would have been considered an unethical event," said Zachary O'Hagan, a Ph.D. student in linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley who has done research with Amadeo in Peru.
"When a language like this disappears, you have lost a key data point in studying what universal properties exist in all languages," Mr. O'Hagan said.
But Ms. Alicea said it was unlikely that Amadeo would have ever taught his children Taushiro under the circumstances. And she said that, at the time, she did not envision a future in which Amadeo would become the last of his tribe.
In 1990, she adopted the children and changed their last names to her own. The family moved across the hemisphere.
"I love the language," Ms. Alicea said. "But I love the people more than the language. With the blessing of God, those children had a future."

Culture Shock

The change was staggering for the children.
They had been born in an isolated tribe in the Amazon and abandoned in an orphanage. Suddenly, they were transported to a commonwealth of the United States, with busy streets that came to a halt at rush hour and high rises in San Juan.
The thump of nightclub music stretched into the night. They saw the Caribbean for the first time. Ms. Alicea became their guide to the new world, taking them on vacations to New York. Her photos from the early 1990s show the Taushiro children playing in the snow.
The adjustment differed for each of the children as they settled into San Lorenzo, Ms. Alicea's home in the center of the island. Margarita, the most extroverted of the children, made new friends quickly. Amadeo Jr., the youngest at 6, picked up a Puerto Rican accent. But his indigenous features were a curiosity to his classmates. Rather than say he was Taushiro, he told his friends his father was Japanese.
David was the first one to run into trouble.
As the years passed, he became angry. By seventh grade, his teachers feared his outbursts. Ms. Alicea began to notice money missing from her wallet.
One night, Ms. Alicea confronted him in the living room. It led to an altercation that ended with her calling the police.
"I want you to decide if you want to stay here, if you want to be American or Peruvian," she recalled telling him. "I love him and still do."
Two of the brothers, Jonathan and Daniel, decided to return to their father.
The years alone had been difficult for Amadeo. Increasingly drawn to alcohol, which was available only in towns, Amadeo settled in Intuto and lived as a recluse, still sleeping on the ground as he had in Aucayacu. He now hunted with a rifle instead of a blowgun, heading into the forest most days in search of game to sell.
"When we were out, he camped alone," recalled Jorge Choclón, who sometimes hunted with Amadeo. "That was his way. And he didn't like society."

But waiting on the dock in 1994 for the arrival of Jonathan and Daniel, Amadeo was filled with hope again. The father and sons, reunited, embraced.
While they could not speak the language, Amadeo was eager to bring his sons back into the traditions of their people. He and Jonathan woke at 5 a.m. for the hunt, returning after sundown. He took the boys to what remained of the Taushiro settlement in Aucayacu, where only his father and a few relatives still survived.
Jonathan felt apart from it, unable to communicate with anyone there.
"My grandfather could only say my name," he recalled. "I had gotten used to Puerto Rico. Now I felt more from there. I cried all night."
The opportunity to learn Taushiro seemed lost. The boys were teenagers, past the age when children usually pick up language quickly from their parents. Spanish was still the language they heard at school most of the day, and a stigma lingered in Intuto when it came to indigenous languages.
"I could barely say a few words — mother, father, that was it," Jonathan said.
The arrival of David, the oldest brother, in 1996 brought new challenges. Mr. Villalobos, the Christian missionary who directed the school in Intuto, said David's anger had followed him to Peru. The boy rarely did his schoolwork and was known for carrying a knife around town, once threatening to stab one of his classmates, Mr. Villalobos said.
And Amadeo's drinking continued.
One day, José Álvarez, a missionary, went to visit Amadeo at his home on the edge of town. In Spanish, Amadeo told him he was sick, but after a moment Mr. Álvarez said he realized Amadeo was trying to say he was depressed, unable to find the correct word. Amadeo began to cry, the first time Mr. Álvarez had ever seen him express emotion.

“He spoke in tears of his children, that they didn’t want to come see him, that they didn’t want to know hardly anything of him, or their Taushiro origins, not the language, not the culture,” Mr. Álvarez wrote in a letter from that time.
Mr. Álvarez added: “I felt in these moments the deep pain that probably that man felt, the last Taushiro, that the saga of his people would definitively end with him.”

The Taushiro language had been reduced to its last five speakers: Amadeo, and four family members who desperately held onto life in their encampment in Aucayacu. And even that meager number was about to collapse.
The first to die was a brother of Amadeo’s who had long been unable to walk, paralyzed years ago after a snake bite. Then Amadeo’s aunt woke up one day with a sore throat, a fever and blotchy rashes across her body, the first signs of measles. The missionaries had left the encampment years ago, and she died without treatment.
Then came malaria. In the late 1990s, a deadly strain began to work its way up the rivers of northern Peru. Amadeo’s father fell ill and died. Now only Juan, Amadeo’s last brother, remained, living alone in the ruins of the settlement where he had grown up, with only dogs for company.
In 1999, Amadeo hauled his dying brother from the canoe, and the two spoke in Taushiro for the last time.
“They said, ‘Don’t cry, your brother is with the Lord,’” recalled Amadeo.

A Race Against Time

Nearly 20 years later, Amadeo walked through an overgrown cemetery, the place he had buried his brother. The wooden cross had fallen over. Juan García’s name was barely visible where it had been etched onto one of the beams.
“When I’m gone, I’ll be here as well,” Amadeo said later that day. “I am old and will disappear at any time.”
Yet even in the twilight of Amadeo’s life, a few hold out hope that some part of the Taushiro language will persist after him.
This year, Peru’s Ministry of Culture decided to take up the work that Ms. Alicea began. Working with Amadeo, government linguists have created a database of 1,500 Taushiro words, 27 stories and three songs, with plans to make recordings of Amadeo available to academics and others interested in the language.

It is a race against time — and against Amadeo’s own memory, which sometimes fails him after so many years of having no one to speak with in Taushiro.
But linguists involved in the work say that even if Taushiro dies with Amadeo, a record of it will be kept, at least.
“It’s the first time that Peru has made this kind of gesture,” said Mr. Panizo, the linguist leading the project.
Last February, the government flew Amadeo to Lima to give him a medal for his contribution to Peruvian culture. The sudden attention was a shock to Amadeo, along with the packed streets of Lima and the interviews with the local news media.
Still, he beamed as a crowd gathered for a ceremony that honored several other indigenous activists who spoke their languages. Government officials gave impassioned speeches on the importance of preserving the 47 indigenous languages that remain in the country. Amadeo spoke words in Taushiro.
While Amadeo knew that he had not passed his language to his five children, he took comfort in the fact that they were safe. They had not suffered the fate of their relatives, who had all perished in the forest. One of them, Daniel, was even in the audience that day to see him.
After the ceremony, the two men embraced. Daniel introduced Amadeo to his 6-year-old daughter, the first time Amadeo had met his grandchild.
“I just want to be proud of my father, of the tribe that we were, that I was born into, that we lived,” said Daniel, who works as a construction worker in Lima.
One evening this summer, Amadeo sat alone and began to speak his language, saying one sentence in Taushiro, then translating it into Spanish, before repeating the process. It was growing late, the crickets and frogs were getting louder, and Amadeo raised his voice above them.

“I am Taushiro,” he said. “I have something that no one else in the world has. One day when I am gone from the world, I hope the world remembers.”
Juanita Pérez Ríos and Andrea Zarate contributed reporting from Intuto, and Waldemar Serrano Burgos from San Lorenzo, P.R.

The End is a series exploring how we die and what it tells us about how we live.