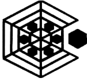

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Conflict Calamities: Natural Disasters and the CPP-NPA

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ABSTRACT. This study examines the effects of natural disaster inundation on the internal armed conflict waged by the Communist Party of the Philippines–New People's Army (CPP-NPA) against the Philippine state. Drawing on interviews and ethnographic data and employing insights from the literature on civil conflict, social movements, and environmental security, this study suggests that the Philippines' vulnerability to disaster has provided the CPP-NPA with tactical opportunities to increase attacks against the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), and has enabled the group to penetrate affected communities to increase civilian collaboration and augment recruitment. In some cases, the Philippine state's institutional architecture for humanitarian relief, which relies heavily on local government units, has abetted this process by enabling local politicians to distribute relief supplies according to political patronage. The effect marginalizes individuals and groups from the political process and enhances the receptivity of the CPP-NPA's anti-state propaganda. The overall impact has been to prolong the CPP-NPA's ability to maintain its revolutionary campaign and increase the group's capacity to wage violence.

KEYWORDS. conflict · natural disasters · CPP-NPA · vulnerability

Introduction

Environmental disasters and armed conflict have been among the greatest threats to the security and livelihoods of the Filipino population. Although these phenomena are distinct, they are also related: conflict facilitates internal displacement, which can increase disaster vulnerability, and disasters exacerbate poverty and undermine livelihoods, which can provide armed groups with opportunities to expand operations and aggravate conflict. This study is concerned with the latter process. It examines the impact of natural disaster inundation on one of the longest-running insurgencies in the world, the conflict associated with the Communist Party of the Philippines–New People's Army (CPP-NPA). In doing so, this paper aims to enhance theoretical

and practical understanding of the social impacts of natural disaster inundation and the manifestation and management of complex humanitarian emergencies. As a growing body of scientific evidence links global climate change to increases in the frequency and severity of climatic hazards, and as incidents of civil conflict in disaster-prone nations remain high, such knowledge is pressing (IPCC 2014).

This article proposes that the Philippines' high disaster incidence has bolstered the CPP-NPA's ability to sustain itself by creating opportunities for the group to augment membership, wage attacks, and expand operations in disaster-prone regions. The physical destruction and livelihood costs disasters impose and the perceived injustices that arise over post-disaster redistributions of wealth fuel these dynamics. In some cases, the Philippine government's institutional architecture for humanitarian relief has aggravated disasters' impact on conflict by enabling local politicians to distribute relief supplies according to political patronage. The result reinforces victims' vulnerability to disaster and enhances their political and economic marginalization. The overall outcome of these processes substantiates an observation made by a participant in a 2011 focus group discussion held by the government's panel on peace negotiations: "These areas [in the eastern parts of the country], the corridor of poverty, are usually hit by storms and are among the poorest in the country. These are also where the insurgents breed" (OPAPP 2011).

Empirical evidence for this study is drawn from a series of interviews and participant observation obtained during six months of in-country fieldwork from 2011 to 2012, as well as from archival and secondary sources. In total, sixty-five interviews with local policymakers, government and nongovernment organization (NGO) disaster relief workers, members of the clergy, current and former CPP-NPA insurgents, and military personnel were conducted in disaster- and conflict-affected areas of the country.[1]

This paper is divided into four sections. First, I discuss disaster vulnerability and its application as a conceptual framework for analysis,

1. Interviews were conducted in Metro Manila; in Leyte, Southern Leyte, Northern Samar, Eastern Samar, Western Samar, and Albay Provinces; and in Cagayan de Oro and Iligan Cities. While some of these interviews were designed to collect empirical data, the majority were held to increase my own understanding of the disaster relief distribution process, its politicization, local impacts, and co-option by non-state forces (the CPP-NPA). The manuscript cites interviews in cases where specific information was conveyed, but because not all the interviews were able to provide relevant empirical data that directly inform the paper, the number of interview citations is necessarily lower than the actual number of interviews held.

with attention to the links between vulnerability and armed conflict. Second, I discuss the Philippines' experience with disaster, the country's institutional framework for disaster response, and the ways in which institutional corruption and patronage politics at the local level have subverted these institutions to enhance political discrimination of vulnerable populations. I then analyze how the intersection of these phenomena—disasters and political discrimination—has created opportunities for the CPP-NPA to perpetuate its revolutionary campaign. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of CPP-NPA activities in Quezon Province in 2004 and 2005 during Tropical Storm Winnie to provide a firsthand account of how the CPP-NPA operationalizes its strategy to build local support for its movement.

Natural Disasters, Livelihoods, and Armed Conflict

An individual's livelihood concerns the "activities undertaken to translate resources—whether environmental or human—into a means for living at the group or individual level" (Matthew, Halle, and Switzer 2002, 15–16). Evaluating natural disasters' effects on livelihoods is critical to determining their impact on armed conflict because livelihood losses and rising insecurity can increase the likelihood that individuals might join or support a war effort (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007; Justino 2009; Lichbach 1995; Wischnath and Buhaug 2014). Indeed, Ohlsson calls livelihood losses the "missing link" between "poverty and environmental factors to conflict" (2000, 3). He argues that the speed with which they occur can condition the risks they pose. Rapid losses pose greater risks because large numbers of newly unemployed young men are more susceptible to the motives and incentives that can encourage and sustain organized, anti-state violence (Ohlsson 2000; see also Urdal 2006).

Natural disasters can devastate livelihoods, especially among those who rely on agriculture for subsistence and production. Too little rainfall can cause drought and exacerbate desertification. Too much can lead to flooding, which can wash away fields, inundate crops, and encourage erosion and landslides. Strong winds and rainfall associated with typhoon storms can destroy entire agricultural sectors. Typhoon Yolanda cast these dynamics in stark relief when the 2013 storm reduced coconut fields to rubble and ruined rice production across Eastern Visayas. Unfortunately, threats from storms like this are only expected to increase as global climate change increases the variability of the El Niño/La Niña Southern Oscillation and intensifies the pace of

the water cycle—the system of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation that cycles water through the hydrosphere (Jose 2009; Durack, Wijffels, and Matear 2012; Latif and Keenlyside 2008). These processes are expected to reduce the value of and access to environmental resources, which can restrict income generation; magnify poverty, inequality, and marginalization; foster migration and displacement; and reinforce the risk of future economic hardship (IPCC 2014).

While disasters can threaten livelihoods, a household's level of vulnerability determines the threat's magnitude and consequences. Vulnerability comprises exposure and sensitivity to environmental phenomena, and a household's capacity to cope with crises when they occur (Deligiannis 2012; IPCC 2001). Exposure reflects the likelihood that individuals will experience a hazard: households located in close proximity to a floodplain or on a degraded hill slope are at greater risk than those on high, stable ground. Sensitivity constitutes the degree to which household livelihood strategies are vulnerable to disruptive shock. Agricultural livelihoods are especially sensitive because of their high reliance on ecosystem services for production. Finally, the opportunities individuals possess to adapt to environmental hazards, and the larger social, political, and economic factors that shape and constrain these opportunities, determine coping capacity. Wealth and the ability to diversify means of production can increase a household's capacity to manage a crisis, because savings expenditures and livelihood adaptation can hasten recovery. Similarly, a government's competence in disaster response and its capability and willingness to provide humanitarian support can determine the length and scale of the crisis phase. When crisis management institutions are inept, or when relief and reconstruction assistance are provided according to political patronage or other non-need-based criteria, the result can increase the disaster's scope and magnitude.

The most impoverished individuals and those least capable of livelihood adaptation are also the most vulnerable: they are the most likely to experience disaster; the most likely to rely on environmentally sensitive livelihoods, like farming, for income and subsistence; and the least able to recover when disaster strikes. Communities that are politically marginalized—those who lack the power to influence political decision-making and the distribution of public goods—face acute risks, because they are less likely to receive relief assistance and less capable of challenging grievances that arise over a disaster's causes and consequences (Raleigh 2010). When a disaster occurs, the impact can instigate or

reinforce a vicious cycle of insecurity and vulnerability and exacerbate anti-state grievances. In conflict-contested regions, the outcome can prolong war (Kahl 2006; Raleigh 2010; Eastin 2016).

Linking Disasters and Civil Conflict

When a natural disaster undermines livelihoods, the opportunity costs of joining or supporting an armed group should decline and individuals' willingness to participate in conflict should rise (Lichbach 1995; Wischnath and Buhaug 2014). Lost livelihoods can also increase the costs of abstaining from conflict when economic insecurity reduces an individual's ability to isolate themselves and their family from conflict violence in war-torn regions. Kalyvas and Kocher (2007) demonstrate that the threat of civilian victimization through indiscriminate violence or erroneous targeting can make abstaining from conflict a costly choice. A disaster's destruction and its effects on livelihoods only magnify these costs, increasing household exposure to both conflict processes and environmental hazards (Barnett and Adger 2007). In contested areas, affiliation with an armed group can provide access to resources—information, access to income, protection from looting and bandits, for example—that can reduce exposure and mitigate future risk. Justino's (2009) work on the micro-foundations of armed group support corroborates this view. She finds that both poverty and a high risk of experiencing conflict violence increase the likelihood that a household will join or support an armed group to protect their current economic status.

A disaster's impact can also motivate individuals to support armed resistance when the politics of resource distribution foments anti-state or intergroup grievances. Disasters can stimulate grievances when they create or catalyze perceptions of social injustice. Justice is elusive because what constitutes fair play can vary; however, a vast body of research suggests that "justice is central to people's evaluations of social situations" (Tyler and Blader 2003, 349). Perceptions of social justice should be especially important in generating legitimacy for political institutions that render resource-allocation decisions in times of crisis. If victims believe the state handles a disaster situation fairly given situational constraints, or if a disaster opens new economic opportunities, such as work in reconstruction, access to new construction materials, or relocation to new housing, then they might be less likely to harbor grievances that persuade them to engage in or

support subversive activities (Tyler 1988, 1994; Tyler and Huo 2002; Tyler and Blader 2003).

Two types of political decisions matter in this context: those that can facilitate a disaster and those that manage its consequences. First, when citizens believe that corrupt or discriminatory political decisions cause or aggravate a disaster, these events can serve as focal points for insurgent propaganda and recruitment. For example, in Peru, taxing and violently targeting multinational logging and mining firms have gained the Shining Path popular support and political traction because these firms are reported to collude with local politicians to gain lucrative contracts, and because their actions aggravate degradation that can increase the magnitude and frequency of local landslides and flooding in nearby communities (Zenn 2012).

Second, disaster management decisions can generate perceptions of social injustice that legitimize dissent if people believe that the relief allocation process is corrupt, that authority figures withhold goods, or that they provide relief according to political patronage, ethnic affiliation, or other non-need-based criteria. The 1972 earthquake in Managua, Nicaragua, enabled the Sandinistas to rise from a minor group to a revolutionary force when claims of Somoza's aid misappropriation resonated with the general public (Olson and Drury 1997). The Sandinistas mobilized civilians and built a powerful political organization on accusations that Somoza enriched himself and his family from the considerable international relief aid that flooded the country. This corruption, combined with the thousands of newly impoverished citizens the earthquake created, empowered the Sandinistas to violently oust Somoza from power in 1979.

If disasters can generate motives and incentives for individuals to participate in conflict, then they can also create opportunities for groups to mobilize them. Armed groups draw members and supporters in roughly three ways: inducement, coercion, and co-option (Weinstein 2007). Inducement concerns a quid pro quo, goods in exchange for allegiance. Subsistence crises can increase the relative value of these incentives, which can prompt individuals to join. Coercion entails the use of intimidation or force to gain compliance. During a disaster, groups can forcibly conscript disaster victims or prevent them from accessing resources necessary for survival, both of which can leave individuals with little choice but to comply. Both of these processes were at work in the wake of the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka when rebels

associated with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam conscripted scores of orphaned and homeless children. In some cases, rebel soldiers forcibly removed children from victims' families. In others, they relied on promises of aid and social support to attract them (Becker 2005).

Co-option entails persuasion and assimilation, and is about "soft power," goal alignment, or "getting others to want the outcomes that you want" (Nye 1990). Generating trust through assistance and resource provision during a crisis can reinforce a group's ability to co-opt reluctant populations. Crucial to this process is the use of propaganda to strategically frame the causes and consequences of the disaster to suit a group's political purposes (Birkland 1998). "Frames are the interpretive packages that activists develop to mobilize potential adherents and constituents" (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 291). Frames can increase the prominence of perceived injustices, crystallize the identity of the agents responsible, and elevate expectations of successful redress through collective action. A rebel group's ability to co-opt disaster victims can depend on their ability to convince local populations of the intentionality of governmental disregard. Success in this endeavor should heighten the motives of individuals to align their goals with those of the group.

Finally, beyond facilitating conflict mobilization, natural disasters can also enable tactical gains for armed groups when they provide opportunities to wage violence against the state. In the Philippines, numerous reports exist of the CPP-NPA exploiting disaster devastation to instigate attacks against the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) (e.g., see Mogato 2017). Most often these attacks occur while the latter is performing humanitarian relief work in disaster-affected locations, in some cases despite a mutually agreed upon ceasefire. Scholarly evidence corroborates these accounts, finding attacks against the AFP from the CPP-NPA and other armed groups in the Philippines to be systematically higher in the aftermath of disaster (Eastin 2018).

Taken together, the combination of rising motives and incentives for conflict participation, opportunities for group mobilization, and prospects for tactical advances suggests that natural disasters have the potential to aggravate or prolong organized armed conflict. The following sections draw on fieldwork, archival and interview data to assess this argument in the context of one of the longest-running armed civil conflicts still ongoing in the world today—that associated with the CPP-NPA.

Natural Disasters in the Philippines

The Philippine government describes a natural disaster as "a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread . . . losses and impacts, which exceed the ability of the affected community to cope using its own resources" (Republic Act [RA] 10121, 5). Breaking this definition down into its three components—the "disruption" (environmental phenomena), the "losses and impacts" (the community's exposure to the phenomena), and the community's capacity to "cope using its own resources"—provides insight into why the Philippines experiences such high rates of calamity.

Geological and meteorological forces coalesce to magnify the Philippines' susceptibility to naturally occurring phenomena. Subduction zones abut the country's coasts, and geologic fractures and faults span its territory. These factors magnify earthquake vulnerability and render the earth that composes major Philippine landmasses especially prone to landslides. The Philippines also sits directly atop the notorious Pacific Ring of Fire, which is home to more than 75 percent of the world's volcanoes and site of 90 percent of the world's major earthquakes. The country averages five perceptible earthquakes per day and contains eighty-five active volcanoes (Daligdig and Besana 1993).

The Philippines is also prone to climatological and hydrometeorological disturbances. The high frequency of tropical cyclonic activity poses the greatest human threat. The Philippines sits squarely within a major typhoon belt. Around twenty typhoons circulate the Philippine islands each year, eight to nine of which strike land. The rising frequency of the El Niño/La Niña Southern Oscillation contributes to increasing rainfall variability. While oceanic cooling, or La Niña, increases rainfall and exacerbates typhoon risk, El Niño brings warmer and drier weather that can diminish water supplies, degrade topsoil, and heighten the incidence of forest fire and drought (Jose 2009). These incidents are especially harmful to smallholder agriculture because so much of the production relies on rainfall or on fragile irrigation systems.

Human impact on the environment, especially from deforestation, magnifies the adverse effects of these naturally occurring events. Environmental NGOs identify the Philippines as having one of the top ten highest deforestation rates in the world (McDermott 2009). Deforestation is problematic because it increases the risk of flooding,

drought, and landslides, and indirectly strengthens typhoons and storm surges. Logging and agricultural expansion, two major drivers of deforestation, degrade and erode topsoil, which can generate larger and more frequent landslides and increase the silt content of storm runoff. Silt-laden streams choke waterways and destroy coastal mangroves and reefs necessary to protect against typhoons and storm surges. Erosion also prevents water from absorbing into the soil, which increases the speed of storm runoff, and heightens the risk that downstream communities will experience flooding, especially during rainy seasons.

While the Philippine islands are uniquely predisposed to experiencing environmental phenomena, the vulnerability of the Filipino population increases the likelihood that these natural hazards will result in human disaster. One report found that although Japan and the Philippines contain approximately the same number of people exposed to tropical cyclones, a storm striking the Philippines would kill seventeen times more people than one of equal magnitude striking Japan (Ginnetti et al. 2013). The causes tend to build upon and reinforce one another, and include poverty, landlessness, agricultural dependence, and habitation in hazardous locales. In rural areas, heavy reliance on agricultural sectors coupled with unequal land ownership patterns heighten the risk of disaster and diminish people's coping capacity. Of the approximately twelve million Filipinos that rely on agriculture for livelihoods and subsistence, 36.7 percent live below the poverty line, in contrast to the national rate of 22.9 percent (Bureau of Agricultural Statistics 2013). Additionally, the distribution of farm ownership is exceedingly unequal. Farms smaller than one hectare constitute 57 percent of the total number of farms, but only cover 12 percent of the total farm area. In contrast, farms larger than ten hectares account for less than 1 percent of the number of farms, but cover over 17 percent of farm area (PSA 2015).

Furthermore, many of those who are agriculturally dependent do not own land; they rent, tenant farm, or farm surreptitiously. This landlessness and inequality can force farmers to accept pay below subsistence rates, settle in environmentally marginalized areas, and supplement income through illegal and environmentally degrading means such as illegal logging or small-scale mining. Settlement and cultivation in marginalized areas—floodplains and denuded hill slopes, for example—reinforce unsustainable farming practices that further weaken soil structures, result in poor crop yields, and increase the risk of drought and landslide. The combination of these processes reinforces

cycles of impoverishment, exacerbates food insecurity, and heightens environmental degradation, all of which magnify disaster vulnerability.

Disaster Relief and Political Discrimination

If we can gauge a household's vulnerability to disaster as a function of its recovery capacity, then the state's ability to provide relief and reconstruction assistance can partially determine vulnerability. The Philippines possesses a clearly defined institutional framework to deliver support to disaster-affected areas. However, the patronage and corruption that pervade Philippine politics, particularly at the city/ municipal and provincial levels, abet resource misappropriation toward the politically well-connected at the expense of the marginalized and vulnerable. Bankoff argues that there exists "a correlation between natural hazards and the manner in which power is articulated in society that partially explains the widening disparities of wealth . . . within the Philippines" (2003, 84). This correlation exists because

> the political elite and those with family or social ties to them, are able to consolidate and even enhance their financial and political position in society directly through the misappropriation of public money designated for relief and rehabilitation programmes, and more circuitously through the patronage that control over such funds confers upon them. . . . [The] corruption . . . is symptomatic of a 'culture' that permeates all levels of the public service down to relief workers at the disaster site and the voluntary labours of NGOs, though the scale in these latter cases is often petty. (Bankoff 2003, 100)

I advance these arguments to suggest that natural disasters and the political corruption, marginalization, and inequality they provoke provide key opportunities for groups such as the CPP-NPA to mobilize new members and supporters and wage violence against government forces, which in turn enables them to sustain their anti-state campaign.

The following section describes the institutional architecture for disaster response and outlines the ways in which local political leaders can subvert this framework to reward political supporters.

Institutional Framework for Disaster Response

In June 1978, Presidential Decree 1566 established the institutional foundation for disaster management in the Philippines. This measure

created the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC), which until 2010 served as the key institution charged with disaster management in the country. In 2010, RA 10121 modified the NDCC's management structure and renamed it the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC); however, the basic functions remain the same. The NDRRMC operates within the Office of Civil Defense (OCD), an agency created in 1972 with a mandate to protect the public during disasters and emergencies. The OCD administrator serves as the NDRRMC executive officer in charge of policy implementation and disaster management, and functions as the chief advisor to the NDRRMC chairperson, the secretary of national defense. The heads of the four government agencies whose missions most closely align with disaster and disaster relief serve as vice chairpersons. A host of other agency secretaries and bureaucratic and military agents, as well as civil society and private sector representatives, constitute the remainder of the council, bringing total NDRRMC membership to forty-four individuals.

The NDRRMC does not possess its own independent operating budget; its operational funds flow from the various agencies that comprise it, as well as lower-tier Regional (RDRRMC) and Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Councils (LDRRMC). Although councils at all jurisdictional levels emphasize self-sufficiency in disaster mitigation and management, the primary functions of these offices are disaster relief distribution and reconstruction support. In the case of very large catastrophes, such as the eruption of Mount Pinatubo, it is common for the government to intervene and establish separate management operations.

RDRRMCs and LDRRMCs are fashioned after the national-level NDRRMC and operate at lower-level political jurisdictions. RDRRMCs serve the largest jurisdiction, an entire region, but have no administrative power or executive officeholders. The NDRRMC chairperson assigns RDRRMC chairpersons, which at the time of this writing are regional directors of the Philippine National Police.[2] Like the NDRRMC, RDRRMCs possess no operating budget independent of the member agencies. These councils are charged with establishing a Regional Operations Center, implementing policy guidelines, advising LDRRMCs, and submitting recommendations to the NDRRMC.

2. The regional OCD chief serves as executive administrator of the RDRRMC. In Autonomous Regions, chief executives serve this role, and in Metro Manila, the chairperson of the Metro Manila Development Authority.

LDRRMCs operate at lower jurisdictional levels or local government units (LGUs): the provincial, city/municipal, and barangay levels. The chief executive of each of these divisions (governor, mayor, barangay captain) serves as the chairperson of their respective LDRRMCs. The geographic scope of a disaster's effects determines administrative responsibility for disaster response. City/municipal LDRRMCs manage disasters that affect more than one barangay, while provincial LDRRMCs manage disasters affecting more than one city/municipality.

Funding for disaster relief and reconstruction activities, as well as disaster mitigation and preparedness, originates from national and local disaster risk reduction and management funds, commonly known as "calamity funds." The Congress of the Philippines appropriates national calamity funds under the General Appropriations Act (GAA), subject to presidential approval. The NDRRMC then recommends to the president specific allocation amounts for each of its member agencies. Each agency must allocate no less than 30 percent of the calamity funds for "quick response" to manage crises during emergency periods. At the local levels, LGUs reserve their calamity funds in a similar fashion to their national counterparts. RA 10121, which created the NDRRMC and LDRRMCs, requires that LGUs set aside at least 5 percent of their annual revenue as calamity funds. Of this 5 percent, 30 percent is for "quick response."

Mechanisms for Political Discrimination

LDRRMCs are the most important links in the disaster risk reduction and management framework. Their proximity to the population requires that they "take the lead in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from the effects of any disaster" (RA 10121, 21).[3] This requirement demands that agencies within a local government unit's LDRRMC handle the greatest share of emergency management, including damage assessment, resource requirement identification, and resource delivery. The result is that the lion's share of relief resources (both monetary and nonmonetary) is channeled through LGU chief executives, who are then responsible for distribution to the public. That local officials, via local legislative boards, also possess the capacity to declare a "state of calamity" enhances this power because

3. This point was also reiterated in the author's interview with Edgardo Ollet, former chief of the NDRRMC Operations Center (OpCen), October 25, 2011.

doing so enables them to release (and request more) money from their calamity funds[4] and empowers them to enter into negotiated procurement contracts.[5]

These powers can be problematic because they provide local officials with tremendous leeway in determining where and to whom to allocate humanitarian relief resources, and with a means for circumventing government procurement regulations.[6] Both of these capabilities can be used as tools to reward supporters or punish defectors. In one interview, a barangay captain in the municipality of Saint Bernard, Southern Leyte, recounted that following a disaster his predecessor routinely refused to ask the mayor for access to calamity funds because the fact that he and the mayor belonged to different political parties implied that his request would be denied out of hand, regardless of the extent of destruction incurred in his barangay.[7] The result is that residents of his barangay were often left with no form of government compensation, relief aid, or access to public goods and services. Additional interviewees reported similar experiences in other disaster-prone areas.[8]

Far from damaging reelection chances, this selective allocation of disaster relief and reconstruction work can help consolidate local officials' power by facilitating personal enrichment and increasing future electoral success through political patronage. Disaster victims who suffer this discrimination can petition officials directly in hope of receiving some assistance. However, these requests often necessitate

4. In practice, calamity funds can be difficult to access, and in some cases barangay officials have been reported to provide funds out of pocket to assist in relief and recovery. However, personal fund distribution can actually add to the perception of corruption because disaster victims are seen to depend on the largesse of local officials rather than governmental funds (Frago-Marasigan 2014).
5. See Republic Act 9184 or the Government Procurement Reform Act.
6. In some cases, LGUs have even attempted to enter into procurement mode and access calamity funds without a state of calamity in their region, as well as to falsify calamity declarations, in order to take advantage of these powers (see CA-G.R. SP No. 96611and G.R. No. 147767 for court case records).
7. Author's interview with Danilo A. Galera, November 15, 2011.
8. In conversations with LDRRMC staff members in various LDRRMC offices in Western Samar, Eastern Samar, Northern Samar, Southern Leyte, and Albay, individuals commonly reported that their local mayors often politicized disaster relief for the expectation of future electoral support. Although city councils technically have approval power for fund disbursal, they seldom offer more than rubber-stamp endorsement.

promises of future electoral support, which subverts the democratic process and enhances dependency. For citizens who have the capacity to travel to the municipal center to make entreaties, this strategy can also carry longer-term costs because it can place them at political odds with their respective barangay captains, which can motivate future retaliation. The result for the marginalized and vulnerable can be increased scarcity of basic subsistence resources, with little capacity to improve or challenge the situation. In one rural barangay within Calbayog City, Western Samar, the barangay captain, who requested to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation, recounted in a conversation that because of political disagreements with the current mayor, residents had recently gone for weeks with only minimal access to food and clean drinking water following especially severe flooding. The floods destroyed crops, wrecked harvests, and contaminated the local well with sewage overflow. The only option for consumable goods access required travel to the city proper; however, this option was not feasible for most residents because of high transportation costs and high prices of clean water in the city. The local office of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) offered a "one-day survival" package of one kilo of rice and a box of sardines as a token gesture, but these offerings were made selectively and distributed only in the city center, which again was not a feasible journey for many of those affected to make.

Consequences include entrenched poverty, diminished social mobility, greater inequality, and isolation from the state, all of which exacerbate vulnerability and heighten anti-state grievances. Occasionally, public outcry reaches a breaking point and protests emerge. In the months following Typhoon Pablo, which killed over one thousand Filipinos in December 2012, public protests erupted at a local DSWD office in Davao City, and at the junction of the Agusan-Davao Highway in Montevista, Compostela Valley, blocking traffic for more than twelve hours (Dalumpines 2013; Escalante 2013). The stated goal of the protests was to call officials to account for politicization and selective allocation of relief goods, and the government's mismanagement of over USD 450 million of international aid and calamity funds. Although it is possible that political opponents of local officials and agency heads organized these protests to serve their own political ends, the example nevertheless indicates the power that disasters have to act as what Birkland (1998) describes as "focusing events," or focal points for citizen mobilization. Indeed, if these processes can facilitate large-

scale protests, it is feasible that they might also encourage some to take up arms against the state.

Nongovernment and faith-based charitable organizations provide a modest alternative to government support, although resources and organizational capacity are limited. However, for the state, relying on these institutions to provide relief can be problematic because those that conduct this work have, in times past, been friendly with leftist social movements such as the CPP-NPA. The Catholic Church, for example, has established a network of Social Action Centers (SAC) within its parishes across the country following the Second Vatican Council's call for greater church involvement in social issues. Notably, owing to their proximity to and work with impoverished and marginalized Filipinos, SACs have historically been hotbeds for revolutionary discourse, producing a number of CPP-NPA cadres, and assisting with NPA recruitment throughout the movement's history (Caouette 2004; Jones 1989). Another source of assistance arises from non-faith-based civil society organizations, or "people's organizations," such as the Citizens' Disaster Response Centers (CDRC), a network of affiliated disaster support organizations located across the country. These centers provide community-based disaster management, which includes not only emergency response but also disaster preparedness and mitigation training, rehabilitation, and public advocacy. Similar to the Church, the CDRCs have historically been sympathetic to the Left, and have provided disaster relief both to and alongside NPA guerrillas.[9] Indeed, the CDRC's mission statement cites its work with "social movements that address poverty, social inequalities, and extractive, environmentally-destructive practices, policies and systems" as a key organizational goal (CDRC 2018). Carlos Padolina, the CDRC deputy executive director in Manila, suggests that problems that arise when providing support in CPP-NPA-occupied areas only occur when the AFP requests to accompany them on relief missions as an escort—ostensibly for intelligence-gathering purposes. When the AFP makes these requests, the types of work these institutions can conduct can be limited.[10]

Thus, while NGOs can provide a limited alternative to the government, their relationship with the Left in many cases facilitates, or at least does not hinder, the opportunities that disasters and

9. Author's interview with Carlos Padolina, November 10, 2011.
10. Ibid.

discriminatory politics create for the CPP-NPA. In the following section, I build upon this point to outline how the CPP-NPA, the oldest insurgent group in the country still in operation, exploits the political opportunities that disasters provide to augment its political base and recruit new followers.

From Disaster to Conflict: The Case of the CPP-NPA

In 1968 in Central Luzon, Jose Maria Sison, a University of the Philippines teaching fellow and activist, founded the Communist Party of the Philippines following his expulsion from the party's communist precursor, Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP). The CPP, the ideological arm of the revolution, espouses a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist doctrine to counter the semicolonial nature of Philippine society and the exploitative capitalism and US imperialism that fuel it. In 1969, CPP founders created the New People's Army, the military wing of the party, in order to instigate a peasant uprising, a protracted people's war, which called for the building of a mass base among the rural peasantry. CPP cadres founded the movement's third wing, the National Democratic Front Philippines (NDF or NDFP), in 1973. The NDF acts as the united front organization, the political wing to supplement the ideological and military actions of the CPP-NPA. The NDF consists of a constellation of legal and semilegal institutions including trade unions, faith-based groups, human rights organizations, political parties, and lobby groups that engage in various types of advocacy work, service provision, political alliance building, and other activities designed to strengthen public opposition to the status quo.

At its height in 1986, the CPP-NPA possessed approximately twenty-five thousand fighters and thirty thousand CPP members and had an active presence in sixty-nine out of eighty provinces (International Crisis Group 2011; Santos and Santos 2010). However, a number of setbacks during the latter half of the 1980s and the 1990s reduced its organizational strength. A failure to fully co-opt the political opportunity that Marcos's 1986 ouster provided, internal disagreements over party ideology and political and military strategies, the splintering off of several breakaway factions, and a series of deadly internal purges within the Mindanao fronts all combined to instigate a precipitous decline in capacity and membership (Rocamora 1994). However, in the years following, the movement has regained some of its original momentum through a consolidation and reaffirmation of core principles and

ideologies, coupled with a renewed attention to mobilizing the rural peasantry. Currently, a primary obstacle for the movement stems from difficulties in recruiting educated new cadres to rejuvenate party leadership. A relaxation of recruitment standards has resulted in more instances of abuse than had existed before in the movement, as less ideologically inclined guerrillas exploit their position to coerce and steal. In certain areas, this lack of discipline has caused the local population to eschew NPA involvement, which has damaged its credibility (e.g., see Kwiatkowski 2008).

Nevertheless, the movement soldiers on. The most recent and reliable reports cite the group's strength at four to five thousand (Santos and Santos 2010). What explains this group's persistence? I suggest the CPP-NPA's resolve and capacity to maintain their campaign stem in part from environmental instability and disaster vulnerability in the Philippines, and their ability to successfully exploit these opportunities to mobilize public support. Though the Armed Forces of the Philippines has claimed for years that the movement is waning, evidence regarding the group's capacity to wage attacks against military forces suggests otherwise. Data drawn from Berman et al. (2011) indicate that the number of NPA attacks on government forces have steadily increased from approximately one hundred in 1995 to over one thousand each in 2006 and 2007, the final year of their data collection efforts.[11] Given that the AFP has reported relatively few major military successes in the years since 2007, it is not far-fetched to assume that the NPA has been successful at sustaining or even increasing these operations to the present day.[12]

11. The data that inform this statistic are drawn from the dataset that Berman et al. (2011) used to conduct their empirical analysis and is described on page 504 of that manuscript. These authors were kind enough to share their dataset with me, which is where I obtained this information and that from Quezon Province referenced in figure 1 later in the text.

12. While the author has been unable to locate reliable, publicly available statistics on contemporary CPP-NPA membership, the group has continually waged attacks on military and CAFGU installations since 2007 and, as of 2017, is showing no signs of halting these actions. Indeed, were the group's recruitment and attack capabilities to collapse, then one might anticipate the group to be more forthcoming with their participation in peace talks and more willing (by necessity) to limit their violent campaign. However, this has not been the case. Rather, the 2017 peace talks have collapsed because of the CPP-NPA's continual engagement with military personnel during counterinsurgency operations.

CPP-NPA Recruitment

Although there exist regional variations in recruitment strategy based on the movement's previous community presence or particularities in local political economy, the NPA traditionally employs a standard set of recruitment protocols throughout the organization (Caouette 2004, 229). Assuming no prior community presence, CPP cadres begin by establishing ties with a local contact sympathetic to the cause. A small number of cadres will then move into the village—often into the contact's own home—to facilitate introduction to other villagers and to gather information about community problems in order to tailor their political message. These cadres, to the extent that security constraints allow, might perform or assist in community services such as education and literacy training, health care, or agricultural work (Kwiatkowski 2008, 241). In exchange, they ask residents to attend small community meetings at night to discuss local issues and the movement's message, and to enable the party to assess the capabilities and willingness of villagers to support the cause. Eager participants are enlisted to recruit others who might also be inclined to engage. During the day, cadres ask receptive residents to participate in group activities designed to encourage cooperation and collective action. In describing this process, "Leonard," a former CPP member who spent several years recruiting, stated:[13]

> We [cadres] would begin by assigning them [villagers] to do small tasks like digging a new latrine or rebuilding an irrigation system. It was important to show them what they could achieve, to get them to understand how to work together. It helped them build trust with each other and with us. After a project was finished, everyone would meet and talk about it. We would ask them what went well and what went wrong. We would ask them what they could have done better. This self-criticism and self-evaluation were very important. . . . Many had never done this before. It taught them awareness, to reflect on their actions and to be critical.[14]

As the rapport builds, the initial meetings develop into longer political seminars and indoctrination sessions that elaborate the movement's message and relate how the ideological adherence to the

13. "Leonard" is a pseudonym.
14. Author's interview with "Leonard," December 4, 2011.

NPA can empower villagers. Efforts are made to frame these messages in such a way that identifies and accentuates local injustices, names the agent or agents responsible, and formulates solutions, all while conveying the movement's overarching political goals in a way that resonates with the villagers' cultural and normative experiences. The objective is total political indoctrination, and to leave in place a "party branch," a group of individuals fully integrated as activists and awaiting assignment to the various political or military positions within the movement. Once the recruiting cadres complete this process, they move on to other communities, ultimately developing what Rutten describes as "a state-like political organization, loosely centralized, that reache[s] from the national level down to region, district, section, and village, with party committees staffed by local men and women" (1996, 115).

This strategy provides a gateway for the NPA to expand. Its purpose is to establish a presence, attract future CPP cadres or NPA fighters, and develop a foundation for revolutionary taxation that provides funds for the movement to operate. Once this expansion is complete, members work to co-opt or coerce local officials and other non-aligned residents to cooperate with the NPA to provide food, shelter, information, money, and other resources to NPA fighters, and to eschew involvement with the military. When cooperation is not forthcoming, the NPA employs coercive tactics to maintain discipline, exert control, and facilitate resource extraction.[15]

In addition to direct recruitment, the National Democratic Front, the CPP-NPA's united front organization, and its affiliated institutions or people's organizations also work to mobilize a broader political base that includes middle class, business and industry leaders, and politicians. The NDF conducts advocacy campaigns, distributes propaganda, plans strikes and protest movements, works to build legal and political alliances, and performs human rights work—all to advance the cause of the revolution. It has had notable successes at these broad-based mobilizations, particularly within the Catholic Church (Caouette 2004). While the NDF and its affiliates do not engage in the type of direct party recruitment described above, these institutions conduct workshops, perform services, and hold political education seminars that are likely very similar to activities CPP-NPA cadres perform during standard recruitment procedures.

15. Ibid.

Natural Disasters and the CPP-NPA

A substantial portion of the propaganda the NPA espouses in seminars and in the movement's public communiqués emphasizes natural disasters, environmental degradation, and the need for environmental protection as rationale for the movement.[16] While there are some doubts about the veracity of these claims (Gaillard 2015), a disaster's occurrence can substantiate them because it exemplifies the environmental consequences of political corruption and unchecked corporate expansion and places these concepts in a local context familiar to victims. In this capacity, a disaster can provide a focal point around which to build public support. Political corruption surrounding the disaster's causes and consequences can further enhance the salience of this propaganda, which can increase the disconnect citizens feel toward state institutions and boost the attractiveness of supporting alternatives to the status quo. This corruption can also increase the level of material deprivation in excluded communities, which can decrease the opportunity costs of joining the CPP-NPA.

Providing assistance and reconstruction work in disaster-damaged and excluded areas builds upon these processes by bolstering the public's perception of the CPP-NPA as a movement for the people, despite a long record of exploitation. These actions also provide opportunities for the group to interact with locals in a helpful and constructive capacity, which enables cadres and NPA soldiers to build trust and rapport among residents and supports the movement's efforts to consolidate political support. In areas the NPA has already secured, these actions can rebuild or reinforce community ties that might have frayed during violent military confrontations or while extracting resources from residents. In areas where the movement seeks to expand, providing assistance can provide rhetorical justification for NPA presence and can provide opportunities to hold more indoctrination seminars. In both types of community, these actions can act as tipping points that motivate villagers to join the movement, and can encourage future reciprocal behavior—providing food, shelter, resources, or support to NPA fighters—among those who do not join. "Carlos,"[17] a cadre who has held a high-level position in the CPP Central Committee explains:

16. For example, a simple search of the word "environment" on the CPP-NPA's website (www.philippinerevolution.net) generated 354 hits that each link to CPP-NPA public bulletins. The words "disaster" and "typhoon" generated 129 hits and 85 hits, respectively (accessed November 15, 2015).

17. "Carlos" is a pseudonym.

> In experiences with communities effectively led by or with strong presence of the CPP-NPA and other revolutionary organizations, the people are always very grateful for whatever help these organizations are able to render to them. The CPP-NPA and other revolutionary organizations rendering assistance . . . boost these communities' appreciation and support . . . not only in those times of disaster but further on. They become all the more faithful and solid supporters of the CPP-led revolutionary movement. Disasters may have temporarily economically weakened the mass bases and expansion areas of the CPP-NPA . . . but these organizations' assistance in the relief efforts have politically strengthened them . . . Such activities as disaster relief are able to pave the way for more numerous new recruits, particularly in areas where consolidation is still being developed and in areas of expansion.[18]

Three factors determine when and where the NPA will provide relief and what kind of assistance they can offer: proximity, practical capability, and security.[19] Proximity refers to the location of NPA units relative to the disaster-affected area. NPA units and revolutionary people's organizations affiliated with the NDF are more likely to perform relief operations in communities within or near the areas they inhabit because of their familiarity with the locale's political, socioeconomic, and cultural conditions and physical geography, the latter of which lends them an advantage in defending themselves in the case of a military exchange. Practical capability refers to the NPA's capacity to respond. Because the NPA is a resource-poor group, it often provides services (rather than goods) such as evacuation assistance and repair and reconstruction of farms, fields, wells, houses, and community buildings. In consolidated areas, this assistance can involve mobilizing sympathetic individuals in neighboring communities to assist in these activities. More capable units might have the ability to provide medical and technical support, equipment, temporary shelter, food, clothing, and seeds for replanting. Depending on the relationship between NPA units and government officials in a given area, relief assistance might even include working directly alongside government relief providers, though this is not common. Finally, security refers to the NPA's

18. Author's interview with Carlos, December 5, 2011.
19. Ibid.

capacity to operate openly without risk of attack from the AFP, the Philippine National Police, or locally sourced paramilitary units (Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units). Security concerns in nonconsolidated and militarily contested areas might necessitate that members who seek to provide assistance disguise themselves as NGO personnel or civilian volunteers.[20] In the case of very large disasters or those that strike in contested areas, it is common for the group to declare a ceasefire (either unilateral or reciprocal with the AFP) so that they might operate with greater impunity; however, to what extent these ceasefires are genuine or opportunistic is unclear.[21] In areas where security concerns dominate and no ceasefire is in place, the NPA might still provide assistance but limit their actions to coordinating communications from a remote location.

The following section details a case that illustrates precisely how the CPP-NPA mobilizes its forces for relief distribution. This anecdote was recounted during an interview with a former NPA commander, "David," who worked in Quezon Province during the time these actions took place.[22] I have supplemented this account with data on Tropical Depression Winnie and from NPA combat activities in Quezon Province drawn from Berman et al. (2011).

Disaster Mobilization: The NPA in Quezon Province

On 29 November 2004, Tropical Depression Winnie, one of the strongest storms of the year, struck the Philippine landmass, killing 1,593 people and generating economic damage totaling almost PHP 750 million (Wingard and Brändlin 2013). Its arrival, the third in a succession of four consecutive storms, caused widespread flooding and landslides, with damage concentrated in and around the municipalities of Real, Infanta, and General Nakar in the northern portion of Quezon Province. These events caused the death of more than 1,400 people and destroyed farms, houses, infrastructure, telephone lines, and other facilities in these municipalities. In some areas, the floodwaters were so strong that many victims were forced to spend days on the roofs of

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20. Ibid.
21. During these ceasefires, it is not uncommon for opportunistic behavior, such as surreptitious attacks (NPA and AFP) or looting of relief convoys (NPA), to occur. Both the AFP and the NPA claim violations with virtually every major ceasefire declaration, and both deny the other's claims.
22. Information about the CPP-NPA's actions in Quezon Province was taken from the author's interview with "David" on May 17, 2012.

nearby buildings (Gaillard, Liamzon, and Villanueva 2007, 261). Authorities calculate that Winnie, along with the two storms that preceded it and the one that followed, caused damage equal to approximately 0.35 percent of the gross domestic product (Virola 2004; Gaillard, Liamzon, and Villanueva 2007).

The night the disasters occurred, NPA forces were gathered near the town proper in Infanta. This proximity, coupled with the absence of military, police, and paramilitary units nearby, enabled NPA fighters to assist victims nearby in evacuating to higher ground. The following day, the NPA unit called a meeting to organize the people in these areas to assist with the rehabilitation of their damaged property. NPA forces divided themselves into teams and proceeded to work on providing security, repairs, production work, and housework. One team helped in repairing the wrecked irrigation system; others in replanting rice, root crops, or vegetables in washed out farms; and another in rebuilding destroyed houses.

Local roads remained impassable for a month after the storms. These conditions meant that other relief providers, including government agencies, NGOs, and private organizations, could only deliver relief supplies as far as Real. To assist, the North Quezon NPA unit communicated with other local CPP branches, NPA forces, and, in particular, their network of aboveground organizations from Real to General Nakar to coordinate the movement of relief goods and building materials and the repair of damaged roads. Once the goods were delivered, the NPA and its affiliates, alongside local residents, assisted with infrastructure repair and rehabilitation. In exchange for the assistance, the NPA used the evenings to hold meetings with the individuals involved in the relief aid distribution and reconstruction work in order to conduct political education seminars for them.

In January 2005, after immediate work was finished, the CPP leadership in North Quezon formed a comprehensive plan for a longer-term response to the disasters' effects. This plan involved establishing a people's organization, an aboveground legal entity, to cover the entire North Quezon subprovince and its three municipalities. Once established, the organization assisted with the more widespread gathering and distribution of relief and rehabilitation support, service provision to distressed communities, and coordination of the individuals and organizations involved from nearby cities, municipalities, and rural barangays in the subprovince. Following its establishment, affiliated individuals solicited food, clothes, household goods, tools, seeds, and

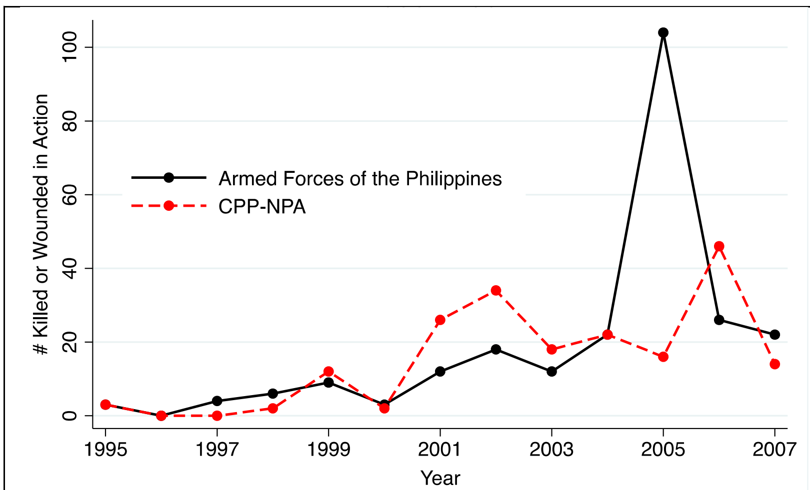

Figure 1. Combat in Quezon Province, 1995–1997.

other resources from local allies, friends, and unaffected communities nearby, as well as provincial and Manila-based disaster organizations and other relief aid sources. Grassroots chapters were established at the barangay level in order to systematize the process. In addition to its relief efforts, this organization conducted education and training and gave financial allowances to the full-time organizers, relief workers, and organizational staff. During this process, the NPA organized *bayanihan* (collective voluntary work) mobilizations to assist in these activities. This campaign lasted for more than two years.

In seeking to build upon these efforts' political and practical successes, the CPP-NPA in 2006 relaunched the organization with the aim of improving local agricultural production. However, by this time the Armed Forces of the Philippines had gotten wind of the increases in CPP-NPA strength in the area, and moved to establish several military detachments and checkpoints throughout the subprovince. The security situation became more tenuous as military hostilities intensified and the AFP began harassing and threatening the organization's officers and members. Because of this, the activists desisted from their activities and the disaster mitigation campaign ebbed to a point from which it has not yet recovered.

Although not conclusive, data on NPA military activities within Quezon Province corroborate the possibility that these actions boosted CPP-NPA strength in the area, at least temporarily. Figure 1 displays

the number of CPP-NPA and AFP soldiers killed/wounded in action in Quezon Province from 1995 to 2007.[23] As figure 1 indicates, combat interactions held a relatively steady trajectory until 2005, the year following the storms—all of which occurred in late November and early December 2004. In 2005, the number of AFP soldiers that NPA soldiers killed or wounded spiked, increasing from 22 in 2004 to 104 in 2005, while the number of CPP-NPA killed or wounded in Quezon decreased from 22 to 16. Although the precise level of support these actions generated is impossible to ascertain, this evidence suggests that these actions had the intended effects, as public support and assistance can be crucial for guerrilla fighters to conduct offensive operations. The decline in AFP killed/wounded following 2005 is likely a result of the AFP's amplification of its counterinsurgency campaign in the province following the realization that insurgent support and presence had grown.

Conclusion

This paper discusses the impact that natural disasters have had on armed rebellion in the Philippines with data from the CPP-NPA conflict. It has sought to demonstrate how disasters and the livelihood crises they create have enabled the group to increase public support and participation by providing humanitarian relief and reconstruction support to affected communities, and by tailoring their political message to capitalize on institutional weaknesses in the state's system of disaster response. The result has prolonged the group's ability to sustain itself and enhanced its capabilities in militarily challenging the state. The section detailing the CPP-NPA's activities in Quezon following Tropical Storm Winnie provides a firsthand account of the tactics the group employs in affected communities to gain political advantage and supplements this account with data that demonstrate the potential efficacy of these tactics on the group's ability to wage attacks against the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Moving forward, future research would do well to examine the ways in which the state might diminish the effects that disasters can have on conflict processes. One possibility is to explore how governments might use natural disasters and well-executed disaster relief and reconstruction provision as mechanisms to build public

23. Data for figure 1 are drawn from Berman et al. (2011).

legitimacy and trust. While one might expect that if discriminatory political institutions can exacerbate conflict in a disaster's wake, and that transparent institutions and depoliticized relief distribution might reduce it, little research exists to support this claim. A second possibility is to explore the extent that state agents—military and police forces—are able to capitalize on the same factors that enable insurgent groups like the CPP-NPA to build support in communities in contested regions post-disaster. The process of providing humanitarian relief, which is often a duty of military forces in war zones, partially corresponds to duties associated with population-centric (hearts and minds) counterinsurgency strategies (Cuny 1989). However, the extent that state military forces capitalize on these processes to improve their own capabilities on the battlefield remains an open question.❁

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