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Casey Shannon Harrington
Macalester College, casey.harrington@gmail.com

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Machiguenga Mobilization in the Peruvian Amazon: An Analysis of COMARU as an Effective Change Agent

Casey Harrington
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William Moseley
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Abstract

COMARU (Consejo Machiguenga del Río Urubamba) is an indigenous organization that promotes the rights of thirty native Amazonian communities in the face of the Camisea Project, a massive natural gas extraction project. The state has consistently ignored negative health, environmental, and cultural impacts from five spills that have occurred in the natural gas pipeline, and the communities the right of consultation granted to them in the International Labor Organization's Convention 169. This paper, using interviews with Machiguenga community members and COMARU leadership in addition to political ecology scholarship, analyzes the success of COMARU's politicized and depoliticized strategies. Through the use of four criteria, it determines that while the organization needs to make several changes to how it operates as a change agent, it is generally successful due to its ability to navigate unequal power structures within Peru and genuinely listen to the voices of the communities.

Introduction

In a school building in the Amazonian community of Shimaa, I sit at a table observing a meeting between the community's teacher, health promoter, community members and two leaders of COMARU. On the wall is a sign that reads, "Respecting ourselves we will live better." Just outside of the school is a traditional Machiguenga hut with a roof constructed of leaves, whereas the school in which we sat was made of concrete. This is because it was constructed as compensation by TGP, the company that constructed a natural gas pipeline directly through Shimaa. The pipeline is within walking distance from the school. Alfredo, the community health promoter, stands up to give his account of the current health maladies in the community: parasites, uterine cancer, boils, all due to water contamination from ruptures in the pipeline that leads through the community. He insists that the state should at least provide a health post stocked with medical supplies for the community. Alfredo currently has to zipline out of the community to Kepashiato, where he buys medicine for the community with his own money. COMARU listens intently and takes notes.

In the Southeast Peruvian Amazon, natural gas extraction through the Camisea Project is having incredibly adverse health, environmental, and cultural impacts on native Machiguenga

communities (Earle 2009; Vences 2006; Bruijn 2010). A traditionally silenced population, Machiguengas have suffered these consequences despite the promises of the Peruvian state to involve them in decision-making and to make sure they, too, benefit from the extraction. COMARU (Consejo Machiguenga del Río Urubamba) is an organization entirely composed of Machiguengas that works intimately with thirty Machiguenga communities to promote their rights in the face of the project. In this paper, using a political ecology framework, I will analyze the success of COMARU (Consejo Machiguenga del Río Urubamba) using four criteria of success: achieving legitimate representation of the communities, fostering of a collective Machiguenga identity which is necessary for a powerful mobilization, achieving adequate compensation and attention through negotiations with the state and energy companies, and holding the state accountable for laws that protect indigenous rights through politicized tactics such as strikes and protests.

While COMARU was originally established as a representative organization, conveying the needs of the communities to external powerholders who have the finances to implement development projects, elevated threats from the Camisea Project have prompted COMARU to transform itself into a social movement organization. COMARU now uses politicized tactics such as strikes and roadblocks to jolt the state into fulfilling its promises of indigenous consultation and compensation. First, I will provide background information on the Camisea Project and Machiguengas. Additionally, I will a political ecological framework that informs the case study in order to clarify the power structure COMARU navigates in order to function as a social movement organization. After I discuss the adverse impacts reported to me through interviews with Machiguenga community members and leaders of COMARU, I will analyze the success of COMARU using my four criteria of success previously mentioned. Finally, in my

conclusion, I will make recommendations for the organization. This research is important because it sheds light on voices of Amazonian communities that are traditionally marginalized. Additionally, it provides a case study of an organization that, for the most part, successfully navigates unequal power dynamics between the communities, state, energy companies and international NGO's to achieve substantial change in the communities and capture the world's attention.

Methodology

This research was carried out partly through ethnographic interviews with leaders of COMARU at their office in Quillabamba, Peru, where I interviewed them about the philosophy of the organization and their perceptions of the Camisea Project. I also traveled with several COMARU leaders to five communities impacted by the Camisea Project in Alto Urubamba: Korimani, Chakopishiato, Inkaare, Monte Carmelo and Shimaa. There, I gathered ethnographic interviews from community leaders, and a few community members.

In each community, I observed meetings between leaders of COMARU and community members where they discussed impacts of the Camisea Project in addition to other inter-community conflicts. I also include observations from an anniversary party of COMARU, where I observed Machiguengas celebrate their culture through singing and dancing. Apart from field work, I relied on research from political ecology scholars to understand how COMARU functions within a power web in order to fight for change.

It is important to note that my position as a white American woman brings with it inherent biases in how I envision indigenous organization and development. However, I hope that my unique opportunity to travel with COMARU will provide a unique perspective of the

inner-workings of the organization and contribute to pre-existing critiques of their efficaciousness.

Theoretical Framework

Political ecology is an essential tool for studying social movements given that it helps one to understand how power structures both facilitate environmental degradation and provide momentum for local mobilization. It also informs how one understands the various scales of power within which COMARU operates to enact change. In my discussion of political ecology and its applications to the social movement COMARU is constructing, I will adhere most closely to Peet and Watts' definition of political ecology. They define it as a "confluence between ecologically rooted social science and the principles of political economy" and envision "possibilities for broadening environmental issues into a movement for livelihood entitlements, and social justice" (Peet and Watts, 1996b, pp. 38-9).

In my discussion of the impacts of the Camisea Project and COMARU's subsequent organizing of Machiguenga communities, I will refer to the environmental identity and social thesis, which says that environmental conditions create opportunities for local groups to define and represent themselves politically (Robbins 2004). Robbins distinguishes this branch of political ecology as being heavily focused on sociology, focusing on cultural networks and political system upheavals.

Social movement theory is also critical to understanding the politicization of COMARU's strategies. Bebbington refers to social movements as "vehicles through which the concerns of poor and marginalized groups are given greater visibility within civil society" (Bebbington *et al.*, 2008,p. 2888) They rest upon the formation of a collective identity, and often unite individuals who encompass a variety of diversities apart from class, such as gender, ethnicity and race

(Moore 1998; Dirlik and Prazniak 2001). Using social network theory, I will explain how COMARU can contemporarily be understood as a social movement organization rather than simply a representative entity, utilizing an aggressive campaign to fight for Machiguenga rights.

Finally, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* provides an important framework for which to understand power dynamics between Machiguenga communities oppressed by the impacts of the Camisea Project and the state and extractive companies. Freire defines the oppressed as those who are "prevented from being fully human" (Freire, 1982,p. 42) and their oppressors as those who abuse their power towards violence, possessiveness and depreciation of the oppressed. It is important that the oppressed abandon their belief in the invulnerability of the oppressor because they are the only ones who can liberate themselves and their oppressor. Freire stresses that is essential that the oppressed be the main actors in their liberation process. Otherwise they will be involved in 'pseudo-participation', not 'committed involvement'" (p. 56). Genuine participation of the oppressed in their liberation can only come from equal collaboration with any entity that may assist them with their liberation in addition to "a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed" (p. 55).

COMARU plays a key role in facilitating the liberation of Machiguenga communities from their oppression, and through this role they act as a "change agent" (Burkey 1993). Change agents serve as a link between local communities and powerholders and "give legitimacy to groups before they have acquired strength and acceptance on their own" (Burkey, 1993, p.173). This paper will analyze how well COMARU carries out that role of "change agent".

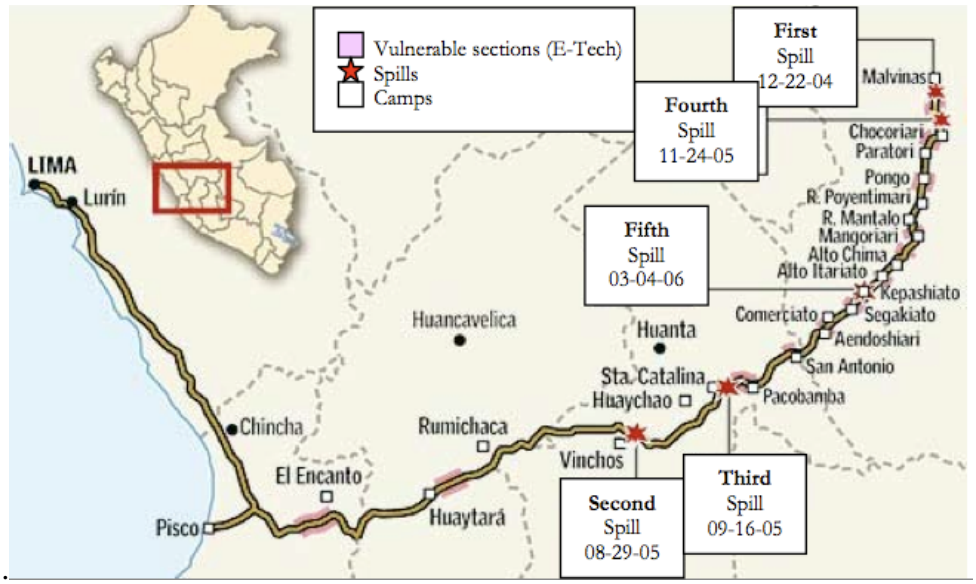
Background on the Camisea Project

Natural gas was first discovered in the South Eastern Peruvian Amazon in 1978, but it wasn't extracted until August of 2004 with the initiation of the Camisea Project (Earle and Pratt

2009). In this year, two pipelines were constructed starting from Camisea's gas fields in the Amazon stretching all the way across the Andes to Lima on the coast. Peru's Camisea natural gas project is a $1.6 billion project, $75 million of it funded through a direct loan from the IDB (Hearn 2007). The project has been marketed as a key development strategy through its potential to transform Peru into a net energy exporter, attracting many multinational extractive companies. However, the state and energy companies show a lack of concern over the projects adverse impacts on the health and livelihoods of the Machiguenga native communities who live in and around the sites where gas extraction and transportation take place.

Five ruptures have occurred in the pipeline transporting natural gas liquids from Camisea to Lima (Hearn 2007).

Figure 1
Spills along TGP natural gas duct that passes from Camisea in Bajo Urubamba to Lima.



(Vences 2006)

Techint and TGP, two companies involved in pipeline construction, deny the faulty construction of the pipe, although a report filed by E-tech found that 40% of the pipes were leftovers from other transportation projects, they were heavily corroded, and the welders lacked certification

(Hearn 2007). These spills have directly contaminated Machiguenga water supplies, leading to extremely adverse health, environmental and cultural impacts within the communities.

Background on Machiguengas

The ethnicity of the members of the communities that are being impacted extraction and transportation processes of the Camisea Project is Machiguenga. Machiguengas are traditionally primarily characterized as shy people, their goal to "minimize contact with the larger world rather than to confront and try to control it" (Johnson, 2003, p. 11). For this reason, Machiguengas have settled in relatively isolated areas, even though the fish and game animals tend to be scarce where they have settled. Machiguengas fish for trout and hunt monkeys, tapir, parrots, deer, spectacled bear, anteaters, depending on the elevation (Johnson 2003). Since the ruptures in TGP's pipeline and the resulting water contamination, it has been increasingly difficult to find fish and animals and at times have to rely on canned sardines and rice to supplement their diet.

Despite the popular notion the individualism is a strictly Western concept, Machiguengas are extremely individualistic and resent outside intrusions. This individualism is one of the main reasons they exist in low population densities and their settlements are very dispersed (Johnson 2003). It also rationalizes the resentment Machiguengas feel towards the presence of energy company and TGP workers in their communities.

Despite the resentment worker presences ignite, several Machiguenga characteristics provide barriers to collective action. First, Machiguenga community ties normally extend no further than the family unit. Both their highly dispersed settlements and individualistic attitudes prevent them from coming together regularly for anything other than fishing (Johnson 2003). Rosengren argues that "it is only in times of perceived external threat that individuals come

together to co-operate" (as cited in Earle and Pratt, 2009, p. 12). Second, voicing concerns is not something Machiguengas feel comfortable doing; their voices are typically extremely soft. Manners are highly valued and they usually repress their anger through grudges rather than outwardly demonstrating it (Johnson, 2003).

Machiguengas, although their culture is quickly changing, are often viewed in urban regions in Peru as backwards, uneducated and savage. The word *chunchos,* which means "wild ones" in Quechua, is sometimes used in reference to Amazonian peoples (Rénique, 2009, p. 118). In contrast to indigenous peoples in the Andes, who are simultaneously marginalized but are considered "reputed inheritors of a romanticized imperial civilization" (p. 118), Amazonian peoples are viewed more as uncivilized savages who choose to separate themselves from the dominant culture in Peru. Natalie Smith comments on an expectation for Machiguengas "to work together as an ethnic group in the aggressive protection of their territory and traditional livelihoods," and to, "assign a type of primordial role to indigenous peoples" (as cited in Earle, 2009, p. 705).

Another common stereotype about Machiguengas is that they are inherently linked to the environment. On the other end of the spectrum, I have also encountered the belief that because Machiguengas experience low levels of education, they should not have the power to manage their own land. A civil engineer from Cusco, Peru said:

> "Because they (Machiguengas) have little formal education, they don't understand what the environment is. They live simply as part of the environment, but they don't know the importance of the environment." (civil engineer, personal interview, May 2, 2010).

This quote reflects a common sentiment that rests within Peruvian urban culture, that Amazonians are uneducated and weak.

Alan García, Peru's current president, has said, "These people don't have crowns. They aren't first-class citizens who can say…'You [the government] don't have the right to be here.' No way." García went on to call indigenous protesters "pseudo-indigenous" and accused indigenous leaders of a protest in Bagua of terrorism (Rénique, 2009, p. 121).

The Camisea Project: Impacts on Machiguenga Health, Environment and Culture

Local Perceptions in Monte Carmelo, Korimani, Shimaa, Chakopishiato, and Inkaare

In order to comprehend COMARU's motivations for organizing Alto and Bajo Urubamba, it is important to understand the incredibly adverse impacts these communities experience due to the Camisea Project. The quotes cited below come from five communities in Alto Urubamba, which the natural gas pipeline crosses through. However, these interviews represent only a small sampling of the health, environmental and cultural impacts the project has on native Amazonian communities.

I interviewed community members about perceptions of the Camisea Project's impacts in five Alto Urubamba communities: Monte Carmelo, Korimani, Chakopishiato, Shimaa, and Inkaare. Alto Urubamba lies in the Province of La Convención, which is in the region of Cusco. Community members in all five communities are Machiguenga and most speak Machiguenga as their first language and Spanish as their second. Families live very dispersed within the community. Health resources in each community were lacking: none of them had a health post and only Shimaa had a health care provider, who was deemed a *promotor de salud.*

While reactions towards the project varied slightly in each community, perceptions of the Camisea Project were overwhelmingly negative. Interviews with informants reflected a deep concern towards the project's impacts on human health, fish and wildlife populations, and the survival of Machiguenga cultural tradition. Most of these impacts are directly or indirectly

related to water contamination caused by various ruptures in the gas duct that transports gas from Camisea to Lima (Johnson 2005). In addition to recognizing the negative impacts of the project, community members verbalized the urgent need for assistance from COMARU to help solve these problems.

Figure 2:
The first TGP gas duct in relation to the five communities studied in Alto Urubamba

(COMARU)

Impacts that appear to be the most profound for the communities are the death of fish and animals that they depend on for food due to natural gas contamination in their major water sources. This has led to a profound state of malnutrition. Another commonly voiced impact was the increased presence of illnesses such as nausea, vomiting and fever, which is probably also due to contamination of drinking water.

. Machiguengas in these communities conceptualize environmental and health impacts of the project in terms of how they effect their wellbeing and livelihoods, but also through a cultural lens. This quote is from Jorge Kategari, assistant to the chief of Monte Carmelo, in response to a question regarding his memories of the community when he was younger, before the initiation of the Camisea Project in 2004.

> "There wasn't immigration of the colonists to this zone. The majority were Machiguengas. So, because there were small numbers of colonists in this zone and also few Machiguenga inhabitants, there was an abundance of fish, an abundance of wild animals that we ate as food. Also, there was a lot of timber, medicinal plants, and also in relation to our culture, we had it almost intact. We practiced our cultural identity. We still had to use our own dress which is the cusma, we used arrows, we used instruments to hunt the animals in the forests…almost everything was natural.[1] (Jorge Kategari, personal interview" April 16, 2010).

Andrés Mamanki, the ex-Chief of Korimani, expressed a similar sentiment towards "colonos", presumably TGP workers, who enter the communities. He said, "Now we are becoming civilized. Many colonists come, the civilizations. We're losing our culture" (Andrés Mamanki, personal interview, April 16, 2010). This concern regarding cultural change as a result of the presence of TGP workers was an urgent concern for community members. Their use of the term *colonos*, or colonists, when referring to them highlights their sentiments of feeling colonized. This metaphor was present throughout interviews with COMARU as well. The president of COMARU, Rubén Miguel Binari Piñarreal, said, "With the presence of the companies there is a massive influx of people from the exterior making the communities lose their culture," and "Before, we lived in Alto and Bajo Urubamba in a paradise when there were no roads. It was pure, Everything was beautiful. There were animals, There were monkeys. Now there aren't. Now, colonization comes." (Rubén Miguel Binari Piñarreal, personal interview, April 16, 2010).

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Spanish to English were carried out by the author.

Adverse health effects from water contamination were another repeatedly mentioned concern. According to Mamanki, Korimani is suffering from, "yellow fever, tuberculosis, diarrhea and parasites." Once again, perceptions of COMARU leaders mirrored that of community members. Plinio said, "Now you don't see clean water, just muddy water. This at the same time kills fish and also, for example, another product of this is that the community members have to drink this. This also generates diseases: parasites or other illnesses with the digestive system" (Plinio Kategari Kashiari, personal interview, April 27, 2010). Additionally, Rubén spoke of rapid transmission of STDs from workers to community members due to the lack of preparedness of their immune systems. Rúben spoke of at least three communities in Bajo Urubamba in which cases of HIV/AIDS have been reported, and he says Peru's Ministry of Health has not initiated any educational programs to prevent further transmission. Rúben also mentioned the rise in alcoholism in the communities because workers make it more accessible (Rubén Miguel Binari Piñarreal, personal interview, April 16, 2010).

The only health care provider in any of the communities was Alfredo Capa in Shimaa. He provided me with information regarding new emerging illnesses in the community since the construction of TGP's natural gas duct, which he says runs about a kilometer from Shimaa's school. Shimaa lies between two rivers, the Río Shimaa and the Río Kompiroshiatov (Johnson, 2003, p. 23), and these drinking water sources have been contaminated by natural gas from a rupture in the pipeline. In order to obtain medicine for the community, Capa ziplines across a river to Kepashiato, the closest community with a health post, where he buys medication for the community with his own money. Alfredo says that there are now more cases of leg infections and intestinal infections now that the gasduct passes through the community. Another

devastating new illness that has begun to afflict pregnant women in the community, according to Alfredo, is uterine cancer. (Alfredo Capa, personal interview, April 18, 2010)

Mamanki expressed the fact that these impacts establish a great need for COMARU to represent the communities. He said, "If we are not going to do these things, (collaborate with COMARU), who is going to help us? Who is going to defend us? There is no one who can save us." (Andrés Mamanki, personal interview, April 16, 2010). In the following sections, I will discuss the strategies COMARU uses to attract national and international attention to these grave injustices native Amazonian communities are experiencing due to the Camisea Project. Additionally, I will evaluate the success of COMARU's strategies to achieve compensation from extractive companies and to promote state political accountability.

Organizational Structure of COMARU

COMARU (Consejo Machiguenga del Rio Urubamba) has evolved to become the most active and influential organization in the Camisea region despite its small leadership base and limited financial resources (Earle and Pratt 2009). As a non-profit founded in 1991, its primary stated objective is to protect the wellbeing of the 30 native communities with whom they affiliate and represent. Eighteen of these communities are situated in Alto Urubamba and twelve in Bajo Urubamba (Earle and Pratt 2009). While other organizations such as AIDESEP (National Organization of the Amazon Indigenous People of Peru) and CEDIA (Center for Indigenous Amazonian Development) also work for Amazonian indigenous rights in the face of the Camisea Project, COMARU undoubtedly works the most intimately with indigenous communities impacted by extraction in the Camisea gas fields. Nevertheless, COMARU gains some of its political legitimacy through collaborating with those groups, because as Burkey notes, small,

isolated groups have limited power when they do not team up with like-minded groups (Burkey 1993).

While COMARU has an extensive agenda, including improving community education and full registration of all Machiguenga territories, its most all-encompassing and urgent goal is one that was outlined in a 2004 meeting between COMARU representatives and delegates from all of COMARU's affiliated communities: "Ensure the full realization of indigenous rights to ancestral lands, as well as to autonomy, indigenous self-determination and jurisdiction, economic development with identity, and culturally appropriate education and health, as set out in national Law and Convention 169 of the ILO" (Earle and Pratt, 2009, p.10).

Due to the mistrust members of COMARU's affiliated communities hold towards larger international NGO's and white individuals who are deemed *'colonos'*, COMARU is made up solely of Machiguengas. They believe this is the only way in which they the organization can truly understand and represent the voices of their affiliate communities. Because COMARU leaders were born in the same communities they represent, they have extremely intimate ties to them.

Earle and Pratt (2009) describe how, although COMARU was founded originally for the purpose of representing its affiliated indigenous communities, "it has begun to adopt protest strategies and mobilize collective activities that are drawn from the strategic repertoire of social movements, specifically protest marches, blockades and boycotts (p. 24). While COMARU has indeed made this transition, it maintains its representative role. In this role, it serves as an intermediary, channeling demands of the communities to the Peruvian state and the companies. Within this intermediary role, COMARU uses its authority to translate the needs and concerns of the communities they represent, in addition to the needs of any other native community within its

geographical range that requests assistance, into language that larger structural entities will pay heed to.

However, as companies have consistently gone against their own codes of conduct in dealing with communities and ruptures in the gas pipeline have led to significant impacts in indigenous livelihoods (Earle and Pratt 2009) "COMARU has had to bring the demands and problems of the Machiguenga, who have been all but excluded from the polity since the creation of the Peruvian state, into the public consciousness and the political arena" (p.25). Through protests, establishment of blockades, and direct confrontations with Peru's armed forces, COMARU has politicized its activities and image and evolved into a considerably more aggressive defender of Machiguenga rights.

So far, this paper has laid out the adverse impacts Machiguenga communities in the Southeast Peruvian Amazon experience due to the Camisea Project and emphasizes their need for support in achieving their rights. In the following sections, I will analyze how well the infrastructure and strategies of COMARU set the organization up for success as a change agent for the Machiguengas.

Evaluation of COMARU's Success as a Change Agent

In order to evaluate the success of COMARU's efforts to act as a successful change agent on behalf of the thirty communities that they represent in the Urubamba I will use four primary criteria referred to earlier:

1. How well does COMARU genuinely amplify the true needs and wishes of their thirty affiliated communities?
2. Does COMARU help to establish a collective Machiguenga identity, which is essential for collective action to occur?
3. Does COMARU demonstrate negotiating power through their ability to procure compensation for the communities from the state, municipality, and extractive companies?

3. Does COMARU hold the state accountable for complying with indigenous rights laws, the ILO's Convention 169 in particular through the use of politicized tactics (strikes, protests, roadblocks, etc.)?

I. Genuine Representation of the Communities

COMARU prides itself upon its intimate collaboration with the communities it serves in order to facilitate a development that reflects their needs. In an interview with Anibal Kategari, the environmental technician from ProNaturaleza through the program PMAC (Programa de Monitoreo Ambiental Comunitario), he said "COMARU is born of the communities. Whatever decision, they make in the communities…the communities are the base that decides every decision" (Anibal Kategari, personal interview, April 13, 2010). Similarly, Plinio, Kategari Kashiari, Co-leader of COMARU, stated, "Meetings between chiefs of the communities, this is what dominates the assembly in general. They are the ones who make decisions, not COMARU…they decide what it is that COMARU is going to do. This is the most important decision of COMARU" (Plinio Kategari Kashiari, personal interview, April 27, 2010). In this section I will analyze to what degree COMARU accurately amplifies the needs of its affiliated communities.

One of the primary ways in which COMARU takes stock of the needs of the communities is by regularly traveling to each one to hold meetings with community leaders and members. Usually about five hours long, the meetings are conducted in Machiguenga so that all members, including ones who do not speak Spanish very well, may participate. Understandably, COMARU's limited financial resources from its primary source of funding, Oxfam America, (Earle and Pratt 2009) and the substantial distance between COMARU's office in Quillabamba and the communities prevent COMARU from making community visits more than two or three times per year. However infrequent, these meetings are essential tools in developing

COMARU's understanding of the health, environmental and concerns of the communities in addition to communication the communities' rights to them. In other words, an invaluable dialogue and trust is forged between COMARU and the communities at these meetings. After listening to community concerns at meetings, COMARU uses meeting information about community needs to persuade the municipality Echarate, extractive companies and the state to implement projects such as the construction of schools.

During community meetings, leaders from COMARU sit at the front of the room in front of the *Jefe* of the community and other community members. These are two separate agendas Plinio, the co-leader of COMARU wrote on the board in Inkaare and Chakopishiato:

Meeting Agenda[2]

1.Alto Lagunas Road[4]
    -passage of vehicles
    -falsification of signatures
2. Communication Radio
3. Educational Institution
4. No participation of young people in community's activities
5. Community organization

Community Development Plan[3]

1. Education
2. Health
3. Land and Resources
4. Culture
5. Community organization

COMARU addresses problems specific to each community such as the construction of the Alto Lagunas road in Inkaare and the passage of the TGP natural gas duct through Shimaa. In Korimani, during my trip with COMARU, a heated argument over territory rights broke out between community members, and COMARU used a map to determine who should hold territory rights. While COMARU deals with these specific problems in each community, they commonly addressed these themes in every community: education, maintenance of culture in the face of the Camisea Project, health issues afflicting the communities due to water contamination

[2] Meeting agenda from Inkaare
[3] Community development plan from community meeting in Chakopishiato
[4] Alto Lagunas is a newly constructed road in Inkaare

from the pipeline ruptures, and strengthening community organization. COMARU greatly stressed community cooperation and said to Inkaare: "the most important thing is to not be divided."

Community member participation in the meetings varied greatly. In Korimani, community members were extremely timid, therefore COMARU and the ex-leader of the community, Andrés Mamanki did the majority of the talking. In Chakopishiato and Inkaare, where Plinio asked community members to voice their desires for the communities, they willingly did so. Inkaare community members wanted a person to give doses of medicine, a radio to be able to report accidents, to be able to call ambulances in Kiteni, medicine because they are seven hours from a health post, and better transportation. Shimaa residents participated by far the most out of the five communities I visited. The health promoter, teacher and chief of the community all individually stood up and spoke of wishes they had for the community. Despite variations in levels of community participation, extremely high turnouts at each meeting demonstrated each community's trust in COMARU and investment in the promotion of their rights.

It is clear that community members view meetings with COMARU as an essential strategy of communicating their concerns surrounding the Camisea Project and other community problems. While they occur infrequently due to funding limitation, they make COMARU unique in that they insure that community members have a voice in what local development projects are pursued. This strategy allows COMARU to relate more intimately with the communities than INGO's, whom have in the past used poor communication methods. According to Pratt (2007), when international and local NGOs have attempted to engage with Machiguenga, they have used

large workshops, which didn't resonate with locals. Overall, they seemed to be more driven by their own agendas rather than by the true needs of the Machiguengas.

II. Development of a Collective Identity

One of the primary goals of COMARU is to protect and strengthen Machiguenga identity in the face of unwanted development (COMARU 2009). COMARU recognizes that, despite the heterogeneity of the communities it represents, the creation of a collective identity is the only way Machiguengas can successfully battle Camisea. Whittier (2002) recognizes this necessity as such:

> Even movements that organize around collectivities that are recognized and legitimized by the dominant culture…must nevertheless construct collective experience: who the group are, what their attributes are, what they have in common, how they are different from other groups, and what the political significance of all this is (as cited in Earle, 2009, p. 710)

Social networks such as COMARU are important in shaping such a collective identity because they facilitate the solidification of identities "with a specific political contention (Passy 2003; cited in Earle 2009). COMARU, through it's media discourse, has promoted the popular notion that Machiguengas are intrinsically connected to nature, and by doing so, have shaped their collective identity through the lens of this historically popular stereotype. In this section, I will analyze to what extent COMARU perpetuates the stereotype of the "noble savage" for the sake of forming a collective identity and also to what extent COMARU permits the Machiguengas they represent to participate in the process of their own liberation.

Earlier, I discussed Freire's theory of the pedagogy of the oppressed (1970), which says that oppressed groups must adopt an active role in the process of their own liberation. He says, "While no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone, neither is he liberated by others" (p.53). Using this ideological framework, the Machiguenga communities can be thought of as the oppressed who are marginalized by their oppressors, the Peruvian government and extractive companies. Burkey (1993) promotes the concept of participatory development as a way of ensuring that local groups have a voice in their own development, which mirrors Freir's argument. While the change agent, in this case COMARU, may serve as an intermediary between locals and larger power-holders, an effective development approach must be rooted in grassroots efforts (Burkey, 1993, p. 166).

COMARU recognizes that it is important for the communities they represent to take an active role in their liberation and that this is achieved by improving Machiguenga confidence. Only when they overcome a lack of confidence in themselves can they rid themselves of their "diffuse, magical belief in the invulnerability and the power of the oppressor" (Freire, 1982, p. 50) and begin to participate in their struggle for liberation. In an interview with Plinio, he commented on how happy he felt when a community member said, "Here I am! Here I am!" upon seeing himself in a picture of a strike on a COMARU t-shirt. Therefore, the strikes and protests which COMARU have increasingly relied upon effectively contribute to a collective Machiguenga identity, despite their dispersed geographic origins. The anniversary party COMARU threw in Quillabamba soon after our trip to Alto Urubamba also served as a means of fostering collective identity and Machiguenga pride. There, community members from both Bajo and Alto Urubamba participated in celebrations of Machiguenga culture through dance and singing performances.

In its efforts to establish a collective identity, however, COMARU sometimes serves to erroneously homogenize the Machiguenga identity and to perpetuate popular stereotypes of natives inherently living in harmony with their environment. Plinio, in an interview, said that, "By nature the Machiguenga has always characterized himself to be a conservationist, to live with nature", and "They say that the native, the Machiguenga, without resources or without the environment, isn't a native, isn't a person" (Plinio, personal interview, April 27, 2010). In COMARU's 2009 bulletin that lists the goals and projects of the organization, COMARU refers to "the extractive gas companies, who have created a disequilibrium in the habitat of our indigenous brothers" which assumes that Machiguengas naturally live in an equilibrium state with nature (COMARU 2009).

Earle (2009) says that by stressing this harmonious relationship, COMARU is most likely attempting to appeal to Western notions of Amazonian indigenous identity, which generally assumes a harmonious bond between indigenous peoples and nature. However, shared geographical origins does not mean that all Machiguuenga have the same needs and attitudes. The perpetuation of this stereotype leads to the creation of an "imagined community" (cited in Earle, 2009, p. 707).

Another potential result of COMARU's identity work is their establishment of an 'Us versus them' mentality (Bruijn, 2010, p. 487) in which the Machiguenga begin to envision themselves as caretakers of the environment and the Peruvian state and extractive companies as evil representatives of modernization (p. 487). While this dichotomy is oversimplified, and COMARU recognizes this oversimplification, they support this dichotomy in order to foster a collective identity based upon anger towards their oppressors. This anger prompts the

communities to band together and pursue collective action through strikes and protests which will be discussed more in-depth later.

III. Effectiveness of Depoliticized Tactics

In the following two sections, I will analyze the effectiveness of COMARU's organizational strategies, both politicized and depoliticized. As previously mentioned, COMARU has made a tangible shift from acting primarily as a representative organization towards a social movement organization. However, as noted by Earle, COMARU "is still at root a representative organization…it was not founded to protest against the work of energy companies (Earle 2009). COMARU's members function as intermediaries between the communities, state, municipality, and extractive companies, translating cultural and linguistic differences to achieve favorable outcomes for the communities. Through this role, leaders of COMARU serve as change agents, "giving legitimacy to groups before they have acquired strength and acceptance on their own" (Burkey 1993).

One of the defining characteristics of a change agent, according to Burkey, is their "working directly with small groups (to) provide a vital link between the groups and local officials" (Burkey, 1982, p. 173) COMARU demonstrated their negotiating power and ability to provide that link when denouncing the architect of a school that was to be built in the community of Chakopishiato by the district municipality, Echarate. The architect appeared, unannounced at the community meeting between COMARU and the communities, and a leader of COMARU denounced the blueprints he was carrying in front of the entire community. He said that the school was so small that "not fit for a chorale of rabbits", let alone children. The community watched in awe as they saw COMARU standing up for them and their childrens' educations in

front of their own eyes. This incident represents COMARU's power to negotiate on behalf of the communities with powerholders.

COMARU's decisions regarding the 2004 public hearing to discuss the development of Block 56, a new energy concession, provides a second example of COMARU playing out its role as an intermediary in negotiations. Through this example, we begin to witness COMARU's adoption of tactics typical of a social movement organization. Finally, it reveals criticisms from NGOs towards COMARU's willingness to compromise with extractive companies. The hearing was to be held in January of 2005, but after the pipeline leading from Block 88, the first energy concession, ruptured, COMARU decided not to attend the hearing. This decision was an important strategic move because the development of the concession depended on the approval of an Environmental Impact Assessment, which would take place at the public hearing. They would not allow the hearing to take place, they decided, until their eight demands, or "ocho puntos" had been met. Amongst the top priorities were:

1. Clarification of the cause of the spill.
2. An inspection of the whole route of the gas pipeline
3. An environmental audit of Block 88's activities and the pipeline
4. Repair of damage to affected communities (Earle 2009)

Company and state representatives did not respond to the eight demands, so COMARU came to the public hearing banging oil drums and shouting "Pagoreni won't be sold, the Machiguenga will defend it" (Earle and Pratt, 2009, p. 704). However, when leaders of CECONAMA and COMARU were invited to hold a meeting with the extractive companies at their headquarters, they agreed to hold a public hearing on May 10th. Some communities were too upset to attend the hearing. COMARU, however, stood by its decision, believing that a failure to cooperate with the companies could lead to a forfeiting of compensation and resources from the companies (Earle 2009).

Activist NGOs who believe indigenous groups should not give extractive companies any access to their territories labeled COMARU's agreement to hold the public hearing as a failure of their negotiations and protest efforts. However, COMARU recognizes that extraction is going to continue in Peru and that it is necessary to hedge your bets when negotiating with extractive companies. Burkey (1993) speaks of the need for change agents to encourage positive relationships between the local groups with whom they work and local officials because extended conflict will eventually destroy a participatory movement (p. 170). Cohen admits that this "implies acceptance of certain rules of social interaction viewed as legitimate, at least temporarily" (as cited in Burkey, 1993, p. 170). With these ideas in mind, COMARU recognizes that while they don't agree with many actions of the energy companies it is necessary to maintain relatively positive relations with them in order to maintain compensation.

When COMARU, the Peru office of UK WWF and two other Peruvian indigenous organizations, CECONAMA and FECONAYY negotiated with the company Shell, they were again highly criticized. Through these negotiations, however, Shell agreed to self-contain Shell workers' camps to minimize worker-community interactions and to not extract in Manu National Park, among other things (Earle 2009). COMARU, CECONAMA and FECONAYY leaders said they were willing to negotiate with Shell because they were more reasonable than other energy companies would have likely been.

Clearly, COMARU's relationship with energy companies is both positive and negative as they strive to hold them accountable but also to sustain company compensation and positive negotiations. Johnson calls this dual relationship a testament of COMARU's being a "central source of legitimate representation" (Johnson 2005) because COMARU continues to "position themselves as a thorn in the companies' side". According to the ex-president of COMARU,

"We're not bothering them so they leave, but so they improve" (Johnson 2005). This contradictory relationship with the companies permeates many of COMARU's activities: in the communities, they hold meetings to organize against the energy companies in buildings constructed by TGP, travel from community to community in a truck with a TGP logo on the side, and watched Avatar with Monte Carmelo community members on a projector purchased by TGP. Therefore, COMARU cunningly exploits company resources to organize against them.

While COMARU has effectively exploited its relationship with energy companies, the organization feels negotiations with the state and the current president, Alan García, are somewhat futile. According to the president, Rúben Miguel Binari Piñarreal, "With this Alan Garcia we aren't going to have clear dialogue. We're waiting for the government to change." He says indigenous communities should pressure the U.S. to tell Alan Garciá "You're not handling the oil companies, and it's tremendous abuse" (Rubén, personal interview, April 16, 2010). Through the *Ley de Promoción de la Inversion en La Amazonia* (Ley 27037), the Peruvian government promises to promote development in the Amazon through implementing projects to improve, health, education, and nutrition. Rubén says that none of these promises have come to fruition in the communities. According to him, "In Peru, democracy is not like they say it is. The center is Lima…the state doesn't invest like it says it does for the communities, but it invests in bridges, in projects, in other things. But here in the communities we don't see that reality, there isn't development."

Despite the state's negligence towards development in Amazonian native communities, they are the ones who should be developing such health and education projects. In regards to this sentiment, Plinio commented, "The one who should develop solutions is the central Peruvian government. Although they have considered us third class citizens, we are born of Peruvian

territory and we have every right to be attended by the state in education, health and sustainable development in every one of the communities" (Plinio, personal interview, April 27 2010). COMARU's vehemently believes that the state will continue to neglect its promise of promoting sustainable development in the Amazon if drastic changes aren't made. Therefore, they have transitioned away from being solely a representative organization towards a social movement organization, using more aggressive tactics in hopes of finally getting state and international attention. In the next section, I will discuss whether or not COMARU is successful in gaining attention and influencing policy through these highly politicized actions.

IV. Effectiveness of COMARU's Politicized Tactics – Do They Lead to Political Change?

Political ecology is an especially useful lens when thinking about COMARU as a social movement organization because it explains how COMARU, a "meso-level" organization "mibro-mobilizes" communities in order to combat top-down environmental change imposed on communities by the state and extractive companies (McAdam *et al.* 1988; Tilly 2004). COMARU is a meso-level organization because its actions take place at some level intermediate between the macro and micro" (as cited in Staggenborg 2002). COMARU, whose activism is based upon "informal friendship networks", as McAdams says many collective action is, has begun to utilize tactics characteristic of social movement organizations (SMOs), such as protesting striking and blocking companies' access to roads. Two important characteristics of professional social movements, according to McCarthy and Zald, are attempting to impart the image of 'speaking for a potential constituency' and influencing policy toward that same constituency', two objectives COMARU prioritizes (McAdams *et al.* 1988).

The environmental degradation wrought by the Camisea Project has prompted the development of collective action from Machiguenga communities in the Southeast Peruvian

Amazon, facilitated by COMARU as the change agent. This phenomenon reflects the "environmental identity and social movement thesis", which says that "changes in environmental management regimes and environmental conditions have created opportunities or imperatives for local groups to secure and represent themselves politically" (Robbins 2004). Machiguengas' frustration and the opportunity to mobilize with the support of COMARU was the "critical event" (Staggenborg 2002) that prompted them to abandon their traditional individualistic values to fight for political change.

Another significant change signaled by this organizational shift is the communities' ability to participate in the process of their own liberation. When COMARU functioned strictly as a representative organization, the communities were virtually excluded from the negotiation process. This exclusion, according to Freire, prevents them from achieving true liberation and, in fact, deepens their oppressed state. In his words, "Those who work for liberation must not take advantage of the emotional dependence of the oppressed…using their dependence to create still greater dependence is an oppressor tactic" (Freire, 1982, p. 53). Now that COMARU organizes strikes and protests which itilize, and in fact, require, the participation of the Machiguenga communities, they may now participate in the process of their own liberation.

The central law for which COMARU is attempting to hold the state accountable is Article 15 of the International Labor Organization's Convention 169. By becoming a signatory to Convention 169, the Peruvian state has an obligation to give native communities the right to "consultation, participation, and decision" in any development projects that could potentially affect their well-being. They also must ensure affected people will experience benefits of the extraction and be paid compensation for damages from the extraction process. (Smith 2005).

COMARU feels that these "rights that the Peruvian government has accepted as law are not being applied in Peru" (Plinio, personal interview, April 27, 2010).

Earle cites three instances in 2005 in which COMARU has successfully mobilized Machiguenga communities to shed light on inadequate responses towards ruptures in the natural gas pipeline (Earle, 2009, p. 26) The first protest activity occurred in response to the previously mentioned public hearing to approve the Environmental Impact Assessment for Block 56. They shouted slogans, waved banners, and banged on empty oil cylinders in order to draw attention to authorities' apathetic attitude towards the spill. After that hearing was suspended and rescheduled, the hearing had to be suspended again when COMARU arranged a boycott (Earle 2009). While COMARU eventually agreed to hold the hearing in fear of losing compensation from the company, it helped COMARU get its feet wet in terms of protesting. The second protest occurred after the fourth rupture in the pipeline when COMARU, in conjunction with two other indigenous organizations, blockaded a river to prevent the transportation of supplies to Camisea.

These protests are significant not only because they attract attention from extractive companies, but also because they promote Machiguenga confidence and a collective identity. Plinio, the *Sub-Jefe* of COMARU says, "What's lacking is the self-esteem in every one of the communities. Commenting on a 2009 protest, he said:

> "One very important aspect is that never in Peru has anyone held a strike for 150 days. But the indigenous have, they've done it. It's a big lesson that the citizens of Peru have received. To show our gratitude to our comrades who have fought, we made t-shirts. It makes me really happy when they say 'Here I am, here I am, look at the picture!' With that, they feel valued and that they haven't fought for nothing, but for a noble cause." (Plinio, personal interview, April 27, 2010).

Clearly, politicized actions help COMARU to achieve one of their goals of fostering a collective identity and increasing the communities' confidence in their ability to organize. Unfortunately, however, COMARU's politicized actions have compromised their already small

financial pool by sacrificing financial support from INGOs that want to "maintain their neutrality" (Earle and Pratt 2009). INGOs completely against negotiating with extractive companies criticize COMARU for collaborating with companies while NGOs that require state approval of their development work criticize COMARU for their aggressive protests that anger the state. According to Pratt, NGO support for COMARU has been minimal, partly because of their wanting to maintain their neutrality. While many claim to support the ideals of the organization, only one INGO has financially supported its efforts for a significant period of time (Pratt 2007).

COMARU has amplified its reputation as a social movement organization on an international scale through its active participation in protests against the "Law of the Jungle". This package of degrees created by the president, Alan García, open up additional tracts of the Amazon to foreign investment, and legal experts say that at least nine of the decrees violate Convention 169 (Rénique 2009). Violent protests involving COMARU and other indigenous organizations such as AIDESEP and the Peruvian Jungle Inter-Ethnic Development Association against these decrees developed into a popular indigenous uprising between April and June of 2009. Images of Machiguengas in traditional dress, carrying signs and bows and arrows appeared in popular media, in addition to reports of the violent clashes between indigenous groups and police.

In early June 2009, police fired upon a crowd of indigenous protesters blocking a highway led to the oil pipeline in Bagua, in the northern region of the Peruvian Amazon. The New York Times reported the death tolls at twenty-five indigenous people, twenty-two civilians, and eleven police offers. García responded to the events by saying, "We have to understand when there are resources like oil, gas and timber, they don't belong only to the people who had

the fortune to be born there, because that would mean more than half of Peru's territory belongs to a few thousand people" (Romero 2009).

As a result of these roadblocks, demonstrations, and marches, García's approval rate dropped to below 25% (Rénique 2009). Finally, in June of 2009**,** Congress annulled decrees 1015 and 1073, the two considered to be the most offensive (Rénique 2009). This victory was a huge success, and proof that mobilization, even when it takes place amongst a group that has been historically oppressed can lead to political change.

Conclusions and Recommendations for COMARU

Since the initiation of the Camisea Project, the Peruvian state has treated native communities in the Amazon as third-class citizens. They have ignored their promise to consult communities and denied them of essential resources to promote sustainable development within the communities. The increasingly adverse impacts of the project have prompted the Machiguengas to overcome their traditional shyness and individualistic attitudes to mobilize with COMARU for their rights.

Community meetings between COMARU and the communities are an essential tool for establishing a clear dialogue between the two regarding concerns and desires for their communities. COMARU shows a genuine interest in the communities due to their actually being from the communities and their physically traveling to the communities to hold these meetings. However, these imperative meetings occur infrequently due to time and funding limitations. NGOs, on the other hand, generally use tactics such as workshops that don't foster a relationship of trust like the communities have with COMARU. Therefore, COMARU should allocate more of their funding towards traveling to communities more than once a year, as they are a critical

component of their strategy of legitimate representation and intimate connection with the communities.

COMARU recognizes that, in order to increase the self-confidence of the communities and to build a common foundation for the social movement they are generating, they must work towards creating a collective Machiguenga identity. Strikes and cultural celebrations are both important strategies to achieving that collective identity. However, in COMARU's development of collective identity, they frequently utilize the 'noble savage' stereotype, an oversimplified representation of native Amazonian peoples, in order to appeal to Western consciousnesses.

While COMARU has successfully adopted strategies typical of a social movement organization, it maintains its role as a representative organization--negotiating with the state, municipality, and energy companies so they will initiate sustainable development projects in the communities. COMARU has demonstrated its ability to successfully serve as an intermediary time and time again through achieving compensation for the communities. NGO's criticize COMARU for negotiating too heavily with the companies, but COMARU stands by its company negotiations because they recognize they can't foster a completely adversarial relationship with them if they are going to continue to receive compensation. Given that the communities do not currently play a significant role in negotiations, COMARU should make an effort to involve them more so that they may participate in the process of their own liberation.

While COMARU continues to negotiate with powerholders, an increased sense of urgency has prompted the organization to take on strategies more typical of social movement organizations (SMOs) such as strikes, roadblocks and protests. The participation of Machiguenga community members in these public protests allows Machiguengas to take part in the process of their own liberation and attract national and international attention to the demands of COMARU

and the indigenous organizations with which it collaborates. These protests have come at the cost of the deaths of Machiguengas, civilians and police officers, but in the end, they led to policy changes favorable to the Machiguengas. The withdrawal of the two decrees within the "Law of the Jungle" occurred partly through COMARU's banding together with other Peruvian indigenous groups, so COMARU should work to maintain and strengthen these coalitions to achieve future similar victories.

This paper contributes to conversations started by political ecology scholars such as Bebbington (2009) and McAdams (1988) due to its reliance upon social network theory, the environmental identity and social movement thesis, change agents and collective action. Political ecology helps shed light on how unequal power structures can provide a foundation for environmental degradation, but in this paper, it also demonstrates how those unequal power structures can be navigated and manipulated in the pursuit of justice for a historically marginalized population. COMARU, like every organization that works for human rights in the face of unwanted development, displays a few weaknesses within its structure that need to be addressed to sustain organizational success. Nevertheless, COMARU proves to be an incredibly unique organization because it *has* manipulated these unequal power structures in order to promote the rights of this population it so genuinely cares for.

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