



## ETHNOGRAPHY OF AN INDIGENOUS STUDENT ORGANIZATION IN PERUVIAN AMAZONIA: THE AMBIVALENCE OF PROTEST

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Bagua, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009. On behalf of their rights and identity, the “indigenous” populations of the Amazonas region (a province of Peruvian Amazonia) protested against decrees facilitating the extraction of hydrocarbon from their lands. When the forces of order intervened to clear a road that had been blocked for two months, nine protestors were killed. In retaliation, 25 policemen were taken hostage and executed.<sup>1</sup> The Interethnic Amazon Forest Development Association (Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana, AIDESEP, henceforth “the Association”) played a key role in this protest. Present at various territorial levels (native communities,<sup>2</sup> districts, départements) since 1980, the Association claims to represent more than 90 percent of the 332,000 indigenous people living in Peruvian Amazonia in 2007.<sup>3</sup> Following the events of in Bagua, several of the Association’s leaders were prosecuted and its President, Alberto Pizango, went into exile in Nicaragua. The French press summarized

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Hughes, “Indigenous Protest in Peru: The ‘Orchard Dog’ Bites Back”, *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest*, 9 (1), 2010, pp. 85-90.

<sup>2</sup> Native communities have legal status. This status is granted them on the basis of precise criteria: linguistic, cultural and social specificities, shared possession of a given territory on which the community lives in a nuclear or dispersed manner. See decrees no. 20653 (1974) and 22175 (1978).

<sup>3</sup> In 2007, the National Institute of Statistics and Data Processing (INEI) for the first time conducted a census specifically of the indigenous population using the same criteria as for native communities. INEI, // *Censo de las comunidades indígenas de la Amazonia peruana*, Lima, National Institute of Statistics and Data Processing, 2008. On the representativeness of the Association, see Jorge Dandler, *Pueblos indígenas de la Amazonia peruana y desarrollo sostenible*, Lima, OIT/Oficina de Area y Equipo Técnico Multidisciplinario para los países del área andina, 1998.

this episode of head-on confrontation between protestors and police with the headline, “Seeing Red: The Indians of Peru Go to War”.<sup>4</sup>

On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, I met Raul<sup>5</sup> in Iquitos. For three years, this 22 year old student from the Achuar ethnic group had been a member of the Iquitos-based Student Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Peruvian Amazonia (Organización de Estudiantes de los Pueblos Indígenas de la Amazonía Peruana, OEPIAP, henceforth “the Organization”). On several occasions, Raul took part in demonstrations against the numerous oil companies that operate in his native region. During the events of 5 June 2009 in Bagua, he campaigned alongside the Organization’s then president, Willem, at the head of the Iquitos indigenous committee. At the time of my interview with him, he told me that he had been contacted by a representative of an oil company several months earlier who requested that he encourage the authorities of his native community to negotiate with the company. This has led him to “betray his people”, he admitted: “They told me to present myself as part of the regional government. I agreed [...] I arrived and told them, ‘ok, so I’m from the regional government’. But in reality, I was from the oil company. [...] I convinced two Apus<sup>6</sup> and brought them with me to Lima.”<sup>7</sup> The Apus ultimately authorized the company to extend its activity to the portion of the petrol allotment on which they live. Today, the company supplies a major part of the Organization’s budget.

Bagua and Iquitos, confrontation and agreement: comparison of these two accounts invites one to consider the complexity of indigenous protest, which cannot be reduced to the “warlike” practices visible in moments of effervescence. The OEPIAP is an ideal terrain for reconstructing this protest moment’s polyvocality. The interactions that take place there cannot simply be reduced to confrontation but must also be analyzed from the perspective of the space in which they occur. With a population of 380,000 people, Iquitos is the capital of Loreto, an Amazonian region that extends

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<sup>4</sup> Hélène Despici-Popovic, “Coup de sang. Les Indiens du Pérou repartent en guerre », *Libération*, 8 June 2009.

<sup>5</sup> All individuals encountered in the course of my fieldwork and quoted in this article are referred to by pseudonym.

<sup>6</sup> A Quechua term referring to the traditional leaders of several Amazonian ethnic groups.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Raul, a 22 year old nursing student. Iquitos, 23 June 2010. All translations of citations and interviews in this article are mine.

across the northeastern third of the nation's territory. With indigenous people comprising 39.5 percent of the population, this province is the country's most ethnically diverse. Around a quarter of its total surface area is covered by actively operating petrol concessions<sup>8</sup> and most of the other allotments are in negotiation, a fact that regularly provokes conflict with the native communities on whose lands the allotments are located. Despite a sustained effort throughout Peru's history to "domesticate" this "eastern frontier", the road system is underdeveloped and several days of travel by river are sometimes necessary to reach native communities.<sup>9</sup> Young indigenous people, growing numbers of whom are heading to towns to study, play a crucial role in the evolution of ethnicity policies.<sup>10</sup> Enrolled at the public university, they often join indigenous student associations such as the OEPIAP, which has around fifty members. All come from the native communities of Loreto and live together in Iquitos since the Organization's creation in 2003.

An examination of the sociabilities, interactions and trajectories of the young members of the OEPIAP underscores the complexity of indigenous protest, which cannot be reduced to a binary opposition between domination and resistance.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Politicization of "Indigenous Youth"**

The creation of indigenous student organizations<sup>12</sup> is strongly linked to increased rates of school attendance among indigenous populations. Indeed, since the 1940s, the spread of bilingual teacher training programs in Peruvian Amazonia – initially on the initiative of evangelical or Catholic organizations in cooperation with the Minister of

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<sup>8</sup> Estimation based on the map of allotments granted by the state petrol extraction promotion agency, Perúpetro, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Frederica Barclay, Fernando Santos-Granero, *La frontera domesticada: historia económica y social de Loreto, 1850-2000*, Lima, Fondo Editorial PUCP, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Oscar Espinosa de Rivero, "Ciudad e identidad cultural. ¿Cómo se relacionan con lo urbano los indígenas amazónicos peruanos en el siglo XXI?", *Bulletin de l'institut français d'études andines*, 38 (1), 2009, p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> The present article draws on two ethnographic studies carried out in June-July 2010 and January-April 2011, respectively. These studies led to interviews with 15 members of the Organization; the distribution of a questionnaire to 40 of its members, daily observation of the Organization's operation and an examination of its archives (OEPIAP, other activist organizations, the media and the police). This work was complemented by a return to the field in 2012 to submit the report that resulted from the student survey.

<sup>12</sup> Associations also exist in Lima, Pucallpa (Amazonia) and Cusco (Andes).

Education, subsequently in the framework of the AIDSESEP's development projects – has been reflected in a growing rate of literacy in these populations.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the Association has entered into a series of agreements with public universities to promote access to higher education among indigenous students.

### **Between Subsistence and Distinction**

Young indigenous people who enter the university nevertheless find themselves confronted with very difficult living conditions. Far removed from their native communities, they have very little spending money, a poor command of Spanish and generally suffer from a sub-standard level of general education. Indeed, many abandon their studies before completing the programs in which they are enrolled.<sup>14</sup> In 2002, the first cohort of native community students entered the main public university in the Loreto region, Iquitos' National University of Peruvian Amazonia (UNAP), with which the AIDSESEP had just reached an agreement. Though they were housed in the premises of the Association, these new students had difficulty finding money for their university and food expenditures. Collective organization offered a solution to concerns over individual subsistence: formally enrolled on district registers on 12 December 2003, the official mission of the OEPIAP is to “manage the donations of public and private institutions, both national and foreign [...] in order to support the university-related expenditures of the students of Peruvian Amazonia”.<sup>15</sup> Thus, even if it has ties to the local and regional federations of the AIDSESEP, the initial aim of the OEPIAP was not to represent the collective interests of native communities.

These students' status is evidence of the ambivalent character of “indigenous youth”. Their passage to adulthood is now marked by an educational career rather than

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<sup>13</sup> In 1993, 49% of those speaking a native tongue as their first language could neither read nor write; in 2007, that figure was 38%. For those who speak Spanish as their first language, the results were 15% in 1993 and 14% in 2007 (INEI, *IX Censo de población y vivienda*, Lima, INEI, 1993; INEI, *II Censo de las comunidades indígenas de la Amazonia peruana*, cited above).

<sup>14</sup> O. Espinosa de Rivero, “Para vivir mejor: Los indígenas amazónicos y su acceso a la educación superior en el Perú”, *Revista ISEES (Inclusión social y Equidad en la Educación Superior)*, 2, 2008, pp. 87-116.

<sup>15</sup> Article 4 of the statutes of the OEPIAP.

“rites of initiation”.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, even though they appear to be significantly lacking in cultural, economic and social capital relative to their university peers, these young indigenous people are generally drawn from the most influential groups of their place of origin. Of the 40 students I surveyed in 2011, 36 stated that their family included a school teacher, a leader<sup>17</sup> and/or an individual holding local political office (generally that of mayor, assistant mayor or “justice of the peace”<sup>18</sup>). They also have ties to networks of political influence and their proximity to the leaders of local AIDSESP federations allows them to master the information necessary for entering the university. Mainly male, they appear to belong to the dominant of the dominated. Ties of kinship and membership in the federations and networks of inter-ethnic affinity that emerged in the missionary schools attended by most members of the OEPIAP also played a decisive role in averting these young people to the existence of the Organization, which they then sought to join in order to benefit from the food and housing it offered.

### **The Assertion of a “Warrior” Collective in Competition with the AIDSESP**

In 2006, young indigenous people daily lined up at the university dining hall in the hope of being able to eat other students’ leftovers. Access to the dining hall was reserved to students with a mean score of 12 or higher out of 20, results rarely obtained by indigenous students. A member of Socialist Youth (JS), which is affiliated with the Trotskyite Socialist Worker Party (PST), noticed the waiting students. The Party’s representatives in Iquitos saw helping the indigenous student organization as a way for the Party – hard hit by the collapse of the radical left in Peru – to survive on the activist scene.<sup>19</sup> On 22 May 2006, the OEPIAP and JS decided to jointly occupy the rector’s

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<sup>16</sup> Sylvie Poirier, “Les dynamiques relationnelles des jeunes autochtones”, in Natacha Gagné, Laurent Jérôme (ed.), *Jeunesses autochtones. Affirmation, innovation et résistance dans les mondes contemporains*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Dirigente’ in Spanish. This term is used to designate presidents of the indigenous organization at the local, regional and national levels.

<sup>18</sup> These “justices of the peace” are elected at the local level on the basis of their prestige. They generally have no legal training and mainly intervene in the case of minor offenses.

<sup>19</sup> Created in 1971, the PST is one of six Trotskyite factions born of the insurrectionary “new left” of the 1960s (Ricardo Letts, *La izquierda peruana. Organizaciones y tendencias*, Lima, Mosca Azul Editores, 1981). Like other Marxist organizations, the Party fell into discredit as a result of the persecution of the Shining Path. The number of its activists (50) and supporters (200) is testimony of its present weakness (estimation supplied by one of the last officials of the PST living in Iquitos, informal conversation 26 June 2012, Lima).

office, where administrative staff were held hostage for a day. Wearing “war paint”,<sup>20</sup> the occupiers covered the walls of the dining hall with slogans such as “Long live the indigenous struggle!”<sup>21</sup> As a result, they were granted special access to the dining hall, paid for by the Regional Council of Loreto. This subversive action strengthened ties between JS and the OEPIAP. The Organization’s next two presidents (2006-2010) joined the Trotskyite collective, followed by a handful of indigenous students. The new recruits participated in JS’s training and reading workshops, which had seized upon a 2006 corruption scandal involving the university’s management to increase its pool of activists and ensure its political survival.

The indigenous members of the Trotskyite group acquired new skills in the art of expressing their ideas, tailoring their discourse and organizing protests. As they occupied positions of authority within the OEPIAP, their experience influenced the Organization’s internal debates. The minutes of its weekly meetings show politicization, understood as increased discursive generality and an affirmation of the confrontational nature of the positions adopted.<sup>22</sup> They mention, for example, the creation of a “propaganda committee”, a political analysis of the government and an “action plan” for the Organization.<sup>23</sup> The development of these practices took place in the context of a network of locally organized organizations. Students also protested alongside the local section of the General Confederation of Peruvian Workers, the country’s largest labor union, and NGO’s involved with environmental questions. The growing alliance with ecologist NGOs, which possessed greater material resources than the PST, thus favored the spread of a representation of indigenous people as “ecologically noble savages”.<sup>24</sup> For the AIDSESEP, involvement in urban activist networks corrupts indigenous people; the Association criticized the OEPIAP and withdrew its support. In

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<sup>20</sup> The expressions “war paint” and “war dances” were used on several occasions by local media (in particular, the *La Región* daily), who seemed to find particular interest in the “authentically” indigenous aspect of these young people in an urban context.

<sup>21</sup> According to photographs of the scene after the occupation of the rector’s office. Personal archives of a PST activist.

<sup>22</sup> Camille Hamidi, “Éléments pour une approche interactionniste de la politisation: engagement associatif et rapport au politique dans les associations locales issues de l’immigration”, *Revue française de science politique*, 56 (1), 2006, pp. 5-25.

<sup>23</sup> Up to date records of OEPIAP meetings since 2004 (required of all officially registered associations).

<sup>24</sup> Kent H. Redford, “The Ecologically Noble Savage”, *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 15 (1), 1990, pp. 46-48.

2009, the indigenous students thus found themselves obliged to relocate to the premises of an “allied” ecologist NGO, the Loreto Environmentalist Network (RAL). This NGO emphasized the notion of indigenous roots and students were daily reminded of them by their new location, which was situated on the town’s periphery and surrounded by luxurious vegetation: the houses were on stilts and the site was organized around premises dedicated to ritual practices, as in a native community.

The conjuncture of these various influences was expressed by a performance that the students of the Organization reproduced on the occasion of their protests, whether targeting the regional government, petrol companies, the university authorities or the policies of the national government. Most often, they occupied premises, held a demonstration and even set up *piquetes* or road blocks – relatively violent practices, since any vehicle that ventured into town when a *piquete* had been announced risked punitive destruction (burnt tires, damaged frames, broken windows, and so on). On the occasion of these various protests, the students, who usually wore jeans and tee-shirts, went about shirtless. With their bodies and faces covered in “war paint”, they sported the feather crowns and jewelry of traditional indigenous authorities and vigorously chanting their slogans. Sometimes, they ended their interventions with a “war dance”: two protesters faced one another, mutually calling to one another in their native tongue while miming club blows and leaping in place to the rhythm of their shouts. The ambivalence of the category ‘indigenous’, a crucial resource of mobilization, can be seen in the manner in which Guillermo responded to a question concerning his indigenous origins. The son of missionaries, born in the town of Yurimaguas, Guillermo left with his parents at age 7 to live in the community of Balsapuerto among the Shawi people: “In certain cases, yes; in others, I would say not. Here, in the Organization, I say ‘but yes, really! Okay, I was not born in the Balsapuerto community and Shawi is not my mother tongue but I speak it!’ But if one asks me at the university, I say that I was born in the town of Yurimaguas. [...] Because at the university, most people are mestizo, no? Few people are interested in the indigenous movement.”<sup>25</sup> This discourse reflects the plasticity of the appeal to ethnicity, which is only activated when the interest it generates

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Guillermo, a 19 year old student in agronomy, Iquitos, 16 February 2011.

allows the students to improve their condition. Guillermo is indigenous when it is a matter of getting involved or justifying his admission to the OEPIAP – in other words, when he is in the presence of people who “are interested” in the indigenous question. But the criteria of identification are flexible. While the official condition for membership in the Organization is to have been born and raised in a native community, Guillermo prefers to emphasize his knowledge of the language, which he learned by living in the Balsa Puerto community for ten years. As the “indigenous” tag tends to be looked down upon at the university, by contrast, Guillermo abstains from using it. Rather, he seeks to melt into the crowd of “mestizo” students, the descendants of colonists from the Peruvian coast, the Andes and even Europe, who are seen as forming the better part of the population of Iquitos.

The theatricalization of the students’ “indigenous roots” and the frequency of their demonstrations encouraged widespread coverage in local media outlets. In the course of a wave of protest that began in 2008 (and included the 2009 events in Bagua), the leaders of the OEPIAP led the Iquitos Action Committee and the press referred to Willem as the “leader representing the region’s Amazonian ethnic groups”.<sup>26</sup> The student collective thus succeeded in locally substituting itself for the bodies of the AIDSESEP network at a time when the latter had been weakened by the legal proceedings undertaken against Pizango in the aftermath of the Bagua events. Having returned from exile, Pizango passed through the town of Yurimaguas in June 2010. I happened to be there as well, accompanying Willem in his campaign as candidate of a small local party in the regional elections. We were staying in the same hotel as Pizango and this allowed me to enter into contact with the members of the Association. While an activist from Willem’s party tried to secure me an interview with the president of the AIDSESEP, someone close to the latter intervened and asked about my project. This was the Director of the AIDSESEP’s Training Program for Indigenous Professionals in Intercultural Health. When he realized that I knew the Organization’s president, he strongly criticized it. He disapproved of the acculturation of these students who, without consulting the communities’ traditional leaders, had become involved with parties

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<sup>26</sup> “Garantizamos una protesta pacífica”, *La Región*, 11 June 2009.



oriented towards the proletariat. In the program he directs, students receive a full scholarship, solely devote themselves to their studies and pledge to return to their communities of origin to exercise their professions. Clearly, I had not passed the test: I had chosen an illegitimate object for analyzing indigenous protest and was therefore not invited to talk with the AIDSESEP's president.<sup>27</sup> The two organizations fought with one another for monopoly over the urban representation of indigenous communities and disagreed with regards to the definition of the "good native". While the AIDSESEP defined the latter as preserved from all external influence, the OEPIAP thought he should be a leader open to the contributions of "Western" style activism.

### **"Paradoxical Friendships" and Networks of Mediation**

The indigenous students present themselves as influential members of their communities, a stance picked up by the press, which describes them as "leaders of the [Peruvian] indigenous movement". They are consequently well placed to ensure translation between the dominant culture and their places of origin.

### **Intermediaries in Sites of Mediation**

Indigenous students have a tendency to acquire new legitimacy within their communities, where a conception of authority linked to age and knowledge of ritual traditionally prevails. Luis, who was President of the OEPIAP in 2011, recalls the day when, returning to his community, he was appointed to preside over a meeting without having offered to do so: "At the meetings, they were perfectly aware that I was a student. During each of my vacations, I went there and talked with the Apus, the school teachers... you know, with the leaders."<sup>28</sup> While it is sometimes contested within the communities, this legitimacy is emphasized by young indigenous people, who see themselves as an educated elite possessing rare skills. By virtue of this, they are able to "intervene in various arenas characterized by what can be significantly remote rules,

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<sup>27</sup> Field notes, Yurimaguas, 30 June 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Luis, a 27 year old student in environmental engineering, Iquitos, 17 February 2011.

procedures, knowledge and representations”.<sup>29</sup> They are thus capable of occupying an intermediary role that simultaneously involves a search for compromise and the construction of “‘common meaning’ between institutional environments that do not appeal to the same knowledge and representations”.<sup>30</sup>

Their skills as mediators are sought after on a daily basis: they are regularly contacted by ecologist NGO’s hoping to launch awareness-raising campaigns in the communities, local political parties or indigenous candidates<sup>31</sup> seeking votes in regional elections and companies wishing to enter into dialogue with communities that have historically opposed all extractive activity. Luis recalled several trips with James, the President of the Loreto Environmentalist Network (RAL), to various native communities: “[I gave] a talk to the Kukama on environmental issues. I knew a lot of people there. I also travelled with James for a workshop on the environment in my community, [...] to give a workshop in language.<sup>32</sup> In Spanish, and translated into language. I distributed and explained Convention 169.”<sup>33</sup> Luis, whose mother tongue is Awajún, presents himself as an appropriate mediator, even with ethnic groups other than his own, such as the Kukama. Translation is thus not only a linguistic matter; it is also a matter of transmitting from one social universe to another such concepts as those developed by Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization. While their content varies, the messages communicated by the indigenous student observe similar modes of transmission: translation takes place as much along linguistic lines as conceptual and procedural.

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<sup>29</sup> Olivier Nay, Andy Smith, “Les intermédiaires en politique. Médiations et jeux d’institutions », in O. Nay, A. Smith (eds.), *Le gouvernement du compromis, Courtiers et généralistes dans l’action publique*, Paris, Économica, 2002, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> In the past dozen years, every list of candidates to regional elections in zones with large indigenous populations must meet a particular quota of indigenous candidates. Electoral law no. 27683 (15 March 2002).

<sup>32</sup> When they refer to their native tongue, the students speak of “*idioma*” (language), without necessarily adding the qualification “indigenous”.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Luis, cited above.

## The Distribution of OEPIAP Students by Field of Study

| Field of Study  | Percentage (n=58) |
|---|-------------------|
| Health (pharmacology, nursing, medicine) and primary school teaching    | 27.6              |
| Environment (agronomy, ecology, environmental management, biology)      | 27.6              |
| Industry (food, electronics, computer science, chemical engineering...) | 20.7              |
| Administration, international trade, accounting                         | 12.1              |
| Arts, letters and human sciences (anthropology, law, philosophy)        | 12.1              |

100.01\*

Source: OEPIAP data registers, consulted in Iquitos on 24 March 2011.

\* Percentages rounded to the highest decimal point.

Three quarters of all members of the Organization are trained in medical, environmental or industrial technology. They have turned towards domains seen as “compatible” with their indigenous status and which are, above all, less selective. While most of these fields are located at the bottom of the disciplinary hierarchy – running from the most technical to the most abstract and demanding in regards to mastery of Spanish – the students nevertheless become initiated into specific bodies of knowledge which allow them to translate their interlocutors’ messages for native communities. Luis does not only translate the messages of ecologist NGO’s: on several occasions, he has served as a mediator between representatives of his district’s communities and a petrol company that wanted to operate in his region.

## The Legitimation of Material Exchanges in Terms of Friendship

My interviews revealed that, since 2009, a multiplicity of individual alliances have existed between students seeking revenue and the region’s petrol companies. It even happens that the former offer the latter their services as translators or negotiators with

their communities of origin without seeking remuneration. These alliances are sometimes condemned due to their opaque character: a student was excluded from the Organization, another stripped of his post as president. They evoke the “collusive transaction” that Michel Dobry has defined as “exchanges between actors situated in different and autonomous fields [...] all involved in the games or issues specific to the social sectors in which they are immersed.”<sup>34</sup> Actors who are not party to these exchanges describe them as illegitimate but they nevertheless generate legitimacy to the degree that they are accompanied by mutual recognition among the sectors involved in the transaction. This is what is revealed by analysis of the formation of a collusive transaction observed in the field.

Iquitos, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011. At one of the general assemblies that takes place every Sunday morning, it is announced that Jorge, a petrol company engineer, will be visiting. The entire group is waiting patiently in the meeting room when Jorge arrives, preceded by students carrying boxes. Willem presents him as a “very old friend”, they embrace, joke with one another in front of their “audience” and address one another in familiar terms. After the boxes have been opened – they are filled with an impressive quantity of kitchen utensils personally offered to the Organization by the engineer – a dozen students rise to individually present themselves to Jorge and thank him. The latter then speaks for around an hour. He says that he first met Willem’s family more than fifteen years earlier while working as an engineer at one of his company’s petrol extraction sites, located near the young indigenous man’s native community. He recounts a series of anecdotes to emphasize his familiarity with the frugality of daily indigenous life (sleeping on the ground, the risk of catching rabies from bats and so on) and encourages the young natives to preserve the humility that is particular to their background while accepting help from outsiders. The meeting lasts more than two hours.<sup>35</sup> Willem subsequently tells me that he met Jorge during the mobilizations of 2008-09: at the time President of the OEPIAP and the Iquitos action committee, he had been called upon by the engineer, who wished to meet him. Since then, they see one

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<sup>34</sup> Michel Dobry, “Valeurs, croyances et transactions collusives. Notes pour une réorientation de l’analyse de la légitimation des systèmes démocratiques”, in Javier Santiso (ed.), *À la recherche de la démocratie. Mélanges offerts à Guy Hermet*, Paris, Karthala, 2002, p. 111.

<sup>35</sup> Field notes.

another on a regular basis and Jorge helped him finance his electoral campaign. Willem speaks to me of Jorge as a “friend”.<sup>36</sup>

In clientelist relations, the term ‘friendship’ is frequently employed. Presenting “a relationship objectively determined by the unequal distribution of resources between individuals under the subjective aspect of a voluntary and morally justified tie”,<sup>37</sup> it establishes a long-term relationship of obligation. Part of an internal struggle for influence, the gift of kitchen utensils is a means of extending the ramifications of this “friendship” between Willem and the engineer to the entirety of the OEPIAP. Indeed, excluded from the OEPIAP by Willem, Pedro created his own NGO, bringing on board a number indigenous students, including Luis, President of the Organization. Seeking to monopolize control over access to resources, Willem encouraged Luis to reorient himself towards collaboration with Jorge and away from Pedro. “Since Jorge is my friend, he wants to learn my language, Awajún. He wants to pay for that. I looked for someone from the OEPIAP: Luis. I want [Luis] to understand that, once he is engaged [in this service], by giving [Jorge] all information necessary [to carrying out our projects], the OEPIAP will be able to find continued funding. Above all, I want to take it away from [Pedro’s NGO] and I am going to tell him, ‘You know what, give it up and work. Teach Jorge and he’ll pay you’.”<sup>38</sup>The Awajún courses appeared to favor closer collaboration between the OEPIAP and Jorge’s company. By facilitating this relationship, which will give the Organization access to new resources, Willem hopes to retain his influence over the OEPIAP. Such struggles within the Organization thus facilitate the formation of relations of cooperation with the economic sector. Luis teaches Jorge Awajún every day from 19h to 21h. The latter lingers after his courses, inviting all fifty students to dinner on several occasions and profiting from this to give them advice. The “friend” thus acts as a guide and possesses the authority to judge. By insisting on the values of “humility” and “openness”, he encourages the students to seek alliances and engage in dialogue. Yet the discourse of “openness” and “trust” that accompanies the ritualization of

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<sup>36</sup>Interview with Willem, former president of the OEPIAP and regional representative, 25 year old student in pharmacology, Iquitos, 6 March 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Louis Briquet, “Des amitiés paradoxales. Échanges intéressés et morale du désintéressement dans les relations de clientèle”, *Politix*, 12 (45), 2009, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup>Interview with Willem, cited above.

friendship serves as a device for authorizing certain behaviors and disqualifying others. While opening oneself to others is tantamount to discernment, closing oneself and refusing the ideas brought to the table by external interlocutors amounts to opposing progress within the Organization. Through the creation of such “paradoxical friendships”, hierarchies and criteria of judgment are established which correspond to the good faith of the actors and their willingness to engage in dialogue. Little by little, the students’ practices were reformulated: the “warriors” they incarnated in the media became professionals of mediation. The resulting advantages played a crucial role: aside from the occasional “gifts” they received, mainly came from the extractive sector, 2500 Euros are deposited on a monthly basis in the OEPIAP’s bank account by T., a Canadian petrol company operating in the region.<sup>39</sup>

### **“Political Maturity”: Reformulating the Principles of Collective Action**

Regional councilor on the list of a small local party since September 2010, Willem had earlier spent three years as an activist in the PST. At the time of our meeting in June 2010, he criticized indigenous leaders who were in dialogue with the state and claimed to distrust negotiation, preferring to put his efforts into mobilization instead.<sup>40</sup> Six months after being elected to the regional council, he admitted to having changed his mind: “Significant legal parameters have changed. T. is a (petrol) company with a very high social responsibility rating. They talk about global warming, social and environmental responsibility. But the leaders don’t know this because they never go to the trouble of talking with them! We do.”<sup>41</sup> Willem criticizes the position of the AIDSESEP, which totally rejects hydrocarbon exploitation: “[They] still say ‘we don’t want any petrol companies because they pollute our land!’ This is common language. But that will all disappear, you’ll see. Little by little, they will realize that that doesn’t exist anymore. What exists are high ratings and oversight parameters. From which they are isolated.

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<sup>39</sup> This amount (10,000 soles) is mentioned by the students and appears in the internal accounts of the OEPIAP. According to the 2012 president (Willem’s older brother), this is the Organization’s only source of financing if one sets aside occasional individual assistance solicited by James, President of the RAL, among British and Polish families on behalf of indigenous students (field notes, Iquitos, 18 June 2012).

<sup>40</sup> Informal conversation on the way from Iquitos to Yurimaguas, 24 June 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Willem, cited above.

[...] The problem is not petrol companies and foreigners. The problem is our own laws! We simply need a process of formalization. [...] Now, I have some thoughts for Congress. I want to create a solid indigenous movement!”<sup>42</sup> Willem and his organization distinguish themselves from “common language” by agreeing to “talk” with the petrol companies. It is only in this way, according to them, that they have come to understand that there is no longer any justification for uncompromising refusal; “social responsibility ratings” and “legal parameters” have changed the way in which petrol is extracted. They present themselves as the avant-garde of a new “indigenous movement”, the aim of which will be to “formalize” and implement clear laws capable of improving the living conditions of indigenous peoples by obtaining seats in Congress. The AIDSESEP, by contrast, is in their view condemned to remain outside of this process, locked into a stance of uncompromising opposition.

The OEPIAP is the space of socialization for this “good”, technical and legalist leadership, whose reformulation influences the way in which young indigenous people conceive of collective action. President of the RAL, the NGO that accommodates the students, James is one of the Organization’s foremost “friends”. He appreciates the collective “progress” it has made: “The group matured by understanding that its political role, instead of being limited to protest alone, was to assign itself certain objectives, to win space. [...] Protesting just to win five places in the dining hall is relatively easy. But to have winning more places at the university as one’s political project, having a better organization, seeking out allies is much more than a protest role.”<sup>43</sup> The “political role” that results from this process of maturation consists of inserting oneself into a space of alliances: protest is a form of infancy that must give way to a real politics, which involves networking and negotiation. While the number of protests in which the OEPIAP participates has not diminished, their symbolic dimension now prevails. This is a matter of “winning spaces”, establishing legitimacy in order to then negotiate with the regional or university authorities. The Organization can thus attract the interest of strategic interlocutors and thereby create and maintain the alliances necessary to its survival.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Interview with James, President of the Loreto Environmentalist Network (RAL), Iquitos, 23 March 2011.

These visible moments of protest nourish an activity of permanent “management”<sup>44</sup> that is at the foundation of the indigenous students’ collective action. This action mainly aims to establish projects ensuring the visibility – and thus the viability – of the Organization. Examples of such action observed in the course of my field work include the creation of a regional radio program, the establishment of an intercultural school in cooperation with local authorities and the publication of an OEPIAP review financed by Jorge the engineer – so many opportunities for bringing in revenue.

The reorientation of the Organization’s practices – from radical protest to discussion and project management – has obeyed principles of judgment that serve to discredit those who part ways with its rules of action. In the course of my field work, I saw that students who were considered too uncompromising exposed themselves to sanction: those who sought to break the alliance with James, criticizing his secret management of resources from petrol companies in the local media, were ejected from the Organization; the student who criticized another OEPIAP member at a meeting open to “friends” of the Organization was silenced.<sup>45</sup> These processes for discrediting dissident voices were reflected in the evolution of the individual positions held by students and the justifications they offered for them: they presented themselves as potential mediation professionals. Indeed, the relatively long duration of affiliation – a consequence of the difficulty mentioned above for students to reach the end of their studies<sup>46</sup> – favors practices of collective action over individual strategies. To questions regarding their professional aspirations, the students almost always respond by referring to the projects that they hope to establish in the area of development, ecology or natural resource management. Of the 36 students I surveyed, 13 claimed to have already worked, most of them in the hydrocarbon sector (4) and/or NGOs (6). Most of those who have left the university are local representatives, founders or employees of NGOs seeking to ensure the development of natural resources or the cultural heritage of their community or technicians in the “community relations services” of petrol companies. They emphasize the “horizontal” and “flexible” aspect of their projects,

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<sup>44</sup> A recurrent expression used by the leaders of the OEPIAP in describing their activity.

<sup>45</sup> Field notes, Iquitos, 20 March 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Among respondents to the questionnaire, 14 of the 25 students who have been affiliated with the Organization for over a year claimed to have interrupted their studies at least once.



whether relating to political representation, economic development or the preservation of indigenous culture. In all cases, they possess the skills of indigenous mediator, which they adapt to the diversity of interlocutors who seek to enter into contact with their communities. Indeed, the multiplication of so-called “participatory” spaces and the spread of the discourse of durable and community development (a “formula” that encourages contradictory interests to make concessions<sup>47</sup>) have promoted encounters among the various sectors in which the students work: indigenous bodies, local and regional authorities, petrol companies and ecologist NGOs. In the event of conflict, these young professionals represent strategic intermediaries who participate in the “government of compromise”. Their educational capital confers legitimacy upon them in the eyes of their native communities; their representativeness confers it upon them in the eyes of external interlocutors. In this, the careers of the various members of the OEPIAP recall the tendency to “institutional activism” among organizations that, having emerged as protest collectives, come to ensure the management of certain issues alongside the very authorities who had been the targets of their protest.<sup>48</sup>

As a localized field of analysis, the OEPIAP reflects the plurality of the “range of strategies and interactions that are deployed between the pole of the dominant and that of the dominated” and reminds us of what is at stake “in this fuzzy – and fluctuating – zone where the ‘dominated of the dominant’ and the ‘dominant of the dominated’ rub shoulders”.<sup>49</sup> Indigenous protest cannot be reduced to forceful opposition of the sort witnessed during the 2008-09 mobilizations. While these moments of effervescence constitute important spaces of political socialization and serve as an indication of the significant stakes involved in issues of indigenous protest, that protest itself is eminently polyvocal, as reflected in the daily life of the indigenous students. Their practices can take the form of radical criticism of designated adversaries in the context of

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<sup>47</sup> Alice Krieg-Planque, “La formule ‘développement durable’: un opérateur de neutralisation de la conflictualité”, *Langue et société*, 134 (4), 2010, pp. 5-29.

<sup>48</sup> Gwenola Le Naour, “Entrer dans l’action publique en la contestant. Quand la cause des usagers de drogues devient soluble dans la politique marseillaise de lutte contre le sida et la toxicomanie », *Politix*, 70, 2005, pp. 9-28.

<sup>49</sup> Yvez Dezalay, Bryant G. Garth, *La mondialisation des guerres de palais. La restructuration du pouvoir d’État en Amérique latine entre notables du droit et ‘Chicago Boys’*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2002, p. 282.

demonstrations as well as the construction of formal or informal alliances with those same adversaries.

The “collusive transactions” at the origin of these reorientations only materialize thanks to “constellations of interest”, a Weberian notion which, according to Michel Dobry, allows one to conceive of domination and processes of legitimation otherwise than in the vertical perspective of governors and those they govern.<sup>50</sup> Even if they come from different and even opposed sectors, the actors can see their interests converge at a given moment and enter into a relationship with one another. This perspective allows one to avoid readings in terms of “manipulation”. The construction of “paradoxical friendships” does not abolish but on the contrary stimulates the capacity of analysis of indigenous students, who constantly wonder about the “intentions” of their interlocutors. While the generalization of discourses and practices relating to the “social responsibility of corporations” encourages transactions between petrol companies and a growing number of indigenous organizations in Peruvian Amazonia, these tendencies are never linear and remain subject to the complexity of the various terrains of protest.

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<sup>50</sup> M. Dobry, “Légitimité et calcul rationnel. Remarques sur quelques ‘complications’ de la sociologie de Max Weber”, in Pierre Favre, Yves Schemeil, Jack Hayward, *Être gouverné. Études en l'honneur de Jean Leca*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2003, pp. 127-147.