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The "Frontline Community" of the Waorani Women of the Ecuadorian Amazon

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Author's Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS submitted by:
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The Ecuadorian Amazon, one of the world's most biodiverse and culturally rich regions in the world, has been consumed by extractive institutions in the name of development and modernity. This region is also the ancestral home of the Waorani, an indigenous nationality of semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers in total isolation until the mid-twentieth century. Since their encounter with the West, their livelihood has changed drastically while their natural ecosystem has been commodified. In 2005 the Waorani women created the AMWAE to lead an Environmental Justice movement that demands recognition and preservation of their knowledge, cosmology, and livelihoods. This research contributes to the Environmental Justice literature by analyzing with a decolonial lens how Waorani women develop an alternative economy based on pluriversal principles, *Buen Vivir,* and ecofeminism. This research was conducted with a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews, participative observation, and data coding. Through the categories of survivability, traditions, knowledge, and recognition, I explore how the AMWAE is navigating the market economy without reproducing the domination discourse that oppresses indigenous women, nature, and ancestral cosmology in the name of maldevelopment, therefore, successfully creating a "post-economy".

Keywords: *Environmental Justice, Pluriverse, Buen Vivir, Waorani, Recognition, coloniality of knowledge, nature, market economy*

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List of Abbreviations

AMWAE	Association of Waorani Women of the Ecuadorian Amazon (Asociación de Mujeres Waorani de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana)
CGG	Compagnié Générale de Géophysique
CONAIE	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador)
CONFENAIE	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía)
ECUARUNARI	Kichwa Confederation of Ecuador (Confederación Kichwa del Ecuador)
EJ	Environmental Justice
NAWE	Waorani nationality of Ecuador (Nacionalidad Waorani del Ecuador)
ONHAE	Organization of the Waorani Nationality of the Ecuadorian Amazon (Organización de la Nacionalidad Waorani de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana)
OWW	One-World World
SIL	Summer Institute of Linguistics
UISEK	International University SEK (Universidad Nacional SEK)
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
YITT	Yasuní National Park and the Intangible Tagaeri Taromenane Zone

1. Introduction

The Ecuadorian Amazon is one of the world's most biodiverse and culturally rich regions. Furthermore, it is also a region rich in oil reserves. This is why, since 1920, the Ecuadorian government has granted concessions to oil transnational companies, causing drastic changes in the ecosystem (Albán 2021). The Ecuadorian Amazon is also the ancestral home of the Waorani, an indigenous nationality of semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers (Rival 2022). The Waorani were utterly unknown to the Western world until the mid-twentieth century when they encountered the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Since then, they have gradually lost their cosmology, jeopardizing the protection of their territories and their ecosystem.

Like other ancestral cultures, the Waorani nationality possesses a cosmology that, although imperfect, moves away from the extractivist and the linear growth model reproduced by modernity and exercised by oil institutions. On the contrary, its social, ecological, and economic structure is closer to *Buen Vivir* (the *Good Living*) (Acosta 2012; Gudynas 2009; Kothari, Demaria, and Acosta 2014), a complex of practices of indigenous communities in the Andean region that calls for humans to live in harmony and with responsibility within nature for the present state of the planet and future generations (Monroy and Gaete 2018).

Since 2005 the Waorani women of the Association of Waorani Women of the Ecuadorian Amazon (AMWAE) have led an Environmental Justice movement that goes beyond the distributive realm (Schlosberg 2004; Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010) to demand recognition, reproduction of local ecological knowledge and cosmologies, participation, and preservation of their livelihood. The current socio-environmental crisis experienced by the Waorani people

cannot be solved by using the same concepts and following the extractivist logic of the world-vision that created the problem in the first place. As Kothari et al. (2019, XXIV) affirmed, "It is not enough to do the same but better, or less of the same"; a drastic change must occur and the concepts for the conversation must be different. This is why the AMWAE is expanding the *pluriverse* (Escobar 2015; Querejazu 2016) by changing the concepts of the conversation and developing an economic model that resembles more to the *Buen Vivir* project, incorporating Waorani cosmology.

This research project aims to broaden the understanding of the world to one that goes beyond Western understanding. It seeks to prove how indigenous Environmental Justice movements, grounded on indigenous cosmovisions, can be successful alternatives to their local context and achieve a transition to a "post-extractivist" economy. Moreover, it wants to stress that traditional cultures are not stuck in the past; their practices and knowledge, still deeply rooted and synchronized with the earth, can build a different future. Finally, this research is an attempt from the Academy to get closer to the Jaguar fathers, warriors, and shamans of the Amazon: the Waorani.

1.1 Research Question and Objective of the Study

Through this research, I seek to improve the understanding of the decolonial Environmental Justice theory and the *pluriverse* via the case-study of the Waorani women of the Ecuadorian Amazon. The research question that leads this study is: How is an alternative economy based on pluriversal principles conceptualized by the AMWAE for the protection of the Ecuadorian Amazon and their livelihoods?

Furthermore, three objectives were considered during the development of this research:

I. Understand how Waorani women, AMWAE members, navigate the market economy and contemporary state dynamics to enforce their roles as a "frontline community" against the detriment of their environment and culture.

II. Understand how Waorani women incorporate their indigenous knowledge with Western knowledge while preserving their livelihood under *Buen Vivir* practices.

III. Understand how Waorani women define, build, and implement a sustainable livelihood initiative and assess the scalability of their approach with a pluriverse notion.

1.2 Outline

The following chapter will review the literature on Environmental Justice, focusing on colonization and the coloniality of knowledge. This is to frame the logic behind the "One-World World", modernization, and development. The second part of this chapter will provide literature on proposals made from the Global South, specifically, the *pluriverse*, ecofeminism, and *Buen Vivir*. Moreover, it will explain the economic proposal that arose from these theories, which aim to reconfigure the modern vision of linear development for one based on solidarity, cultural diversity, and natural wealth. Throughout this chapter, concepts relevant to the case of Waorani Women will be emphasized.

The third will discuss the methods used, as well as the literature available that supports the relevance of these methods for the development of this research. Finally, it will address the

limitations and research ethics. Chapter four will be divided into five sections, addressing the results and discussions. Section one provides the context of the Waorani nationality in the Ecuadorian Amazon, their past as semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers, and the change in their livelihoods after encountering the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Section two will address the establishment of oil companies in Waorani territory and the impact on Waorani's socio-economic conditions. The third section will discuss the creation of the AMWAE to confront gender-based violence perpetuated by the "One-World World" and reproduced by male-led indigenous associations. Moreover, it will present activities performed by the association to resist this universalism.

The fourth section will present Waorani's cosmovision, which moves away from a dualistic colonial logic to build a complex relationship between humans and nature based on interdependence. It will also discuss Waorani women's relevance to their past and future generations and their inheritance (territory). The fifth section highlights "recognition" as a critical concept determining the relationship between Waorani women and oil companies and the market economy.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Throughout this chapter, I will introduce the Environmental Justice (EJ) theory, used through the research to make sense of the EJ movement that the Waorani women of the Ecuadorian Amazon are leading to protect their ecosystem and culture. First, I introduce the origin of this theory in the United States (US) and its distributive focus. Furthermore, based on Schlosberg's (2004) definition of Environmental Justice, I address the importance of going beyond the distributive realm to incorporate concepts of "diversity," "recognition", and "participation". These are important for understanding how the EJ theory, created in the Global North, can be decolonized to describe the realities of indigenous environmental justice movements in the Global South, specifically in Ecuador.

I continue explaining the colonization process and the coloniality in four realms, emphasizing the colonization of knowledge and the epistemic violence experiences nowadays by subaltern groups, mainly indigenous communities. This first section aims to depict an image of the problem to discuss throughout this research, which I attempt to exemplify through the case study of the Waorani women and the Association of Waorani Women in the Ecuadorian Amazon (AMWAE). The coloniality has created a "One-World World" (OWW) where indigenous women's knowledge is erased, their livelihoods are forced to change, and they are dispossessed of their territories, causing environmental damage.

In the second part of this chapter, I present the *pluriverse* as an alternative to the OWW in Latin America, and Ecofeminism and *Buen Vivir* as proposals within this *pluriverse*. AMWAE incorporates these alternatives within its environmental justice movement. Below

I break down the concept of *Buen Vivir* into four themes: the decoloniality of knowledge, the feminist critique of patriarchy, the decolonization of the concept of nature mainstreamed throughout the OWW, and the critique of modernity. It is essential to explain these axes since they are used to define the struggles developed within the AMWAE in the second part of this research. Finally, I describe the economic proposal of *Buen Vivir* to enlighten a possible answer to the research question of this project.

2.1 Environmental Justice Theory

The Environmental Justice theory has emerged throughout the decades and around diverse regions, cultures, and systems. The classic Environmental Justice theory is related to the movement against environmental racism in the United States (US) around the 1980s. Robert D. Bullard (1983), considered the "founding father" of the Environmental Justice theory, raised awareness that environmental regulations were not applied uniformly within the US territory. Hence, by making the relationship between environmental justice and environmental racism, he claimed that people of color were disproportionately harmed by industrial toxins (Bullard 1983, 15). His approach was based on a distributive focus as the movement looked to reduce environmental inequities and risks (Bullard 1983, 30). Moreover, it was developed from and for a specific geographical context: the Global North[1].

[1] Following the logic of Kothari et al. (2019, XXI), whenever the terms "Global North" and "Global South" are used in this research, they do not merely mean geographic designations but rather economic and geopolitical implications. Therefore, "Global North" can mean the colonizing dominant nations, and the wealthy ruling elites in the South. Similar for the "Global South" which can mean the colonized nation or the minorities and vulnerable groups located in the North.

In contrast with Bullard, David Schlosberg (1999) thought that the Environmental Justice movement should be more than just the unequal, classist, and racist distribution of environmental risks (Scholsberg, D. 1999, 10). For Schlosberg, "diversity" was a pivotal term to distinguish the environmental justice movement from mainstream environmentalism. He was one of the first authors that stopped theorizing only from a Global North perspective by trying to recognize the diversity of communities involved in the Environmental Justice movement. Besides just understanding the unequal distribution of environmental risks, Schlosberg goes deeper to recognize the communities, cultures, and different understandings of "environmental health" and "sustainability" (Scholsberg, D. 1999, 13). With this, Schlosberg opened the window to the emergence of other scholars who sought to transform and broaden the object of study of the EJ movement beyond the distributive understanding of justice. Recognizing the diversity of communities within the EJ movement is fundamental to not erasing the different struggles and interpretations of the theory across the regions.

In the EJ movements, "recognition" has achieved a leading role, pointing out that EJ cannot only be approached from the point of view of risk distributions, but it must recognize the diversity of participants and their experiences within the movement (Fraser & Honneth 2003, Schlosberg 2004, Gonzalez 2019). According to Nancy Fraser (2003), "recognition designates an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects in which each sees the other as its equal and also as separate from it" (Fraser, Nancy and Honneth, Axel 2003, 10). Moreover, she argues that justice today requires both redistribution and recognition. Following this logic, Schlosberg (2004) points out that part of the problem of unjust distribution of environmental risks is the lack of recognition of the diversity of participants and experiences in affected communities (Schlosberg 2004, 518). Finally, for Schlosberg (2004) there is a direct link

between recognition – at a personal or community level - and the ability to participate in democratic, social, or economic processes.

As so, it is necessary to address the social, cultural, symbolic, and institutional conditions that led to the poor distribution of environmental harms in Latin America. In this region, several indigenous communities are vulnerable to environmental risks -not only to the uneven distribution of environmental burdens or benefits but from the access to recognition and participation-.

2.1.1 Colonization and the Decolonial Environmental Justice

As Álvarez and Coolsaet (2020) affirm, there is a tendency to transport and adjust Western concepts and theories to other geographies in the Global South. However, we must consider that every theory emerges from specific contexts, discourses, points of enunciation, and social experiences. Transporting the Environmental Justice theory developed from the Global North into the South may create the opposite effect, aggravating injustices and erasing realities. Moreover, this could replicate the epistemologically violent discourse that the Global South does not produce knowledge (Álvarez and Coolsaet 2020). EJ theory must acknowledge that ecological distribution conflicts may not just overlap race conflicts with people of color but with other social conflicts over ethnicity, indigenous identity, gender, or territorial rights (Martinez-Allier in Kothari et al. 2019, 183), all of which are important in the discussion around the AMWAE.

As mentioned by Carruthers (Carruthers, D.V. 2008, 7), the Environmental movements in Latin America have always been accompanied by social justice movements, which can be explained through decolonial thought. Colonization was a historical process that brought the imposition of a modernity that promised "development". However, this global hegemonic model allowed the Western white man to dispossess the natives from their lands and transgress all their lives, establishing a multidimensional and dichotomous dynamic of domination. In this way, it created new dualities and new exclusions (Oyěwùmí, 2007), which privileged Europeans over non-Europeans.

According to Walter Mignolo (2010), the logic of colonization was based on the domination of the human experience in four essential aspects: power (economic through the appropriation of means of production and political through the control of the authority), epistemology (through the management of knowledge), the being (gender, sexuality, and subjectivity), and nature (through the control of the natural resources) (Mignolo 2010, 11). This world-system would be named differently by different scholars: Aníbal Quijano (1991) could call this the "colonial power matrix", Ramón Grosfoguel (2011) as the "European modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system", and Arturo Escobar (2015) as the "One World-World".

To understand why this colonization process is relevant today and why it continues to define our social relations, it is essential to distinguish between "colonialism" and "coloniality". As Grosfoguel (2011) stated, one of the most dangerous myths of the XXth century is to believe that because there are no more colonial administrations in the world, we live in a "postcolonial" world. Therefore, Quijano differentiates these two terms to affirm that the

"colonial power matrix" still exists. On the one hand, "Colonialism" refers to the period in history where the conquest of the societies and cultures that inhabit what today is called Latin America, Asia, and Africa took place. On the other hand, "coloniality" is defined as the "continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administration, produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern capitalist world system" (Quijano in Grosfoguel 2011, 16). Furthermore, these colonial forms of domination are currently produced globally but by the same oppressors: the Western Europeans and their Euro-Northamerican descendants (Quijano 1999, 11).

This colonization process reproduced now as "the coloniality of power", settled dichotomies and hierarchies. Among these was a class formation where the forms of labor are organized by capital; a racial/ethnic hierarchy that privileges European people over non-European (also considered as the "other"[2]); a gender hierarchy that privileges men over women; an epistemic hierarchy that benefits western knowledge and cosmology; a linguistic hierarchy privileging European languages; and an ecological hierarchy that prioritizes this Western conception of "nature" as a resource to extract, as an object to use, a mean to an end (Grosfoguel 2011, 10).

As mentioned, EJ theory addresses the unequal environmental harms marginalized people experience. However, using a decolonial lens in EJ theory enables to go further than just analyzing race, socio-economical context, and state dynamics. A decolonial perspective will go deeper to make visible all the hierarchies and oppressions experienced by Waorani women

[2] In terms of Dusselian philosophy, the "other" represents alterity. Within the binarized colonial logic, the "one" was the male, white, European subject; the "other" was feminine, non-white, and underdeveloped. See Enrique Dussel in his text "The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity" (1995).

in Ecuador, as well as their modes of life, and will avoid a reductionist and superficial analysis of distribution. Recognizing these other social variables that overlap environmental conflicts may allow the recognition and prioritization of other values assigned to nature beyond the "commodity" value given by the market system. The decolonial lens enables the focus on livelihood values, sacredness, indigenous territorial rights, ecological values, and their own units of account (Martinez-Allier in Kothari et al. 2019, 183).

As Álvarez and Coolsaet (2020) have established, exporting the classic theory to the South may perpetuate the colonial hierarchies. For instance, based on the colonial ecological hierarchy, the traditional EJ theory sees nature as an object that can be commodified. This is the reason why it claims the equal distribution of environmental harms. However, for other subalternized groups, such as the Waorani women, environmental justice is not the distribution of harm but the right to live and preserve their livelihoods. Therefore, to truly achieve justice within this context, recognition and preservation of Waorani culture, identity, economy, and ways of knowing must occur (Schlosberg, 2004, 524).

Therefore, cultural recognition is central to attaining justice by indigenous movements. The struggle for justice for indigenous communities includes demands for recognition, reproduction of local ecological knowledge and cosmologies, participation, preservation of identity, community, and traditional livelihoods (Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010, 13). Indigenous Environmental Justice movements are not asking for an equal distribution of harm; they are asking for the cessation of harm to their ecosystems, mountains, rivers, and forests, which possess a spiritual connotation and who are much more than just "natural

resources". They fight for the right to "live in a natural world in non-dominating and non-exploitative terms" (Coulthard 2014 in Álvarez and Coolsaet 2020, 57).

Epistemic violence is "one of the most invisible and subtle ways in which violence is exercised in environmental justice struggles" (Rodriguez and Inturias 2018 in Steger 2023). Therefore, a particular emphasis is done on this aspect of the domination of human experience as it is one of the main fights of the AMWAE to preserve Waorani's cosmovision.

2.1.2 Coloniality of Knowledge and Epistemic Violence

According to the anthropologist Mario Blasser (2010, in Gudynas 2011, 14) "ontology" is the form under which the world is envisioned and interpreted and which is based on a series of assumptions about what exists or does not exist. The ontology of European modernity determined hierarchical dualities that separated society from nature, civilization from the savage, and the European from the "other". Later on, this "modern reason" (Leff 2012, 61) continues reproducing the idea that all the other cultures must unilaterally follow the European civilization and European development, subalternizing their knowledge and cosmologies.

In this sense, Eurocentric knowledge was and still is imposed on traditional societies and cultures, invading and underrating indigenous modes of thinking and their cultural life-worlds (Leff 2012). This world-system prioritized the culture and knowledge of the West. In contrast, all the knowledge produced by the "other", created from local historical experiences, the "traditional" cosmologies, were excluded, omitted, silenced, or ignored. Nowadays, this

epistemic violence is reproduced through globalization by prioritizing the “modern” epistemologies from the Global North, “objective” knowledge produced in universities with a scientific method. Therefore, what prompts this hegemonic knowledge is an “abstract universality derived from the European position as a center” (Escobar 2003, 60).

This reason that accompanies “modern colonialism” is reflected in ecological knowledge. Western epistemology “has monopolized ways of knowing and subaltern ways of living, particularly through the devastation of ecological vitality based on industrial extraction and exploitation” (Steger 2023, 9). For many scholars, this reductionist way of thinking is the cause of the environmental crisis we are currently experiencing and has caused the failure to enable sustainable and harmonious worlds (Escobar 2003, 77). This is what Escobar (2015) calls the "One World-World", a model of social life that has become dominant over the past few centuries (Escobar 2015, 14). Escobar does not assign a single category to this "One World-World". You can call it modernity, capitalism, anthropocentrism, globalization, and rationalism, among others. What is essential is the fact that this "One World-World" imposes a worldview of a particular ethnicity on the whole world. It is a world that does not allow other cosmologies, that through violence and discrimination is erasing other identities, other histories, other bodies, other knowledge, and other realities.

Once we recognize this epistemological violence that reduces EJ to the distributive realm, it is clear to understand why we cannot transport the classic theory to the reality of the Waorani women. As Wenz (1988) affirmed, it is important to understand different people’s interpretations of justice to engage across these differences through learning, understanding, recognizing, and accepting (Wens 1988 in Schlosberg 2004, 536). The same logic applies to

other Western concepts such as “equity”, “nature”, and “culture”. Decolonizing knowledge implies changing the "locus" of enunciation (Mignolo 2010). It is to question this abstract universality and to understand that many social movements in the South have developed their struggle based on non-western concepts (Álvarez and Coolsaet 2020). As Mignolo (in Escobar 2003, 66) states, the decolonization of knowledge is not only changing the content but also the terms of the conversation.

Therefore, detachment from colonial epistemology is the first step for decoloniality and the projection to different worlds. Epistemological decolonization is the first step to creating a new intercultural communication, an exchange of experiences and meanings. Quijano (1992, 447) said it well when he affirmed that although colonization and "modernity" prioritize rational thought, there is nothing less rational than to think that a specific worldview from a particular ethnic group (the Western European), could be imposed as the universal rationality (Quijano (1992, 447) in Mignolo 2010, 16).

It is necessary to find other cosmologies that propose a different way of interacting with nature in a harmonious, respectful, and balanced way. As Escobar (2003, 78) says, we must promote a new environmental rationality and privilege subaltern knowledge of the natural. It is here where the role of indigenous communities plays a leading role. Their cosmovision of nature has promoted the existence of social struggles that imagine other ways of being with other living and non-living beings. This is a step towards the constitution of alternative regional worlds from different thinking.

2.2 The Pluriverse

As addressed, EJ theory was created in the Global North with a reductionist focus on the distributive realm. However, by using a decolonial lens, it is possible to integrate concepts such as “recognition”, “coloniality of knowledge”, and “epistemic violence” and develop a more accurate analysis of the experience of the Waorani women. This next section presents an alternative to the challenges previously discussed, which Waorani women and the AMWAE are part of.

Scholars have spoken in this regard to imagine words where multiple cosmovisions and realities exist. For Mignolo (2010, 98) this *imaginary* is called "frontier critical thinking" and he defines it as a project of diversity that allows us to imagine alternatives to universalism. It points to the need for "a kind of thinking that moves along the diversity of historical processes. This detachment leads to a decolonial epistemic turn towards a *pluriversality* as a universal project (Mignolo 2010, 17).

For Escobar (2015), this *imaginary*/new universal project is called the *pluriverse*:

> "a vision of the world that echoes the autopoetic dynamics and creativity of the Earth and the indubitable fact that no living being exists independently of the Earth. […] A pluriversal ontological design is aimed at enabling the ecological, social, and technological conditions where multiple worlds and ‘knowledges’ can flourish in mutually enhancing ways” (Escobar 2015, pp. 14-15).

Several indigenous movements around Latin America have also theorized on the subject. For example, for the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico, the *pluriverse* is "a world where many worlds fit" (Kothari et al. 2019).

The *pluriverse* implies multiple ontologies and worlds to be known, not simply multiple perspectives of the OWW (Querejazu Escobari 2016, 3). If reality is a social construct and a product of intersubjective practices, there are many ways to create realities. The *pluriverse* is where the natural, religious-spiritual, political, and social are not separated (Querejazu Escobari 2016, 4). In contrast to the epistemic violence executed by the West, the *pluriverse* enables the possibility to recognize and preserve other ways of perceiving nature, society, spirituality, and other forms of creating knowledge.

However, this *imaginary* is not proposing the elimination of the current epistemology nor suggests that everything modern is wrong. It does not imply that all traditional knowledge or practice is good. There are no black or whites; modern epistemology also brought positive things such as human rights and feminist principles. What it denies is the concept of "universalism" which implies that all the ethnic groups and regions of the world must live under the idea of "truth" created by the West. Therefore, this *imaginary* is envisioning a space for the epistemologies from the periphery that aim to achieve political and ethical transformation (Escobar 2003, 66). This transition seeks to overcome this OWW based on the constitutive dualisms of coloniality, such as nature/culture, science/spirituality, and men/women. It looks to overcome this epistemological violence and create a world where all these realities can co-exist in their context and regions and provide the benefits that each one needs.

2.2.1 The Pluriverse in Latin America

Around the world, movements led by "frontline communities" have emerged in response to ecological injustices and the immediate needs and threats to livelihood they now face. These "new protagonists" (referring to actors previously invisible or marginalized like indigenous peoples and peasants), struggling for survival, are leading these projects to create paths towards a more just, equitable, and ecologically sustainable world-system (Smith and Patterson 2019, 253). These movements create autonomous spaces where anti-systemic actors can converge and create different worlds.

From Latin America, "frontline communities" guided by this impetus to decolonize knowledge and transit to a *pluriverse* have created movements that revive or re-interpret ancient worldviews. Specifically, several movements of peasants, women, and indigenous groups have emerged that recognize the OWW as the leading cause of the global crisis. These proposals demand a different cultural and economic paradigm thought from the local; thought from the frontier. By mobilizing on behalf of their mountains, rivers, lakes, territories, and livelihoods, indigenous movements in Latin America are resisting this universalism. The analysis of the case study of Waorani women and the AMWAE is based on concepts from Ecofeminism and *Buen Vivir* (two proposals that arose within the *pluriverse*). Concepts from these theories come up when discussing survivability, resistance, decolonization of nature, traditions, communality, and recognition.

2.2.2 Ecofeminism

In Latin America, women demand a systemic change to the OWW based on colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal values. This is why ecofeminism re-engages in the conversation in response to the way women and nature have been marginalized in this modern patriarchal society (Cirefice and Sullivan 2019, 81). As mentioned, scholars in this theory locate the oppression of women and nature due to the settlement of extractive institutions in the Global South and as part of the capitalist patriarchal structure. As mentioned, coloniality reproduces categories of economic development and natural resources that put economic growth at the center. This myth of "development" as capital accumulation has brought benefits only to a few, while the cost of resource destruction is borne mainly by women (Mies and Shiva 1993, 73).

Ecofeminism argues that this modern world is detrimental to nature, women, and indigenous communities, and places them as "frontline communities". This belief is based on the fact that women, due to their role as "care-givers", are in charge of managing natural resources and household consumption. Therefore, any impact in local environments will place women on the frontline of those affected (Cirefice and Sullivan 2019, 83).

Hence, ecofeminism prioritizes women's knowledge, experience, and realities. Maria Mies (1993) proposes a "subsistence perspective" that validates the ecological knowledge of women and peasants as provisioners of life (Terreblanche in Kothari et al. 2019, 164). This theory recognizes the vital link between women's empowerment, activism, and the earth's healing. Furthermore, Shiva (1993) stresses the relevance of "sacredness" within indigenous

settings as a large part of conservation and to the intrinsic value of biodiversity (Mies and Shiva 1993, 169).

2.2.3 Buen Vivir

Buen Vivir (Good Living) (*Waponi Kewemonipa* in waorani-terera*; Sumak Kawsay* in kichwa) expresses an ensemble of South American perspectives which share a radical questioning of development and other core modern concepts, offering alternatives beyond it (Chuji et al. in Kothari et al. 2019, 111). It is mainly used to represent a set of ideals and values created by indigenous and peasant organizations in the Andean region practiced as a way of life and resistance for centuries by Latin American peoples (Monroy and Gaete 2018, 65). The struggles, stories of resistance, and ancestral knowledge of the different groups in the region nourish this philosophy of life. Therefore, it does not synthesize the proposal of a single culture. That is why some authors correctly refer to it as "*Buenos Vivires*" (the Good Livings) (Kothari, Demaria, and Acosta 2014, 367).

In addition to the fact that there is no single definition of the concept of *Buen Vivir* since each culture gives its interpretation, it is a concept in constant construction and reproduction. However, all of them make specific contributions relevant to point out for this research: the recognition of the coloniality of knowledge; feminist critiques of patriarchy; alternative ethics that recognize the intrinsic value of non-human and environmental visions; and a radical critique of development and market economy (Chuji et al. in Kothari et al. 2019, 111).

In addition to this critique, *Buen Vivir* presents an opportunity to create a different project and achieve a civilizational transition[3]. This sum of experiential practices of resistance to coloniality allows us to imagine post-capitalist and post-development worlds that move away from individualism, exploitation, and commodification of nature, and that do not deny the different knowledges (Valenzuela-Fuentes, Alarcón-Barrueto, and Torres-Salinas 2021, 6).

2.2.3.1 Decoloniality of Knowledge

Buen Vivir arises from decades of indigenous struggles that articulated social changes of peasants, Afro-descendants, environmentalists, students, and indigenous women. This philosophy of life also questions cultural imposition among regions and condemns the coloniality of knowledge by incorporating previously subordinated traditional knowledge. It seeks to create a dialogue incorporating indigenous conceptualizations and adapting them to current contexts and circumstances.

Moreover, it also seeks to give equal status to the diversity of knowledge systems and generations, respecting the undogmatic spiritual self-realization that predominates in indigenous knowledge (Kothari, Demaria, and Acosta 2014, 371). Therefore, moving away from modern European ontology, *Buen Vivir* rejects the idea that "objective" knowledge, reason, and science are the only valid modes of knowledge (Escobar 2012, 35). In this way, it rejects the separation between nature and culture, the supremacy of some human

[3] Escobar describes “civilizational transition” as the complex movement from the dominance of a single allegedly globalized model of life – in this case the European modernity – to a co-existence of a multiplicity of models (Escobar in Kothari et al., 2019, 121).

knowledge over others, the separation of the individual from their community, and the dominance of the white European man.

In contrast, "relational ontologies" emerge as the opposite of these hierarchical dualities imposed for the construction of societies during colonization and settle the basis for the "ontological struggles" (Escobar 2012, 35). These "ontological struggles" are the process of denaturalizing the hegemonic dualisms on which the liberal order is based. Icaza and Vázquez (2013) also points out these "epistemic struggles" where actors produce and theorize other forms of politics, different economies, and other knowledges (Icaza and Vázquez 2013 in Smith and Patterson 2019, 248). Thus, all *Buen Vivir* movements can be categorized as ontological or epistemic struggles that seek to deconstruct the hierarchies imposed and construct a civilization based on relational ontologies.

At a political level, it arises to reject multiculturalism. It demands from the State a rethinking in terms of *plurinationality*[4] that allows society to visualize a different way of imagining life (Escobar 2012), recognizing the collective rights of indigenous peoples and their normative systems, as well as the preservation of their territories, languages, and cosmovisions. For Alberto Acosta (2012, 64), Ecuadorian economist and former Minister of Energy and Mines of Ecuador, for achieving a civilizational transition, a process of intellectual decolonization to decolonize politics, society, and economy must occur.

[4] "Plurinationality" is a political project that recognizes that diverse indigenous nations coexist within a state, rather than integrating them into a homogeneous national culture (Grijalva 2008, 4).

2.2.3.2 Feminist Critique of Modern Patriarchy

As mentioned before, the gender hierarchy was also established during colonization. In this way, the modern European world system, created by and for white Western men, was patriarchal. For decolonial ecofeminist authors such as Vandana Shiva (2016), colonization implied the subordination of women and nature alike. Colonization belittled femininity, conservation, and the ecological principle (Shiva, 2016). Therefore, the domination of women and nature was a vital part of the basis of the project of "patriarchal modernity" (Escobar 2003, 77).

Buen Vivir makes a feminist critic of this patriarchal modernity by postulating feminist alternatives that revive the critical role of women in defense of communities and nature (Chuji et al. in Kothari et al. 2019, 112). This is where ecofeminism and *Buen Vivir* synchronize as post-development alternatives that seek to foster human emancipation through regenerative solidarity economies based on values of sharing, cooperation, and indigenous ethics (Terreblanche in Kothari et al. 2019, 166).

2.2.3.3 Decoloniality of "Nature"

As part of its contributions to the decolonial environmental justice movement in this region, *Buen Vivir* recognizes that the socio-environmental crisis we live in today goes beyond demanding access to natural resources or the equal distribution of harms but seeks to challenge the definitions of these elements that cause conflict (Valenzuela-Fuentes, Alarcón-Barrueto, and Torres-Salinas 2021, 6). *Buen Vivir* strongly critiques the definition of nature conceptualized by modern ontology. It questions the dualism of modernity that separates

society from nature and reduces the latter to an object to be manipulated, appropriated, and exploited (Gudynas 2011, 8). It challenges the idea that nature is a being outside of the human domain. Moreover, it makes a critic of values of development and modernity that sees the products of the earth as the products of labor only and subordinates nature to human-driven markets (Escobar 2008, 121).

Buen Vivir acknowledges that several indigenous communities are not made up just of humans but integrate non-humans, animals, plants, mountains, rivers, forests, and spirits in their territories. This spiritual connection with nature and non-human beings enhances their preservation as the common good (Kothari, Demaria, and Acosta 2014, 370). This spiritual connection contrasts scientific materialism and the logic of technology and modernity that convert nature into commodities.

In this way, *Buen Vivir* looks to deconstruct the modern concept of nature, incorporate indigenous ethics and values into the civilizational transition, and privilege this subaltern knowledge. Furthermore, it challenges the modern idea that indigenous peoples are like children, superstitious and epistemically primitive, needing modern education (Einstein in Kothari et al. 2019, 158).

2.2.3.4 Critique of Development and Modernity

In contrast to indigenous knowledge, modernization established the concept of "development" as something linear, unidirectional, infinite, and exemplified in material and financial growth (Kothari, Demaria, and Acosta 2014, 366). This endless development is

generated from above, from governments and corporations, from the dominant elites at national and international levels, and by the same token, its benefits are contained in these spheres.

This system of linear development is based on capitalism that seeks profit at the cost of the reconceptualization of nature and human beings. Both are seen as commodities to be exploited. The discourse surrounding this economic system is one of domination and exclusion since few are the actual beneficiaries of it. Within the hierarchies established and reproduced by coloniality, the "*other"* will always be used to achieve this development without being worthy of its benefits.

Many authors call this "maldevelopment" (Gudynas 2009, Shiva 2016, Kothari et al. 2019). This "maldevelopment" is based on an idea of efficiency that seeks to maximize results, reduce costs, and achieve incessant capital accumulation (Gudynas 2009, 72). For Shiva (2016), these goals cannot analyze the total reality of a society and leave out other costs, such as the cost of ecological devastation generated during the production of such capital. The ecofeminist author affirms that this maldevelopment is a patriarchal reflection that seeks the domination and destruction of women and nature. What is a fact is that it reproduces disparities in economic opportunities, access to education, and productive resources, as well as in the representation of indigenous and rural women (Shiva, 2016). Thus, the "development" and liberalization of markets did not bring the promised "harmony" but instead deepened inequalities within and between countries (Hernandez Castillo 2017, 30).

This vision of linear development makes the mistake of pretending that it is possible to sustain these exponential levels of growth forever. Acosta (2012, 28) mentioned that one of the biggest mistakes we make today is to deify the market and economic activity. He rejects this mechanistic vision of economic growth and linear development represented as the infinite accumulation of material and technological goods, the reduction of human welfare, and the incessant consumption of nature.

Buen Vivir insists that no economic process as such can be sustainable within the limits of the ecosystem. It is not possible to visualize infinite growth in a finite world (Acosta 2012, 171). This philosophy of life emphasizes the need to preserve a harmonious life between human beings and nature, and that puts life at the center. Moreover, it stresses that quality of life is not represented in material accumulation.

Furthermore, it criticizes the conception of "linear development" by supporting multiple, parallel, non-linear, and even circular historical processes (Chuji et al. in Kothari et al. 2019, 112). In this case, time is not linear for many indigenous communities, so one eventually returns to the "starting point." For the Waorani nationality, achievements are not measured in the accumulation of material goods but in the availability of resources for future generations. Therefore, one of the main objectives of this theory is to take care of the earth and nature, as you will always return to it (Monroy and Gaete 2018, 65).

Buen Vivir also rejects the cultural construction of the economy as a realm independent of social life with the market as a "self-regulating" entity (Escobar 2012, 35). In this way, it does not seek that society be at the service of the economy but rather that the economy be a means

to achieve self-sufficiency. In *Buen Vivir* communities, relationships are not restricted to market exchanges or utilitarian links but enhance solidarity (Chuji et al. in Kothari et al. 2019, 112).

2.2.3.5 Buen Vivir Economic Proposal

As previously mentioned, *Buen Vivir* is a proposal in development, in constant change, and not fully elaborated. However, this vision's value is the opportunity to collectively build a new way of life, reconfiguring our concept of linear development based on solidarity, sustainability, spirituality, celebrating cultural diversity, prioritizing human dignity, and respecting natural wealth.

This proposal does not seek to economize social relations or reduce all things to mercantile goods or services. It aims to reconceptualize quality of life or well-being in ways that do not depend solely on income (Gudynas 2011, 18). On the contrary, the proposal places the community and social welfare at the center. Thus, it promotes a fair combination of labor, capital, and natural resources. For Acosta, this can also be called a "solidarity economy", which satisfies current needs without compromising future generations (2012, 165).

Likewise, this proposal seeks to ensure a harmonious relationship between human beings with themselves and with nature in the name of protecting life. This “solidarity economy” proposes economies based on cooperation, sharing, and living with enough, moving away from competition, exploitation, and wealth accumulation. Moreover, they reinforce community and ecological sustainability by decommodifying exchange relationships and

dismantling the capitalist logic of scale and industrialization. Additionally, this economy prioritized traditional forms of community and the protection of natural habitats (Smith and Patterson 2019, 260).

Escobar (2012, 36) calls this proposal to articulate economy, environment, society, and culture in new ways as a "mixed social and solidarity economy". The Colombian anthropologist invites conceptualizing these as "post-capitalist" economies, comprising a diversity of capitalist and non-capitalist alternatives. In this way, he recognizes that the forms of capitalism, liberalism, and the State will not cease to exist, at least not soon. However, the thinkers of this current propose that the central discourse of domination of capitalism will be displaced by other social experiences that will be considered valid (Santos 2007 in Escobar 2012, 37), for the ultimate goal to be social justice.

Acosta calls this the “post-economy”: an economic proposal that will gather only those ideas that will guarantee a harmonious life between humans and nature, that will accept the oncological value of all beings despite their “usefulness” and overcome materialism in the capitalist patriarchal economic thinking (Acosta in Kothari et al. 2019, 112). However, he acknowledges that society needs production, distribution, circulation, and consumption; therefore, this proposal is not an “anti-economy”. Yet, this process should be regulated by the social-ecological reality and planetary boundaries.

For that reason, *Buen Vivir* does not intend to erase the technological advances or the benefits that modernity has brought. In contrast to the Western obsession to see the world in dualities, this research does not aim to hierarchize knowledge further or reproduce the OWW logic.

Therefore, I do not pretend to claim one vision to be wrong and another to be right, but to take the best of every reality and apply it to the benefit of the Waorani women. De Sousa Santos calls this an "ecology of knowledges" that does not seek to erase Western knowledge but a new form of more equitable relationships between Western knowledge and other forms of knowledge (De Sousa Santos in Varea and Zaragocin 2017, 41). Monroy and Gaete (2018, 63) confirm this thinking by encouraging to blend the more positive values of modernity with those present in indigenous cultures. This final remark is fundamental for understanding this research study. Waorani women have learned how to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the market economy established through oil institutions and the State while strengthening the ancestral practices that positively impact the preservation of their livelihoods and the protection of their environment.

2.3 Conclusions

In this chapter, I addressed the importance of studying Environmental Justice movements through the decolonial lens, not to erase other realities. I addressed how the coloniality of knowledge was a critical aspect that made colonization successful and is still replicable through coloniality. Furthermore, during colonization and now coloniality, hierarchical dualities were incorporated that subalternate and erase other bodies, knowledges, realities, and cosmologies. This is what conforms the modernity and the “One-World World” system.

However, the *pluriverse* is presented as an alternative to the OWW, where many ontologies and realities can fit. In Latin America, Ecofeminism and *Buen Vivir* have re-emerged through indigenous, women, and peasants’ movements looking for other ways of living to celebrate

cultural diversity and recognize the importance of subaltern knowledge. *Buen Vivir* strongly criticizes the modern concepts of knowledge, patriarchy, nature, development, and the market mechanics that prioritize economic growth over human dignity. Moreover, it lays the foundations for a civilizational transition that promotes a "post-economy" based on life, nature, solidarity, harmony, respect, indigenous ethics and values, and *communality*. In Latin America, *Buen Vivir* and Ecofeminsim enrich decolonial environmental justice movements and enhance the *pluriverse*. Most importantly, it allows us to imagine and build collectively a diverse society, in harmony with nature, based on the knowledge of the diverse peoples of the world (Tortosa 2011 in Acosta, 2012, 69).

Academic work on gender issues, indigenous cosmology, and the oil economy in the Ecuadorian Amazon is limited. Rival (2002) has addressed anthropological work focused on the history and social changes of the Waorani nationality; Albán (2021) addressed gender issues, intersectionality, and extraction of resources; and Lu, Valdivia, and Silva (2016) discussed the appropriation of the concept *Sumak Kawsay* by the Ecuadorian government, its misinterpretation, and its impact on the Woarani community from a "top-down" perspective. This research contributes to this body of literature on Decolonial Environmental Justice in the Ecuadorian Amazon by taking a different approach. Through the concepts of survivability, natural abundance, cultural identity, and recognition, I address how Waorani women navigate the market economy to improve their quality of life while protecting their livelihood and ecosystem. Moreover, I present how these women, through the AMWAE, are reinterpreting the theories of Ecofeminism and *Buen Vivir* to enhance the pluriverse in Ecuador. In this sense, the Waorani women are re-interpreting this decolonial project to create a world capable of thinking about differences with equality.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Conception of the Research

This study was conducted with a Qualitative approach to explore how the Waorani women of the AMWAE conceptualize an alternative economy based on *pluriversal* principles for the protection of their ecosystem. Moreover, it aimed to understand how these women navigate the market economy, how they incorporate and preserve their ancestral knowledge, the values they attribute to their territories, their life experiences, and the practices developed to preserve a sustainable livelihood challenged by the oil economy of the region.

Therefore, a qualitative methodology was chosen to understand "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 15). Hence, two tools were implemented to gather data: In-depth semi-structured interviews and field observation. This chapter has the purpose of explaining how the data-gathering process was structured, as well as the analysis of it, the limitations of the research, and the ethical aspects.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Participant Observation

The first tool used to develop this research was participant observation in field research, which is "the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day activities of participants in the research setting" (Kawulich 2005, 2). Therefore, from May 12th until May 30th, 2023, I visited Puyo and Shell, in Ecuador, and collaborated with the Waorani women in the AMWAE office with technical activities, assisting my supervisor, the

coordinator of projects for the association. Furthermore, I went to the AMWAE office in Shell, Pastaza, from 9:00 am – 6:00 pm, from Monday to Friday. My participation as a "volunteer"/researcher allowed me to gain an insight into their activities, the projects they are currently developing, their primary stakeholders, the goals and challenges of the association, the values of Waorani women, their main interests, routines, and experiences.

During my weeks in Ecuador, I could talk with almost all the leadership members of AMWAE and the women on the administrative team. In addition to developing interviews, I held informal conversations daily with the participants. I generated field notes based on these, which I will elaborate on in detail in the "field notes" section. Furthermore, I also attended, as an observer, two meetings with other stakeholders. The first meeting was between the coordinator of projects, Gabriela, the president of the AMWAE, Cahuo, and a representative of the NGO "A World Without Barriers". They were exploring the possibility of starting a new project between these two associations where the former NGO would deliver support to AMWAE through funds for the development of schools and the provision of school materials for Waorani communities. The second meeting was an audit made by a United Nations Developing Program (UNDP) representative as the project "ProAmazonia", from which AMWAE was part, is ending.

In addition to the work done within the offices, two activities were performed in other locations. On May 19th, 2023, I went with Pao, an accounting team member, to Quito, Ecuador, where we carried out three tasks. First, we took handicrafts to the AMWAE store at the *Mitad del Mundo* museum *(see Figure 1)*. Afterward, we went to the International University SEK (UISEK) to collect donations gathered for the Waorani communities. Finally,

we went to the offices of CODESPA, one of the donating associations and main stakeholders, to make an inventory of Wao Chocolates.

Figure 1. Delivery of handicrafts to store at "Mitad del Mundo" museum.

On May 24th, 2023, I went with the Leader of Tourism of AMWAE, Okaguinke, to *Yawepare*, a Waorani community inside Orellana, and spent one night there. There were multiple purposes for this visit: deliver the donations from the UISEK to the community (mainly clothes, blanquettes, and food); provide materials for cocoa planting (carts, saws, spare tires, etc.) and mosquito nets; carry out a routine check of the cocoa plantation and the dye nursery; sign a "conservation agreement" with the members of the community; and collect any handicrafts made by the members of the community *(see Figure 3)*. Furthermore, the women of the community kindly explained and showed me how the handicrafts are produced, how to cut some palms and extract the fiber, the plants used for coloring the thread, the songs they sing while weaving, and finally, how to spin the *chambira* palm[5] already painted.

[5] *Chambira* palm *(Astrocaryum chambira)* is a native species to the Amazonian rainforests. Its leaves produce strong, pliable fibers that Waorani women have used to fashion into handicrafts for centuries, preserving their culture and identity (UNDP, 2016).

Figure 2. Review of donations in the AMWAE office.

Figure 3. Delivering tools and donations in Yawepare

Finally, on May 30th, 2023, accompanied by the Leader of Gender and Families of AMWAE, Carlota, I visited the offices of the Waorani Nationality of Ecuador (Nacionalidad Waorani

del Ecuador - NAWE), which is the head office of the Waorani nationality associations. The AMWAE is an offshoot of this association but for women only. The development and coordination among these associations will be explained in the "AMWAE and the Survivability of Woarani Women" chapter. During this visit, I could talk with the Leader of Tourism and the Leader of Conservation and Territory of the NAWE. The locations I visited during this field trip can be observed in *Figure 4.*

Figure 4. Ecuador's Map: Locations visited during the Field Trip

3.2.2 Field Notes

From the field research and participant observation, I developed 27 pages of field notes, which are the "primary way of capturing the data that is collected from participant observations […] and include records, informal conversations with participants, records of activities, and journal notes" (Kawulich 2005, 21). With these, I described all the experiences, observations, and conversations that emerged from the three weeks of intense involvement.

3.2.3 Semi-Structures Interviews

The second tool used for data gathering was the development of interviews, which is "the process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 108). These include a "person-to-person" interview, but also a "conversation with a purpose", which involves more than two people (Dexter 1970 in Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 108). The "conversation with a purpose" tool was used after realizing that some women felt more comfortable and were more open to answering questions when accompanied by other women instead of having a "person-to-person" interview.

Specifically, I used "semi-structured" interviews, which were guided by questions or issues to be explored. The semi-structured interview allowed me to have more flexibility regarding the order of the questions, to react to a specific situation, to benefit from the topics of interest of the interviewee, or to go deeper into an issue worth exploring for the benefit of the research. Moreover, it is a valuable technique to react to the sensibility of the conversations. For example, I could notice that at the beginning of any interview, Waorani women were a bit reluctant to answer questions. Still, when I asked about weaving techniques, they would immediately engage in the conversation and relax. Eventually, I realized this was a good topic to start the conversation.

The questions asked during the semi-structured interviews can be categorized into three main themes: 1) Experience Waorani people vs. Oil Institutions and the Nation-State; 2) AMWAE

and the Environmental Justice Movement; 3) Waorani Cosmology and Epistemic Violence. A sample of the questions used for the "semi-structured" interviews can be seen in *Annex 1.*

3.2.4 Sample Selection

For the development of this research, a group of "purposive" samples or participants for the interviews were selected. The "purposive" sample is the most typical for discovering, understanding, and gaining insights. Moreover, "this sample is not to get an average opinion, but precisely because of their special experiences and competencies" (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 96). Usually, these samples are rich in information and help the researcher understand the area in-depth. In this case, the "purposive" sample was composed of the members of the AMWAE and former collaborators with the association. As I was talking with my "purposive" samples, they refer me to other participants that could be useful for the research: members of the NAWE and people from the Waorani nationality that have a close relationship with this association. This is called "snowball" sampling, which is when the researcher "locates a few key participants that meet the criteria for the participation study […] and asks to refer her to other participants" (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 98).

In total, ten people were interviewed for this research: 7 women members of the AMWAE, one Waorani woman member of the community of Shell, Pastaza, one consultant and former collaborator of the association, and one former collaborator of the AMWAE *(see Table 1)*. However, as previously mentioned, several informal conversations took place every day.

Table 1. Names and Roles of Interviewees.

Name	Role
Karina	Former Consultant of Rebsol
Nancy	Leader of Health of AMWAE
Luria	Former Cocoa Expert of AMWAE
Cahuo	President of AMWAE
Isabel	Community Coordinator of AMWAE
Okaguinke	Leader of Tourism of AMWAE
Laura	Waorani women living in Shell
Clara	Administration and Financing team leader of AMWAE
Carlota	Leader of Gender and Family of AMWAE
Gabriela	Project Coordinator of AMWAE

3.3 Data Analysis

The recorded semi-structured interviews have an average duration of 40 minutes. All of them were transcribed in Spanish, the first or second language of the participants. The guided questions used for the interviews can be found in *Annex 1.*

3.3.1 Coding

One way of analyzing the data is through coding, which identifies segments in the information gathered that respond to the main research question. Within this process words, themes, or categories that capture the essence of the information emerge. Additionally, these categories should capture recurring patterns that cut across the data (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 206).

For the development of this analysis, I used data analysis software. I began with an open coding process, an "analytical process where concepts are identified, and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data" (Stauss and Corbin 1998, 101). Therefore, all the interview transcriptions were stored in the data analysis software NVIVO. By analyzing line

by line, I could identify the most repeated categories throughout all the interviews and conceptualize general themes. Moreover, the software helped me generate a word cloud and identify the most frequent words used throughout all the interviews (see *Annex 2)*. The ten more frequent words mentioned throughout the semi-structured interviews were: *trabajó* (worked), *comunidades* (communities), *mujeres* (women), *artesanías* (handicrafts), Waorani, *petroleras* (oil companies), *proyecto* (project), AMWAE, *abuelos* (grandparents), and *organizar* (organize).

As 10 categories were identified, the analysis went to the second phase, the "axial coding" process, where the initial codes were reassembled to create 4 more complex, complete, and related categories and subcategories. These codes were transformed into the main results. Finally, the "selective coding" process occurred, where the themes identified are integrated and refined into the theory (Stauss and Corbin 1998, 143).

The categories and themes identified were:

Table 2. Coding: Categories & Themes identified.

Categories	Themes
Resistance	Survivability
NAWE vs. AMWAE	
Products	
Future of AMWAE	
Nature	Traditions and Knowledge
Ancestors (*pikenanis*)	
Wao Cosmology	
Job Opportunities	Recognition
Economic Investment	
Navigate the Market Economy	

3.4 Limitations of the Research

There were several limitations encountered in the implementation of this research. The "financial" limitation was present as I was forced to organize many activities and transports in a very tight time frame. Staying longer would have implied using extra-financial resources to cover all the expenses on the field. A second limitation was the "language". Even though all the participants speak Spanish, this is not the first language of a considerable part of the members of the AMWAE; for the majority, their first language is Waorani-terera. Therefore, certain participants were not that fluid or comfortable speaking Spanish, which I believe impacted the interviews' fluidity.

Moreover, this represented a considerable limitation during the visit to *Yawepare* as most of the adult members of the population there only speak Waorani-terera. The third limitation was "cultural" given my unfamiliarity with the research site and cultural background. However, close guidance was provided by my supervisor. These factors may have limited my immersion in the culture and comprehension of topics. Finally, no potential risk was identified to the participants or the researcher.

3.5 Research Ethics

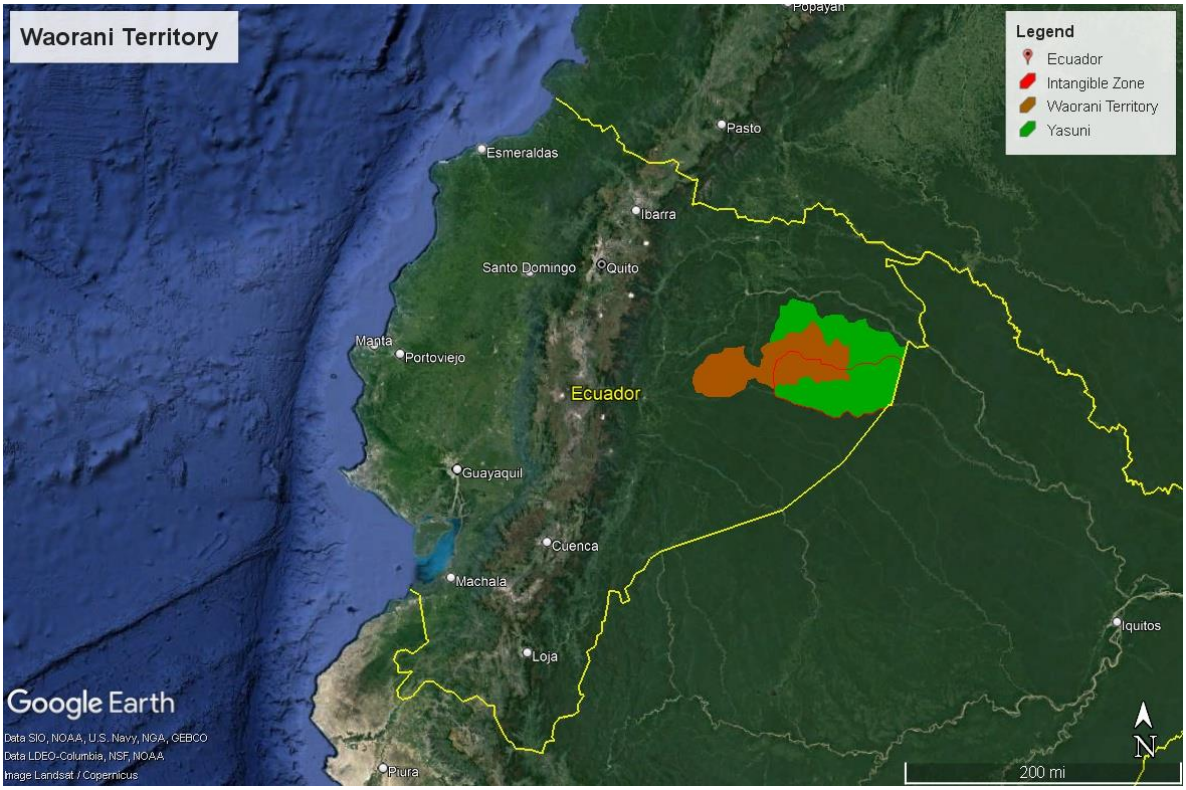
Given that the development of this research involves human subjects, careful attention was given to ethical concerns, following the CEU Research Ethics Policy. All the research participants were adults fully aware of the development of the research. I was fully transparent about my presence in the community before every interview took place. Hence, oral consent was required to develop and record interviews.

Written consent was given by Cahuo Boya, the president of AMWAE, for the taking of photographs in every activity developed with AMWAE and its further use for this research (see *Annex 3)*. Moreover, their participation was voluntary, and anonymity was possible if the participants requested it. Finally, all the participants could withdraw their participation from the research up until June 30th, 2023, one month before the research publication. My contact information (phone number and email address) was provided for that.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Waorani and the Ecuadorian Amazon

Waorani is a nationality[6] living in the Ecuadorian Amazon, which has been their ancestral home for hundreds of years. More specifically, their ancestral home is the Tiputini River, from where they expanded and managed to occupy most of the territory between the Napo and Curaray rivers, almost touching the Peruvian borders (Rival 2002, xiv). Language is the *Wao-terero,* and their economy used to be based on hunting and gathering, while gardening was a more sporadic activity done specially for cultivating garden crops for ceremonial drinks and rituals (Rival 2002; High 2015).



[6] The Council for the Development of the Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador (CODENPE) defines *nationality* as "the people or group of millenary peoples that preceded and constituted the Ecuadorian State, that define themselves as such, have a common historical identity, language, culture, that live in a determined territory, through their traditional institutions and forms of social, economic, juridical, political organization and exercise of their rights" (Chisaguano 2006, 14).

Figure 5. Waorani Territory

They relied on this type of economy because they considered "gathering" a low-risk enterprise and a predictable daily routine. Like most parts of the Amazonian rainforest, due to the annual precipitation evenly distributed throughout the year, there are almost no marked seasons. This allowed them to implement very simple techniques to gather enough food and domesticate species in the wild to undisturbed the forest (also known as semi-domestication). Moreover, as semi-nomads, trekking was a fundamental social activity that allowed the reproduction of society throughout time (Rival 2002).

The Waorani were an isolated nationality until the half of the XXth century. In *Wao-terero* *Wao* is the singular of *Waorani*, which means "we, true humans". On the other hand, *Kowori* would mean the "other", the "non-humans", commonly used to refer to other indigenous groups, settlers, mestizos, and rubber or oil extractors (AMWAE n.d.). They were one of the latest Amazonian nationalities to remain in relative isolation until the late 1950s when missionaries from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) established contact.

4.1.1 Contact with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)

The SIL is a North American evangelical Christian organization whose original purpose was to promote language development and translate the Bible into different indigenous languages. Since 1934 they have carried out various activities in other countries of Latin America. President José María Velasco Ibarra authorized their entrance into Ecuador in 1950 to convert the "savages" to the Christian religion. However, the real purpose was to "civilize" the Waorani people and gain control and access to their territory for oil extraction (Green 2012, 59). Therefore, the "civilizational task", known as "Operation Auca" was a collaboration

between the State and the SIL to integrate even the most isolated communities into one to exploit the natural resources of their territories (Narváez Quiñónez 1996, 18).

The first contact between the SIL and the Waorani was in 1956, when five missionaries arrived at the Curaray River by plane, bringing presents (Green 2012, 59). However, the arrival of these *koworis* was taken as a threat, and after a confrontation that led to the murder of also Waorani people, the five missionaries were killed. This news was known worldwide, portraying the Waorani as "savage slots" (Albán 2021, 35). Years later, the missionary Rachel Saint, the sister of one of the five killed missionaries, made contact with Dayuma, a Wao woman who escaped from her community due to violent attacks from other Waoranis and was living in slavery conditions in a *hacienda* in Curaray. Rachel helped Dayuma to leave the *hacienda,* and since then, a close friendship developed between these two women. Dayuma was key for establishing successful contact between the missionaries and the Waorani people (Carola 2023).

In the "One-World World," the linear development model has been globalized in a delocalized and mono-cultural way (Escobar 2015). Among the many effects it has caused was the expulsion of indigenous populations from their territories and the dispossession of their nature (Hernández Castillo in Varea and Zaragocin 2017, 30). As the "evangelization" process occurred, the SIL was authorized to create a 66,570 hectares protection zone, also known as "the Protectorate," for the Waorani people. This Protectorate was located in Tihueno and only represented 1/10 of their traditional territory. In 1969 the SIL managed to gather 600 Waorani in the Protectorate, and by the 1980s, the total amount of Waorani situated there was 5/6 of the whole Waorani population (Green 2012; Rival 2002). This

process brought about a radical change in Waorani's livelihood. Their traditions, customs, ways of living, economy, and world vision changed. Forcing all communities to live in the same territory brought conflicts between clans and the separation of families. Such was the case of the Tagaeri-Taromenane, who decided not to follow the missionaries to Tihueno and separated from the tribe. Today it is a group in total isolation.

4.1.2 Contact with the West and the Impact on Waorani Livelihood

As the missionaries cornered the Waorani in 1/10 part of their territory, their livelihood changed drastically as they were forced to become sedentary. Traditionally, many of the Waorani tribes did not live near bodies of water. As a result, they had to learn new survival skills such as the construction of canoes, swimming, and fishing, and to manage garden crops and shotguns, dogs, and Western medicine. As part of the ongoing "civilization" process, schools were settled in the Protectorate and in different Waorani communities as a tool for cultural transmission (Rival 2002, 157).

Their physical integrity and health drastically changed after this encounter with the West. For instance, new western sicknesses were introduced, such as polio, hepatitis, and flu; sicknesses to which the Waorani people did not have antibodies to protect themselves. Moreover, schools and oil companies would give the Waorani food products that completely changed their diet and health, such as sugar, salt, canned food, white rice, noodles, sodas, and candies. Their oral health was also affected by the sudden increase in consumption of sugars and other processed beverages (Green 2012). According to the elderly, these dietary changes, as well

as the heat, the noise, the smell, and oil roads, have impacted the young Waorani as they become "weaker" (Bravo Díaz 2021, 61).

While Okaguinke and I were traveling around *Yawepare* to visit different houses, she told me all the fundamental changes she has experienced after the settlement of oil companies and the interaction with the missionaries. "Now we eat tuna, sugar, and salt, but before our grandparents lived without salt. They used to put water, chicha, or crushed wild garlic where it hurt or if they got sick. They hunted and came back singing, now they do it very little. The huambras (the songs) are being forgotten; if they were afraid to welcome someone, drink chicha, wash clothes, they sang. They hardly do it anymore. Now they are putting on clothes and forgetting. Before they used to wear their skirts, feather crowns, and would paint their faces. Everything is changing a lot. That is how young people are now but before they did not forget" (Okaguinke 2023).

In *Yawepare,* the community still preserves culturally meaningful traditional food such as the chicha, a traditional drink within the Waorani communities. *Chicha* is a pre-masticated and fermented beverage, usually made from *yuka* (manioc). This drink, besides being consumed due to the ease of *yuka* production and its hunger-relieving benefits, is a drink with high cultural value. When you visit a Waorani home, the family will welcome you with a bowl of chicha. In my case, the three houses I visited offered me this beverage *(see Figure 6)*. Its flavor depends a lot on who prepares it. The first one I tasted was sweet, somewhat similar to rice water; the other two were more bitter. Additionally, Grandmother Teepa sang me a traditional song while she served me the *chicha,* and I drank it *(see Figure 7)*. On the other

hand, the food consumed during the days there was white rice and noodles. They told me that nowadays they rely on these products, stopping the hunting and harvesting of food.

Figure 6. Traditional drink "chicha"

Figure 7. Grandmother Teepa prepares the "chicha" while singing traditional Waorani songs

Regarding material possession, *Yawepare* also was a mix of traditional huts with hammocks and cabins with electronic devices. Finally, household economics have also suffered drastic changes after the Western encounter. “Subsistence activities (hunting and gathering of wild forest plant resources) are at risk of becoming socially and pragmatically de-emphasized because of the declining quality and abundance of natural resources in zones of extraction, not to mention the opportunity costs of engaging in subsistence compared to commercial activities” (Lu, Valdivia, and Silva 2016, 144).

After the relocation of Waorani people to the Protectorate and the intense and constant interaction with the missionaries, the State, and the oil companies (e.g., Royal Dutch Shell plc, Compagnié Générale de Géophysique (CGG), Petrobell Inc., PetroOriental, PetroAmazonas EP, REPSOL Ecuador SA), the men left these traditional roles for employment with oil companies operating on their territories. In a few decades, the Waorani people became dependent on a market economy including wage labor, tourism, commercialization of handicrafts, and other activities related to commodities production (Albán 2021, 33).

4.1.3 After the SIL

The evangelization process was carried out for decades. However, the context of the Waorani people suffered another radical change when, in 1981, President Jaime Roldós expelled the SIL from the country because of accusations from other civil organizations questioning the relationship between the SIL and the indigenous nationalities (Green 2012, 65). After this

expulsion, in 1989 the Waorani people left the Protectorate in Tihueno to take back their ancestral territories. Hence, new political and social actors appear in the scenario, such as the Organization of the Waorani Nationality of the Ecuadorian Amazon (Organización de la Nacionalidad Waorani de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana - ONHAE), led by men. The ONHAE, in turn, is part of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía - CONFENAIE).

Controversies have been surrounding ONHAE since its creation. To begin with, this organization was created with the resources of Maxus – the natural gas and oil North American company exploiting the petroleum in the region. The resources to cover the leaders' salaries, the office's maintenance, and the equipment came from Maxus (Rival 2002, xvi).

In 1987 the CONFENAIE carried out an international campaign to demand the protection of the Waorani's lands rights and right to self-determination. As a result, in April 1990, the Waorani were granted their ancestral territories, being this the largest indigenous territory given in Ecuador, covering 679,130 hectares. This territory covers the Protectorate, the Yasuní National Park, and the Intangible Tagaeri Taromenane Zone (YITT) (Rival 2002) *(see Figure 5)*. Nowadays, the Waorani population lives in 58 villages between Napo and Curaray Rivers, within the three provinces of the Ecuadorian Amazon: Orellana, Pastaza, and Napo. Many of these villages count on schools that keep reinforcing the interest in integrating them into the national society. Moreover, their population is estimated at around 2500 people (High 2015, 5).

4.2 The Oil Economy in Waorani Territory

Between 1947 and 1971, Ecuador was a banana-producing country. Its production model was oriented merely to export bananas, making it a world leader in exporting this product. As the decades passed, it diversified and transitioned to industry development, concentrating on textile activities and other foodstuffs (Mendoza 2022). From the 1940s onwards, due to geopolitical factors, Ecuador was situated in the international market's sight as oil emerged as an economic front that later took on significant proportions. At the end of the 1970s, oil deposits were discovered in the Amazon region, which opened a new era for the country. Oil exploitation activities intensified, incorporating the Ecuadorian Amazon region into international markets (Narváez Quiñónez 1996, 8) and radically changing its socio-economic, political, and environmental structure and creating territorial conflicts with the Waorani. Narváez Quiñonez (1996, 11) stated that these new actors seeking to extract the discovered resources - companies, settlers, and political parties - restructured power mechanisms, causing tension and breaking social dynamics. In addition, the intense exploitation of resources caused a drastic loss of biodiversity, soil degradation, and water contamination. Finally, the imposition of a new condition of the indigenous community economy began in Pastaza, Napo, and Orellana.

4.2.1 Oil companies in Waorani Territory

The first explorations by Royal Dutch Shell took place in 1937 in Arajuno, Pastaza. However, it was not until the "civilization" and forced sedentarization of the Waorani community by the SIL that the territory was opened for different national and international oil companies to settle in their territories. Since the 1960s, several multinational companies and their

subsidiaries have conducted oil explorations. For example, in 1967 Texaco drilled the first oil well in the Ecuadorian Amazon, in Lago Agrio, Sucumbios (Vasquez 2014, 90). Later, in 1976, the CGG began extraction in Panacocha, north of Yasuní (Narváez Quiñonez 1996, 37). Since then and until nowadays, the Yasuní has gotten the attention of oil companies, creating severe social and environmental impacts, especially for the indigenous groups in voluntary isolation. For example, until 1990, Francisco de Orellana (commonly known as "El Coca") – the capital of Orellana Province - was the frontier Amazonian oil town. Today, it is an oil city, home to 80,000 people.

For the Waorani people, the settlement of oil companies in their territories was not necessarily seen as a negative aspect, as they were not settling in their territories without any compensation. There is an unwritten agreement that is still practiced today: when an oil company is settling in a Waorani territory, there must be some "recognition". As Isabel, the Community Coordinator of AMWAE explained to me. oil companies must bring presents to the community. These presents are food, pots, axes, gardening tools, tents, medicines, electric wires, and iron sheets, among others (Rival 2002, 168). Moreover, it must also be the provision of services such as schools.

As mentioned, the settlement of oil companies caused a drastic change in the social dynamics of the communities. For example, in 1989, the explorations of Petro-Canada created a conflict between villages in the region. The people within these villages were fighting with each other for the right to work for Petro-Canada, as everyone wants the benefits and presents of these companies. Many cases such as this one caused the division of traditional longhouses all along the region (Rival 2002, 169).

4.2.2 Increase in Social Unrest

All these consequences caused that, in 1986 the two major indigenous associations of the country at that moment - the Confederación Kichwa del Ecuador (ECUARUNARI) and the CONFENIAIE got together to create the largest indigenous umbrella organization, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador - CONAIE). Furthermore, the creation of the CONAIE was pushed by the environmental injustices and negative externalities caused in the territory by oil companies (Vasquez 2014, 90).

At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, the Waorani and other indigenous peoples, began to acquire a significant presence in national politics. As mentioned in the last chapter, these associations claimed and recovered their ancestral territories. Moreover, they also started protesting oil development and destructive oil roads as the resulting colonization of indigenous lands. Their demands and presence managed to turn the country into a multicultural state, recognized in the 1989 Constitution. They included the right of consultation with local communities before the development of extractive industry activity in their territory (Vasquez 2014, 92). Yet, these consultations' conditions could and should be improved. For example, as explained in the next chapter, for oil drilling in the Yasuní National Park there was no consultation with the Waorani people living in the park.

4.2.3 Rafael Correa's Contradictory Reign in Ecuador

In the last decades of the 20th century, these indigenous movements, led by the CONAIE, the CONFENAIE, and the ONHAE, mobilized resistance forces that changed the political agenda and rejected the neoliberal[7] system. This social discontent created the ideal conditions for Ecuador to join the Pink Wave that was navigating around Latin America, allowing the rise of center-left and further left governments to power. This is how, in 2007, Rafael Correa won the presidency of Ecuador, calling himself a "progressive" politician. As in other countries in Latin America, these "progressive" governments rejected neoliberal policies and were motivated by a new social agenda (Mendoza 2022, 1).

Hand in hand with these progressive policies came a new development model known as "neo-extractivism". Neo-extractivism emerges as a critique of the neoliberal economic model that merely sought to extract resources and financial gains without considering distributive policies. On the contrary, this model justifies the exploitation of natural resources as the basis for national development and social redistribution (Brand, Dietz, and Lang 2016, 129–131).

Rafael Correa remained in power from 2007 until 2017. Like other progressive politicians, he arrived with the "Citizen's Revolution" project, where the promise of implementing a social policy that would benefit the poorest, indigenous groups and, above all, nature was latent. During these years, the state was seen as a dynamic agent of development that sought to strengthen public goods and services, such as education, health, and social protection. Additionally, during this period, Correa sought the country's industrialization to provide

[7] By "neoliberal" I mean a system that prioritizes transnationalization, deregulation, and privatization (Brand, Dietz, and Lang 2016, 130).

social development without depending on the export of products, including oil exploitation (Mendoza 2022, 2).

The new Constitution of Ecuador was written in 2008 by the Correa administration. This was the first Constitution in the world that gave a legal figure and recognition of the rights of Nature. Also, the "*Plan Nacional de Buen Vivir*" (2009-2013) was implemented. This new plan sought to generate a new wealth generation model while guiding Ecuador in its transition from commodity exploitation. It is meant to trace the path toward a post-petroleum-based society with better living standards (Le Quang and Ortega Breña 2016). However, the oil boom and the rise in the price of Ecuador's oil on the international market rapidly deviated from any attempt to transit to a post-petroleum society. On the contrary, changes in oil-related policies intensified the petroleum concession in indigenous territories in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Albán 2021, 10). Hence and once again, the oil culture intensified its coexistence alongside stories of jaguars and plants (Albán 2021, 15). However, since he took power, his administration began to be filled with inconsistencies (Dangl 2010, p. 41).

Despite this legal framework developed during his administration, Correa continued to support neo-extractive policies in the country, causing great discontent from Waorani and other indigenous groups and distrust from the international community. Moreover, this created indignation due to misinterpretation of the *Buen Vivir* and the extractive governmental approach given. Correa's administration ignored the local and indigenous definitions to promote his extractive agenda, which deviated from the original proposal emerging from the social and indigenous movement (Bravo Díaz 2021, 52).

An example of the implementation of such ideas was the Yasuní-ITT Initiative. This proposal by the Government of Ecuador was a permanent moratorium on oil extraction in a portion of the Yasuní National Park (ITT: Ishpingo, Tambococha, and Tiputini), which crosses the Waorani territory *(see Figure 5)*. This initiative consisted in leaving 830 million barrels of oil underground (equivalent to 20% of the total oil reserves of the country) in exchange for financial compensation from the international community of 3.6 US Billion dollars, equivalent to 50% of the value of the oil reserves in that area in the market. However, this initiative failed in 2013, opening the door to Chinese oil companies and allowing the exploitation of the resources. This decision, justified within the neo-extractive theory, promised that the profits from the extraction of these oil reserves would be destined for fostering social benefit (Bucaram and Fernandez 2013 in Mendoza 2022, 4). In addition, the expansion of oil extraction took place without consulting with the Waorani people living in the park, even though it was already a legal requirement written in the Constitution (Bravo 2021, 58).

Despite the great potential of natural resource wealth, dependence on mineral and hydrocarbon exploitation remains latent in the Ecuadorian country. Accompanied by this failure came many criticisms of the inconsistencies of Correa's government. An innovative government providing legal rights to Nature relied on extracting and exploiting its natural resource endowment to finance other social projects (Veltmeyer, 2022, pp. 73-75). Moreover, during Correa's administration, the national environmental institutions and control and sanction mechanisms against environmental destruction were reshaped and weakened, hindering their performance.

For example, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry for Hydrocarbons and Energy were originally in charge of the energy policy. However, arguing that there were coordination problems, the Ministry of Strategic Sectors was created and given complete control over this policy area. In this sense, both ministries were placed under the control of this new Ministry. Critics of this policy may argue that the Ministry of Strategic Sectors hindered the autonomy of both ministries. Moreover, this body was accountable for the YITT Initiative and constructing hydropower and petrochemical plants. This Ministry oversaw negotiating oil loans with China and the Brazilian company Odebrecht (Fontaine, Fuentes, and Narváez 2019 in Mendoza 2022, 5).

Furthermore, several social constraints shaped the interaction and development of policies within these two administrations. For example, the movements of indigenous communities played an important role as a supporter and eventual opposition to Rafael Correa's administration and energy plan. Before Correa's election, the uprising of social movements associated with the CONAIE, took place in the country, manifesting strong discontent and resistance against the neoliberal and extractive policies of the 1990s. As a result, Correa's "progressive" and anti-liberal campaign positioned him in power. However, once elected, Correa demobilized indigenous and peasant activism that stood in the way of oil extraction (Mendoza 2022, 5).

The government delegitimized the movements opposing extractivism, calling them "terrorists" and enemies of the "Citizen's Revolution" (Veltmeyer, 2022, p. 109). In 2017, under a "State of Emergency", the government moved military forces to arrest hundreds of indigenous and peasant demonstrators peacefully protesting oil and mining policies

(Veltmeyer, 2022, p. 109). Additionally, the government aimed to enforce the presidential regime and increase the State's capacity to restore national sovereignty. In this sense, the government bet on creating subsidies to enhance energy efficiency (Fontaine, Fuentes, and Narváez 2019, 62). Therefore, with the excuse of alleviating poverty and boosting the development of social policies, Correa's administration actively misled the leaders of indigenous movements (Veltmeyer 2012, 109). Between 2000 and 2006, activities related to oil extraction grew so much to represent 43% of the country's total exported products (Espinoza 2018, p.38). Correa has been accused of opportunism and appropriating the concept of *Buen Vivir* for governmental approaches. He ignored the indigenous definition and used it to promote an extractivist model and to install a "twenty-first-century socialist" kind of development (Bravo 2021, 55).

4.3 Creation of AMWAE for the survivability of Waorani women

The appropriation and implementation of *Buen Vivir* from the Ecuadorian government did not bring the expected results to the Waorani community. The high expectations given to Ecuador, the first government incorporating indigenous knowledge in the constitution, quickly faded away. Moreover, the NAWE was not alleviating the gender and environmental injustices experienced by Waorani women. However, Waorani women embraced the role of a "frontline community" to create an association that would put an economic, social, and ecological alternative in the spotlight. In this chapter, I will address how, through the creation of the AMWAE, the Waorani women resist the "One-World world" and create autonomous spaces where their families, traditional knowledge, and ecosystem can flourish.

4.3.1 Origins of the AMWAE

As more oil companies settled in the region and the resource extraction intensified, so did gender inequality in the Waorani communities. As Cirefice and Sullivan stated, in Latin America "the benefits of resource extraction include employment, although most jobs are held almost exclusively by men" (Cirefice and Sullivan 2019, 83). On the one hand, oil companies provided jobs mainly to men, which has caused them to "abandon their traditional hunter-gatherer lives and took jobs as salaried employees" (UNDP 2016). On the other hand, the indigenous associations were also reproducing this colonial dichotomy of gender hierarchy.

In 1990, the Organization of the Huaorani Nationality of the Ecuadorian Amazon (ONHAE, by its name in Spanish) was created to represent Waorani's interests before the government, national and international organizations, and oil companies. However, after several accusations of mismanagement of resources, extravagance, and corruption, in 2007, the organization changed its name to the NAWE (Green 2012, 73).

The NAWE was leading the environmental justice movement as it opened the *pluriverse* to strengthen the voices and wills of the Waorani people. However, following the colonial logic of gender hierarchy, the organizations were structured by gender inequalities. It was a male-led association that instead of alleviating the injustices experienced by Waorani women, they were sharpening them. Once again, women and nature were equally marginalized.

> "The money was not coming in. The men worked, but clothes and food for the children never arrived. So, we women thought: How can we stand out and fight for the children and the family? The men had just started learning another culture and

drinking alcohol, and after a month, they had nothing to bring home. That is why we women started to fight with our grandmothers who rest in peace" (Carola, 2023).

As expressed by Carola, AMWAE's territory leader, men at the NAWE were not equally distributing the benefits of their arrangements with oil companies. On the contrary, they were using their economic resources to buy alcohol.

As decolonial ecofeminist scholars affirmed (Cirefice and Sullivan 2019; Mies and Shiva 1993; Shiva 2016), women are more likely to experience environmental injustices given their role as "caregivers" and as managers of natural resources. When I asked *Luria Omamo*, former Cocoa Leader at AMWAE (2015-2018) why Waorani women called themselves the "guardians of the forest" she answered:

> "Because women work more than men. Men got other jobs. Women live in houses, take care of the children, and work. Women are always present at meetings. Always, more than men. They take care that strangers do not enter the territory, the women are always at the front. And they have the knowledge, they know how to make handicrafts and plant" (Luria Omamo, 2023).

Therefore, following the logic of Mies (1993) of the "subsistence perspective", Waorani women decided to empower themselves. This is how, in 2005, the Association of Waorani Women of the Ecuadorian Amazon (AMWAE) was created. This feminist alternative seeks to "promote the association of women, strengthening participation, solidarity, and community responsibility. Support programs to improve handicrafts, ecological, cultural, and natural tourism to benefit the Waorani families. Moreover, it seeks to promote projects and

programs for the recovery and appreciation of customs and ancestral knowledge, as well as to improve the quality of life of Waorani women" (AMWAE n.d.).

As Cahuo, the president of AMWAE, explained to me, Waorani men did not like the idea of women starting to work, earning their income, strengthening their voices, and occupying public spaces. Tension arose as men were worried that women would leave their homes. Nancy and Alicia, the two Waorani women founders of the association, fought for the constitution of the AMWAE. They coordinated dozens of Waorani women throughout Pastaza, Napo, and Orellana. They fought for the survivability (the ability to remain alive) of Waorani women, their families, and their territories. Today AMWAE has 156 members from 58 communities throughout these three regions, benefiting more than 4,000 Waorani (Cahuo 2023).

4.3.2 Resistance to the "One-World World"

The Waorani women are resisting the "passive non-self"[8] role imposed by the Ecuadorian state in complicity with the SIL and the oil companies. Moreover, the AMWAE demands a systemic change from extractivism, colonialism, and patriarchy. Compared to the NAWE, whose income comes directly from the government or oil companies for the organization's employees, the AMWAE is a productive project that generates revenues from their activities and whose benefits will go back to the 58 Waorani communities. "This productive project

[8] For Vandana Shiva (2016, 8) the "passive non-self" is when "Activity, productivity, creativity which were associated with the feminine principle are expropriated as qualities of nature and women, and transformed into the exclusive qualities of man. Nature and women are turned into passive objects, to be used and exploited for the uncontrolled and uncontrollable desires of alienated man. From being 'resources' in the fragmented, anti-life model of maldevelopment" (Shiva 2016, 8).

wants to work with the communities to protect the Waorani cosmovision, culture, language, and conserve their territories. It seeks to improve their life quality without losing their rainforest" (Gabriela, 2023). In other words, the Waorani women of AMWAE are a "frontline community", responding to the environmental injustices perpetuated in the Ecuadorian Amazon and to the Waorani nationality.

They realize several activities to protect their livelihood and transit to a post-extractivist world. The two main productive projects developed and the most well-known are the production of handicrafts and cocoa cultivation. These two products are fundamental for enhancing adaptation to the environmental challenges they are currently facing, preserving their ancestral knowledge and practices, and finally generating income to improve their life quality.

4.3.2.1 Chambira Handicrafts

The handicrafts made out of *chambira* palm (bags, bracelets, hammocks, necklaces, earrings, baskets, belts, among others) are products of quality and cultural identity *(see Annex 6)*. The techniques for weaving these handicrafts are knowledge passed from generation to generation. All the Waorani women I spoke with told me they were taught to knit by their mothers and grandmothers. Moreover, there are specific weaving techniques that only Waorani women practice. AMWAE buys all the handicrafts that any Waorani (men or women) offers as part of the support and empowerment they want to build on the artisans. Then, after checking the quality and labeling them, the product is sold in their store or on the webpage. The total profit from these products goes back to the artisans so that they have an

income. Therefore, the money collected from selling these handicrafts allows the purchase of new ones.

Figure 8. Okaguinke slices palm leaf.

Figure 9. Grandmother Teepa spins yellow yarn while singing.

4.3.2.2 Production of Cocoa Beans for "Wao" Chocolate

On the other hand, producing cocoa beans *(Theobroma Cacao)* is a more profitable activity for AMWAE. Since 2010, Waorani women have been producing this cocoa in their *chakras* (a diverse forest garden) and selling the cocoa beans to the Ecuadorian company BIOS to develop the "Wao chocolate" *(see Annex 7)*. The revenues from this activity are invested back in the field to 1) hire experts in cocoa cultivation and provide training workshops to Waorani women; 2) provision of tools for growing. Both productive projects are developed sustainably as women plant these raw materials on previously cleared lands for other purposes.

In this way, they seek to recover the land and heal the soil by avoiding monoculture. AMWAE allows the Waorani to generate income in different ways than just being employed by an oil company. Moreover, it reduces the possibility of them participating in alternative markets that are harmful to the ecosystem and biodiversity and frequently illegal (e.g. logging and bushmeat hunting). As an example, during my stay in Ecuador, the association signed conservation agreements with three communities (Yawepare, Dayuma, and Tupeta) to ensure that people do not expand the size of their *chakras* for the production and planting of raw materials (chambira, cocoa, wild garlic, orange, yuka, plantain, among others).

Figure 10. Okaguinke checks out the cocoa plantation in Yawepare.

Figure 11. "Wao" chocolate bars.

4.3.2.3 Other activities performed by AMWAE

Additionally, there are plenty more activities AMWAE performs besides handicraft and cocoa production. Waorani women coordinate projects with the Ecuadorian government. For example, they coordinate health brigades, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health of Ecuador, to bring medicines, vaccines and perform gynecological studies to members of the Waorani communities of difficult to access. These communities are classified as "difficult to access" because it is not possible to reach them by land. AMWAE supports, coordinated by the leader of Health, Nancy, with the transportation of the doctors and a communication bridge between them and the communities. Also, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Economy of Ecuador, AMWAE supported the census to register Waorani people within the communities.

AMWAE also coordinates projects with donors and other international NGOs. They collect donations for the communities by constantly carrying out campaigns with allies to collect clothes, food, and blankets, among others. Through projects with donors, the association purchases tools for cocoa production and cultivation. In this case, this benefit is exclusively for members of the association. Among the tools are carts, spare tires, saws, and machetes, among others. In collaboration with international NGOs, AMWAE develops the construction of schools in the communities and provides facilities and equipment for the children.

Moreover, AMWAE facilitates workshops for the members. Some of these workshops are techniques for planting cocoa and cultivating ink plants, developing natural fertilizers, ethnobotany, ancestral medicine, producing high-quality handicrafts, Waorani language, leadership, and capacity-building courses for women. Finally, coordinated by the leader of

Gender and Families, Carlota, the AMWAE provides accompaniment and advisory to Waorani people for access to government bonds.

Apart from purchasing handicrafts, the rest of these projects are supported by funding from donors such as CODESPA, UNDP, Bos+, the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD) from the Belgium government, and the European Union.

In this way, the AMWAE is changing the "locus" of enunciation" by creating these autonomous spaces where Waorani women are developing projects to enhance the conservation of Waorani livelihood, culture, language, traditions, and territory. Through the AMWAE, Waorani women resist the coloniality of knowledge and universalism by protecting their cosmology from being erased. All these activities are making Ecuador a world where multiple worlds can exist, indigenous nationalities are not being erased, and where the *plurinational* character of the country is strengthened. Moreover, it is creating a path towards a more gender-equal and sustainable world-system. More on the importance and protection of Waorani cosmology in the section "Nature and Knowledge".

4.3.3 Future of the AMWAE

The Waorani women of the AMWAE, motivated to demand their specific rights as women and in the search for a life free of violence, decided to create their association separate from the men of the NAWE. Driven by their desire for survivability and resistance, they are "claiming the principles of *Buen Vivir, communality*, and their own cosmovisions"

(Hernández Castillo in Varea and Zaragocin 2017, 35) to question the civilizing project and modernity itself.

This concept of *communality* resonates strongly with this case study. "Communality" was coined by Floriberto Díaz and Jaime Martínez to express how indigenous communities live in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, Mexico. This concept seeks to describe a form of resistance to the forms of development that reach the communities in this region. These communities have had to accept a contemporary way of life that arrives from the outside without allowing it to destroy or dissolve what is “their own” (*lo propio*). In other words, these communities "have managed to change the tradition in a traditional way [...] to their own way, to remain what they are despite the pressures to dissolve them, reduce them, turn them into something else, develop them" (Guerrero in Kothari et al. 2019, 130).

Thus, "communality" has been an empowering factor for many social struggles as a fundamental principle to defend nature, territory, and life. A crucial part of *communality* is that it constructs a *we* "recognizing all that is visible and invisible below and above the earth" This makes it possible to redefine community in "non-human" terms, incorporating society, the cosmovision, and nature. The Waorani women in AMWAE claim *Buen Vivir* and *communality* to create projects that benefit their vision of "community" that goes far beyond the people to incorporate and protect their traditions and lands. Through AMWAE they seek to recognize themselves and recognize the ground they walk on. In the same way, they recognize their possibilities and their limits. After recognizing themselves, experiences, tools, and knowledge are exchanged with the outside world. Thus, they seek to take the best of the cultural exchange with the West and share it.

In this way, Wao women are transitioning to seek a post-extractivist future where the Woarani nationality will not depend on the employment or benefits of oil institutions to guarantee a good quality of life. For Carola (2023), the future of AMWAE implies "that the artisans improve to the maximum and that we help them to move forward. Each community has its own place so tourists and students like you can visit. It is a dream to have our own house that serves as an office, store, and shelter for Waorani women; that is a good business and place. Also, that in the communities, we have networks. So that at some point, when the oil companies leave and there is no more work, the communities can subsist".

4.4 Waorani Cosmology: Traditions and Knowledge

Given the Waorani cosmological orientation that conceives nature, cultural identity, and spirituality as interdependent and reciprocal, indigenous people have become the main obstacles to the extractive industries that distinguish "nature" as natural resource commodities, separate from culture and devoid of spirituality. This was the case during the oil boom in the early 2000s (Martínez Novo 2021, 11) and the current case for the Ecuadorian Amazon. As previously mentioned, colonization and Western thought created a hierarchical division that divided human beings from nature and scientific knowledge from spirituality. This coloniality still exists in the extractivist economy that predominates in the region. However, as the *Buen Vivir* dissolves the duality that separates society from nature, so do Amazonian cultures (Albán 2021, 25). Their cosmovision defines a complex relationship between humans and nature based on reciprocity and interdependence.

The Waorani cosmology challenges these reductionist or dualistic views of nature vs. culture and nature vs. human due to the importance and meaning they give to their territory and their natural environment. In *wao-terero,* the word "forest" is *monito ömë* (our land) or *ömë* (homeland) (Rival 2002, 80). The language expresses the deep-rooted connection and sense of belonging of the Waorani to their natural world. For them, nature is not only a resource provider but also part of their cultural identity, subsistence, and their grandparents' heritage (*pikenanis)*. As Nancy (2023) mentioned: "We will not forget our language. When we don't speak the language, our culture will be lost and, with it, our territory".

As Hernández Castillo affirmed: "Indigenous worldviews are charged with a strong respect and recognition for their elders, who are bearers of ancestral wisdom; likewise, women are recognized as spiritual bearers of their own epistemology (Heránandez Castillo in Varea and Zaragocin 2017, 40). This is why protecting Waorani cosmology plays a significant role in preserving the Ecuadorian Amazon and for Waorani women. As a result, AMWAE has put a particular interest in protecting their cosmovision, as they are aware that the *pikenanis* (grandparents) are dying, and with them, this knowledge. The purpose of the workshops on language, songs, handicrafts, and food, is not to lose their culture and livelihood, recognizing that the mixture with Western culture has already happened and cannot be undone. The wao cosmology represents the landscape in myths and stories told by the *pikenanis*. In contrast with Western thoughts that underestimate myths to give value to scientific knowledge, these stories are part of the Waorani livelihood and build the holistic perspective that encompasses the Waorani existence within their ecosystem.

Nancy, AMWAE's founder and current health leader, gave me insight into the Waorani cosmology while also noting the critical role of the *pikenanis*, stating that: " In the Waorani culture, trees have spirits. Our *pikenanis* used to tell us these stories in the jungle before going to sleep, while we slept under the trunks of the trees. They told us that the spirits live up in the treetops. But at night, the spirits come down to watch over us and attack our enemies. You can hear sounds at 6:15 in the evening (she makes sounds with her mouth). These sounds mean that they are coming down to protect us. Have you heard that sound? My grandfather used to play with me and tell me that when I heard that, the spirits would take me away and I would get scared and fall asleep. All the Waorani have many stories from the rainforest, the lagoon, the mountain, the water, the stone, and the earth. We have many stories." (Nancy, 2023). Their natural world results from the collective memory shared between generations and is linked with the living and dead people.

4.4.1 Waorani Time: Past and Future Generations

The concept of "natural abundance", coined by the anthropologist Laura Rival, has no translation to *wao-terera*; however, it represents their relationship with the living people, forest, and past generation (Rival 2002, 80). In contrast with the Western concept of time as linear, the Waorani aren't interested in quantifying time. Therefore, when Waorani people talk about their history or grandparents, it could mean a few years ago or centuries. However, they practice a sustainable livelihood as they are highly conscious of the impact of their resource management on future generations.

First, they were reluctant to agriculture because they were aware that people should refrain from subsisting on food created by themselves in the present. The traditional Waorani were semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers who were conscious of the importance of time lags between nature's generative function and its use by humans (Rival 2002, 90). Moreover, for Waorani, the natural abundance and the giving environment are the result of the work of their *pikenanis*. The presence of abundant resources in their forests is thanks to the activities of the dead people. Hence, people's actions today will impact their children's future.

> "We must take care of our nature. Without land, without water, without forest we are nobody. We are 'dead' as they say in other countries. Exploited lands are worthless and pure chemicals, and we do not want that to happen. We want these children to come and see with their eyes the trees, water, land, and inheritance our grandparents left us. That is what we want to preserve for the children to come. How will children study a toad or snakes if there are none? They will only see the drawings left by their grandparents. That is what we want them to live." (Cahuo, 2023).

The relationship of Waorani between each other and with the environment is based on respect and sharing. They are conscious that they are receiving this wealthy natural world from their *pikenanis* and that they should ensure this same state of wealth for their children.

4.4.2 Cultural Identity: Fight and Never Forget

A key aspect within Waorani cosmology is the importance of the forest and the natural world as part of their cultural identity. As identified during the field research, the Waorani attach great importance to the "heritage of their *pikenanis*", which is their territory.

"The forest is life. Without the forest, I would not exist. Without the forest, I would not be talking about my culture, my people. Without the forest, I would be like a stone, dead, like a dry stick [...]. Without my culture and my forest I would not be someone. I must have my land, forest, and healthy water to be something. On the land, we do everything; we eat there since my grandparents left us that inheritance". (Carola 2023). This quote expresses that the interdependence of the Waorani people with the forest is a vital aspect of the Waorani identity.

Carola, AMWAE's leader of territory also explained how the oil companies have monetized their inheritance: "Here (in Shell) I always spend (money), but in my community, I do not lose a penny to drink water. I wish they (oil companies) would not pollute anymore; I always think about it" (Carola, 2023). Moreover, she also condemns the monetization and the reductionist view of her ecosystem as a resource provider; these world-view go against the values of her community.

The fact that they call the forest *monito ömë* (our land) or *ömë (*homeland*)* and they perceive it as the inheritance of their grandparents implies a connotation of a custodial role to defend it. Therefore, one of the main attributes of Waorani and one of the things they are most proud of is their past as warriors.

While I was on my way to *Yawepare* with Okaguinke, Carola, and Carlota, we saw all the oil wells installed on the road from El Coca to Dayuma. In the meantime, they told me stories about how their warrior grandparents protected El Coca from the oil companies. "In the old days, our grandparents were healthy, strong, and gatherers. They kept watch from north to south. They roamed like drones; they watched. They traveled the whole territory in one week;

something that today takes two or three months. They fought against 'the villains' in Coca, Napo, all the way to Arajuno. Our ancestors fought against Shell Company; otherwise, everything would have been destroyed. They were warriors, strong, real doctors, psychologists, biologists, as you say today, they led." (Okaguinke 2023).

Waorani women are claiming this warrior past. Through the AMWAE they become the new warriors who are defending the territory. They acknowledge the labor of their *pikenanis* and are embracing this role to resist and fight against the pollution and dispossession of their territories and their giving environment.

" 'You must never leave our culture, our language, our crafts, our territory, our lagoon, our jungle. You can never forget.' This is what a p*ikenani* shouted at me. She told me ''I will fight, but I will die. But you are young.' I was 25 years old" (Nancy, 2023). These were the words of Nancy as she was telling me why she founded the AMWAE. The importance of their ancestors and the knowledge they inherited from their grandparents motivates the Waorani women to keep resisting through the AMWAE.

4.5 Recognition

Recognition has been a constant battle for Waorani women throughout their history. For example, recognizing the Waorani and other nationalities was a pivotal moment for protecting their rights, as Ecuador was being recognized as a *plurinational* state. For Waorani people, recognition is broader than just recognition from the State. As mentioned in the section "AMWAE for the Survivability of Waorani Women", recognition plays a vital role in

building a sense of *communality* in the AMWAE. Additionally, recognition from other actors would play a crucial role in opening job opportunities and their participation in economic activities (Schlosberg 2004).

4.5.1 Job Opportunities and Economic Investment

A few kilometers from the community of *Yawepare*, Orellana, there is an oil well belonging to the PetroOriental company. This platform is so close to the Waorani community that, despite being in the middle of the jungle, we could not notice a moment of silence. Day and night it is possible to hear the machinery working. During my visit, I noticed that several of the inhabitants of this community work in these facilities. Okaguinke told me that this company has been trying to buy the territory from Waorani for several months, but the community does not want to.

On the contrary, in October 2022 the inhabitants of *Yawepare* occupied PetroOriental's facilities. The reason behind this strike was the pursuit of "recognition". "The community was on strike because they (the oil companies) must recognize something to work there. They must provide housing, a center, or a school; they must give them something. The company did not recognize them, did not do anything. That is why they went on strike. In my community, Block 16 (Dikaro), the same happened. They must recognize" (Isabel, 2023).

As previously addressed, the settlement of oil companies has caused environmental damages and changes in Waorani's livelihood. However, it has also generated job opportunities and community economic investment. As part of an unwritten agreement, oil companies must

"recognize" the community where they are settling by providing services, construction of facilities, and job opportunities.

The construction of oil wells involves the construction of roads connecting the communities. For AMWAE, these roads facilitate land access to these communities and the provision of services. This was the case during our visit to Yawepare, where we delivered carts, clothes, food, mosquito nets, and overland tools. Additionally, I learned that the children of *Yawepare* get into the oil employee's vans every day to go to the nearest town so that they can attend school. During our visit, Okaguinke and I got on one of these vans to get to the bus station and were able to go back to Shell.

However, not all Waorani people are in favor of the development of roads and the support of oil companies. "The Waorani communities that have roads have problems with the company. Because the community wants the company for job opportunities because sometimes, they do not have work, so they ask the companies to come in. In the end, it is going to damage their territory and everything they have. Therefore, we (the NAWE) are trying to get projects that give money from, for example, tourism and not oil. The Waorani communities that live without roads are much better because they live 100% natural, they eat well. Those who live on the road have been taught to eat rice and sugar, but where there are no roads, they drink chicha" (man member of the NAWE 2023). Therefore, the settlement of oil companies in their region means plenty of trade-offs.

Additionally, for several years the company Petrolia, through its foundation Rebsol, provided financial resources to AMWAE as part of an agreement with the NAWE. Likewise, as a

former consultant at Rebsol and collaborator within the NAWE project, Karina Narváez (2023) affirmed, during the school period, this foundation used to support the Waorani with textbooks, uniforms, school repairs, and other basic infrastructure projects. This supports the decision of the Waorani people to want the opportunity to work to get benefits from the settlement of oil companies. Waorani people wish to send their children to school, have easy access to the towns, and have access to the market. Therefore, allowing the entry of these companies seems to be the simplest option.

However, given the negative socio-environmental impacts previously exposed and although AMWAE and the NAWE have different approaches, these two associations share this concern. They are working towards creating new projects that provide other opportunities to the members of Waorani communities. In this case, the AMWAE fights so that eventually oil companies will "recognize" them by guaranteeing a healthy environment and respecting their livelihood, not only for the provision of donations that alleviate their immediate needs but do not guarantee their long-term stability.

4.5.2 Navigate the Market Economy

As mentioned throughout this research, the AMWAE represents an opportunity to generate revenues that benefit the Waorani communities and improve their quality of life without crossing planetary boundaries and losing their traditions. Economic models proposed by *Buen Vivir* and the Social Economy seek to think beyond the mechanistic vision of economic growth mainstreamed throughout the modern world-system.

While I was working in their offices, Gabriela, the project coordinator, and I were constantly talking about what this business model meant for Waorani women. She told me: “Those indigenous women do not belong to the left". "What are we going to ask of them (Waorani women)? That they put on loincloths and go back to the jungle? They have the right to enter the market, industrialize, and improve their lives based on their products" (Gabriela 2023). Waorani women have learned how to enter the market and use it to their advantage by generating income from a fair combination of their labor and the natural materials they use. In tune with the principles of the Waorani culture, they are developing an economic model that does not compromise future generations by giving the Waorani another source of income by selling handicrafts and chocolate, and providing an alternative to the oil economy. Moreover, following Escobar's (2012) logic and *communality* principles, they are developing a post-capitalist mixed economy and are changing their ways of satisfying their needs in a traditional way. They recognize their identity as Waorani people and their limitations, and incorporate other economic practices to the extent that they benefit them without dissolving "their own".

As they recognize their identity as Waorani people, they have learned how to use it in their favor. Whenever they hold a meeting with stakeholders, they wear their feather crowns. Moreover, when they go to fairs, conferences, or when they go to the museum *Mitad del Mundo* they wear their traditional costumes. “The Waorani are in trend, and we must take advantage of it. It attracts many foreigners; it is a curiosity. Who are the Waorani? They are 'the forest protectors', they have the Yasuní. What do people from outside want? They want the ‘lungs of the world’ to be cared for. That is what sells. First, we are not cutting down the forest, we are planting where there are already deforested chakras and we are diversifying

them; we are improving the women's diet, we are improving the women's economy and we are protecting the forest. That is money" (Clara 2023).

Tension has been identified while studying the interest of the AMWAE to preserve Waorani cosmology and territory while also interacting with oil companies and navigating the market economy. Since the interaction with the West, the Waorani nationality has been experimenting with "trade-offs" that have brought positive elements to their realities as well as negative ones.

As explained throughout this research, the interaction with oil companies made them sedentary, changed their diet, introduced different sicknesses, polluted their environments, caused social problems such as alcoholism, and provided "compensations" that encouraged younger generations to forget their traditional roles, languages, and culture. On the other hand, the "recognition" from oil companies has brought durable goods, electrical appliances, cement infrastructure, and services such as schools and hospitals, and it has facilitated access to the communities through the construction of roads. Moreover, they have delivered economic support through programs, wage labor opportunities, and delivery of supplies. Supporting the logic of Lu, Valdivia, and Silva (2016), based on the concept of "maldevelopment" (Gudynas 2009, Shiva 2016, Kothari et al. 2019) that prioritizes capital and material accumulation, then probably the Waorani are "less poor". On the other hand, if their life quality is measured by access to clean resources, a safe environment, and preservation of a traditional healthy diet, then the interaction with the West worsened their conditions.

This reality has raised other questions about romanticizing indigenous communities and their right to self-determination. As Philippe Descola stated "[…] viewing Amazonian Indians as 'primitive environmentalists' and their cosmologies as practical manuals of ecological management do not do justice to the originality of their ecological knowledge nor the resilience of their cosmologies" (Descola in Surrallés and García Hierro 2005, 34). Reproducing this concept of "primitive environmentalist" or "noble savage" takes away Waorani's agency to change and to adapt to the new socioeconomic conditions generated after the settlement of the oil companies.

The *pluriverse* and the *Buen Vivir* blend the positive values of these new socioeconomic conditions with the positive values of indigenous cultures, in this case, the Waorani culture. Creating this alternative world-system is about achieving an "ecology of knowledge". The AMWAE has clarified that they are not "anti-economy" or "anti-market". Contrariwise, they accept and redefine the market from their ancestral practice and cosmology. They participate in the market to improve their quality of life and have the purpose that their production and sales will one day support them 100% and stop depending on donors. Hence, AMWAE is creating an alternative to the modern narrative of development that resonates with their intention of *Living Well.*

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research explores the connection between Environmental Justice and the environmental movement of the Waorani women of the Ecuadorian Amazon. Through concepts such as "diversity" and "recognition", the EJ theory moves from the distributive focus of the classical EJ theory that portrays nature as a resource provider to incorporate their reality. Moreover, the decolonial lens in Environmental Justice enabled the research to transit from a superficial analysis to integrate gender, race, and epistemological variables. Finally, the theories of *pluriverse*, ecofeminism, and *Buen Vivir* provide a framework to analyze the economic proposal that the AMWAE is developing.

Throughout the research, I analyzed how an economy based on pluriversal principles created by the AMWAE enhances its culture and identity as Waorani women. It moves away from the individualistic approach to strengthening the solidarity and *communality*. This economy finds value in traditional customs and diversity of knowledge. It seeks to recover and enhance the appreciation of traditions and ancestral cosmology to develop products that will be sold on the market and whose revenues will improve their quality of life.

This "post-economy" does not deny the market nor pretends to remain outside it. On the contrary, AMWAE is part of the market, but without blindly following its mechanistic behavior. This economy is navigating the market economy and reinterpreting it to break the domination discourse that uses indigenous women, nature, and ancestral cosmology to increase economic revenues. It breaks the maldevelopment logic by measuring life quality with concepts beyond monetary units. This economy enables a dialogue between different

knowledges to create a new economic rationality whose ultimate goal is to live well. This is another example of how local initiatives are challenging the OWW vision. It also stresses the importance of movements that question the coloniality of knowledge and globalization by developing approaches that fit their realities and local experiences.

This research contributes to the EJ theory by proving how concepts such as "survivability", "nature and traditions", and "recognition" can enhance the understanding of EJ beyond the distributive realm. Moreover, it highlights the relevance of incorporating indigenous women's realities in the EJ theory. Furthermore, it proves how Waorani women reclaim their spaces and face mainstream economics and development paradigms. Additionally, these conclusions have an important implication for the EJ theory by demonstrating that more movements throughout the Global South are arising and making the *pluriverse* bigger. By analyzing the alternative economy created by Waorani women, this research highlights indigenous women's agency, resilience, and adaptation capacity when they encounter socio-environmental challenges. This adds to the discussion of indigenous rights, gender equality, and intersectionality.

This research can potentially inform the academic community in EJ, indigenous studies, gender studies, decolonial studies, and ecological economics. Furthermore, it can inform organizations and policy-makers working on environmental and social justice issues in the Global South to develop more inclusive projects. Finally, it can inform other indigenous communities or organizations facing similar challenges and provide practical insights on how to create alternative economic models that preserve their ancestral knowledge and the natural world.

Through the research, the relevance of the concept of "givingness" could be identified. On the one hand, the “givingness” among the Woarani people, strengthened communality and solidarity. On the other side, the “giving environment” is a provider of life and spirituality. Finally, the “givingness” or lack thereof of extractive companies through recognition. Further research could go deeper in analyzing this concept and its meaning for indigenous EJ movements. Additionally, future research could use a mixed methodology to analyze the quantitative approach of this economic proposal.

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Annexes

Annex 1. Sample of questions asked during the "semi-structured" interviews.

Categories

1. Experience Waorani people vs. Oil Institutions and the Nation-State
    a. Since when have you been noticing a change in your environment? How did these change your way of living?
    b. What is the relationship between the Waorani people and the state?
    c. Why did the Yawepare community occupy the oil well? What were you looking for?
    d. How did things change in the community after the settlement of the oil companies?
    e. Who are the illegal hunters and loggers? Do you consider the AMWAE has helped reduce these illicit activities?
    f. Have you developed projects with the Minister of Economy and Social Inclusion (MIES)?
    g. Do plenty of Waorani communities work for the oil companies?
    h. What is the NAWE demanding from the state and the oil companies?
    i. What are the problems that the Waorani nationality is currently facing?
    j. How was the situation during Correa's administration?
    k. What are your activities as the leader of Tourism in the NAWE?
    l. What are your activities as the leader of Territorial and Community Coordination and Monitoring?
2. AMWAE and the Environmental Justice Movement
    a. How was the AMWAE created? Who conforms the AMWAE?
    b. How does the AMWAE help alleviate the challenges you have mentioned?
    c. I always hear that the Waorani women in AMWAE are "resisting". What are you resisting?
    d. Which type of activities does the AMWAE execute?
    e. What are the alternatives to generate income besides the activities performed in the AMWAE for the Waorani people?
    f. What is your job as the leader of territory in AMWAE?
    g. What is the ideal scenario for the future of the AMWAE? When could you say "We did it"?
    h. Would you say the relationship between Waorani men and women changed after the creation of the AMWAE?
    i. Why does the AMWAE receive money from oil companies?
    j. How did your community change after the creation of AMWAE?
    k. How was your experience working for AMWAE in 2008?
    l. The AMWAE is an association from the NAWE (previously ONHAE). Can you tell me more about this?
    m. What were the challenges you faced while collaborating with the AMWAE?
    n. How is the AMWAE contributing to the preservation of the Waorani livelihood?

o. When did the production of cocoa start taking place?
p. Does each community have a different cocoa production technique? Do men participate in this activity?
q. What is the difference between the NAWE and AMWAE?

3. Waorani Cosmology and Epistemic Violence
   a. What is "nature" for the Waorani?
   b. Why are the Waorani women known as the "guardians of the forests"?
   c. Do you feel there is a different relationship between the forests and Waorani women?
   d. Is it true that the younger generations are forgetting the Waorani culture? Why do you say that?
   e. What impact does forgetting the Waorani culture have in the forests?
   f. If I could ask for your personal experience. What would you say the forest means to you?
   g. What encourages young people to leave the communities? What is the impact of this on the territory?
   h. How is the AMWAE improving the conservation of the Waorani culture?
   i. I know you have plenty of tails and myths surrounding nature. What does this mean to you?
   j. How do you collaborate for avoiding the Waorani culture to be erased?
   k. Which type of workshops does the AMWAE give?
   l. What is the *Buen Vivir*?
   m. Is it true that you live based on the philosophy of *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay*?
   n. Does this concept change the way you interact with nature?

Annex 2. More frequent words mentioned throughout the semi-structured interviews generated by NVIVO

Annex 3. Written consent from Cahuo Boya, the president of the AMWAE, for the taking and use of photographs of the Waorani community for this research

CEU CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

CONSENTIMIENTO PARA LA TOMA DE IMÁGENES Y AUTORIZACIÓN PARA SU USO

Organización: Asociación de Mujeres Waorani del Amazonia Ecuatoriana (AMWAE)

Nombre de la persona: Cahuo Boya, presidenta AMWAE

Nombre del padre, madre o tutor/a (si es que aplica): _____

CONSENTIMIENTO PARA LA TOMA DE IMÁGENES

Por la presente, doy mi consentimiento para que se me tomen fotografías (a mi hijo/a o tutorizado/a). El término "imagen" incluye video o fotografía fija, en formato digital o de otro tipo, y cualquier otro medio de registro o reproducción de imágenes.

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FIRMA

☒ Sí autorizo ☐ No Autorizo

Fecha: 23 Mayo 2023

Firma: _____
Si es mayor de 12 años

Firma: Cahuo Boya
Representante legal (si es que aplica)