

# *When different worlds meet:*

Enactments of ontologies by the Waorani  
and other actors engaged in oil extraction  
and nature conservation



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## Abstract

This thesis focuses on the Waorani, an indigenous group of semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers that inhabit a relatively large territory in the Ecuadorian Amazon and have only recently come into contact with the rest of society. Nowadays, the Waorani regularly interact with “outside” actors that are interested in the natural resources in their territory: extractivist actors are interested in oil extraction, whereas environmentalist actors are interested in wildlife conservation. By adopting a political ontology framework, this thesis shows that the conflicts and misunderstandings that take place in this interaction can be explained by these actors enacting different worlds or ontologies, rather than by them having different perspectives on the same world. In other words, there exists a multiplicity of ontologies. In “Waorani ontology”, the forest will always provide them with unlimited natural abundance, as long as they reciprocate by spreading seeds throughout their territory and maintaining good relations with the spirits of their ancestors. These are very different practices than those proposed by environmentalist actors such as NGOs in the wildlife conservation projects that they implement in Waorani communities. Consequently, the Waorani continue to hunt unsustainably in the eyes of these actors. In contrast, in the relation between the Waorani and extractivist actors such as oil companies, conflicts take place whenever the Waorani feel that they are not provided with sufficient resources in order to compensate for the contamination and other negative impacts. In other words, when there is no reciprocity. Here we can see that in their interaction with “outside” actors, the Waorani continue to hunt and gather (i.e. they continue to enact “Waorani ontology”) as they collect resources from these actors and move to other ones or seek conflicts when there is low abundance. Conversely, “outside” actors use processes of coordination and distribution through which their own ontology is sustained and others suppressed. This thesis hereby contributes to theorising the dynamics by which different ontologies interact with each other and sustain themselves, which is the topic of current debates within anthropology.

## Abbreviations

AMWAE	<i>Asociación de Mujeres Waorani de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana</i>
FLACSO	<i>Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales</i>
NAWE	<i>Nacionalidad Waorani del Ecuador</i>
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ONHAE	<i>Organización de la Nacionalidad Huaorani del Ecuador</i>
PUCE	<i>Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador</i>
SIL	Summer Institute of Linguistics
USFQ	<i>Universidad San Francisco de Quito</i>
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Background

This thesis is about the Waorani: a group of indigenous people that live in the Ecuadorian Amazon. With an estimated population size between 2000-4000 individuals (Beckerman et al., 2009; Rival, 2015), they inhabit a relatively large territory of around 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Yost, 1991). Traditionally the Waorani were semi-nomadic, subsisting by means of hunting and gathering, and living relatively isolated from the rest of society. They refused all contact with non-Waorani people, which they call *cowode* (“non-humans”), and Waorani warriors speared any intruders they encountered in their territory. It was not until 1958 that a group of missionaries of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) established peaceful and sustained contact with the Waorani for the first time (Rival, 1996b, 2002). Since then, the majority of the Waorani has come into contact with various other “outside” actors (Rivas & Lara, 2001), with the exception of two Waorani clans – the Tagaeri and Taromenane – that continue to live in voluntary isolation (Pappalardo et al., 2013). Many of such “outside” actors are interested in Waorani territory because of the natural resources it contains: large reserves of crude oil as well as a great biodiversity of animal and plant species (Bass et al., 2010; Finer et al., 2008). These “outside” actors can largely be divided into extractivist and environmentalist actors, based on their specific interests in natural resources.

Extractivist actors are actors such as oil companies, but also the Ecuadorian government, which are interested in oil extraction in the Amazonian region. Oil companies first started extracting large amounts of oil from Waorani territory in 1967 (Kimerling, 2013), supported by the government which granted them the extraction rights. However, the Waorani were never consulted in this process nor informed about the impacts that oil extraction would have on their territory (Korovkin, 2002). Since then, Waorani that live close to oil fields have experienced several negative effects on their health due to oil spills (Hurtig & San Sebastián, 2002; San Sebastián et al., 2002). Although the government has now titled around 7000 km<sup>2</sup> of the original territory to the Waorani and named it the Waorani Ethnic Reserve, oil extraction continues as by law all subsurface minerals remain property of the state (Kimerling, 2013). As compensation and in order to get their “permission”, oil companies have made agreements with the Waorani to provide them with various material resources, such as school buildings, transportation, and money. However, we will see that despite such agreements, various conflicts have ensued between the Waorani and oil companies.

In contrast, environmentalist actors such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and biological research stations are interested in the conservation of natural resources, particularly of wildlife populations. These actors are concerned with the indirect effects of the presence of oil companies in Waorani territory. Many Waorani have now settled in permanent communities along roads that were constructed to reach oil reserves and hence have gained access to markets (Holt et al., 2004; Lu, 2007). As the Waorani are now able to sell bush meat on these markets, many of them have shifted from hunting solely for subsistence to hunting for commercial purposes as well, and are thus killing larger amounts of wildlife (Espinosa et al., 2014; Suárez et al., 2013). Environmentalist actors attempt to diminish these unsustainable hunting practices of the Waorani by implementing projects focused on alternative livelihoods and zonification of the territory. We will see that in spite of these efforts,

many Waorani continue to hunt for commercial purposes; hence the relation between the Waorani and environmentalist actors has not been without difficulties either.

### *Problem statement and relevance*

In short, the Waorani, a group of hunter-gatherers that until recently used to live relatively isolated from the rest of society, are now in regular contact with various “outside” actors (i.e. extractivist and environmentalist actors) that are interested in the natural resources in Waorani territory. This is a situation in which actors with very different practices, ideas, interests and power levels encounter each other, which most likely influences the interaction between them. Various anthropologists have previously studied differences between groups of people and have often argued that these are the result of different cultures. However, more recently debates have started about whether these differences are rather the result of the existence of multiple realities – as opposed to the existence of one reality and multiple cultures – and if so, how this affects the dynamics of interaction between different actors. These debates form the theoretical framework of this thesis (which will be further explained in the next section).

The scientific relevance of this study is that it contributes to these debates by providing empirical evidence from the case of the Waorani and “outside” actors in favour of the argument that there exist multiple realities for different actors which influences the interaction between these actors. It does so by exploring the dynamics of interaction between the Waorani and “outside” actors, particularly focusing on the power relations, processes of decision-making, conflicts, and misunderstandings that occur between these actors. The societal relevance of this research is that by understanding the interactions between actors with different “ways of being”, we can understand why conflicts and misunderstandings take place between them and get clues on how to better cooperate with actors such as the Waorani that are very different from “us”.

## **1.2 Theoretical framework**

As described above, there are various debates within anthropology about the interaction between actors with different “ways of being”. In this section I describe the theoretical framework that I have chosen to adopt to study these interactions and the current theoretical debates related to this framework.

### *The ontological turn*

This thesis makes use of the political ontology framework; an emerging framework that has recently been proposed by a group of scholars (e.g. Blaser, 2009a, 2009b, 2013, 2014; Candea, 2014). The political ontology framework originated from the field of cultural anthropology, which is concerned with studying the differences between groups of people, also called alterity. Often anthropologists have attributed these differences to groups of people having different cultures (Paleček & Risjord, 2012). Those anthropologists thereby adopt a representationalist position, meaning that they assume that people represent the world around them in different ways (Holbraad, 2010). In other words, there are different ways of seeing the world. This is a multiculturalist understanding; it assumes that there is one world or reality “out there” and that there are multiple perspectives on what this world or reality looks like, i.e. there are multiple cultures (Viveiros de Castro, 1998).

In contrast, in recent years anthropologists have become increasingly interested in studying ontology, leading to what some have described as an *ontological turn* in anthropology (e.g. Candea, 2014; Henare, Holbraad, & Wastell, 2007; Holbraad et al., 2014; Paleček & Risjord, 2012; Scott, 2013). The concept of ontology originally comes from the discipline of philosophy and involves the study of reality, dealing with questions such as what kind of entities can be said to exist and what relations take place between them (Blaser, 2014). Anthropologists have adopted this concept to express the idea that differences between groups of humans are caused by the way their reality, or world, looks like (Paleček & Risjord, 2012). In other words, there exist multiple realities or worlds (Blaser, 2009b). This is what Viveiros de Castro calls *multinaturalism*; rather than different groups of people having different cultures, there are multiple worlds that are being assumed by them, i.e. there is more than one “nature” (Viveiros de Castro, 1998). Thus, in short, in the ontological turn anthropologists have moved away from the idea that there are different perspectives on a single reality or world, to the idea that there actually exists a multiplicity of realities or worlds (Blaser, 2009b; Paleček & Risjord, 2012; Viveiros de Castro, 1998).

Various anthropologists have made use of the term ontology to explain differences between groups of indigenous people and Western modernisation (e.g. Descola & Pálsson, 1996). However, in many studies the term *ontology* can easily be replaced by the word *culture* and hence the “ontological” differences that they describe are indistinguishable from mere cultural differences (Blaser, 2009a; Holbraad, 2010). Indeed, what the two terms have in common is that they are both concerned with alterity. Various anthropologists have therefore debated whether ontology, in the way that the term is often used, is “just another word” for culture (e.g. Carrithers, Candea, Sykes, Holbraad, & Venkatesan, 2010). For example, similarly to the use of the term culture, anthropologists often ascribe one shared ontology to a certain group of people and contrast it to a seemingly singular Western modernist ontology, comparing “their” ontology with “ours” (as argued by e.g. Candea, 2010; Holbraad, 2010). However, instead of there being only one ontology that is shared by everyone of a certain geographically delimited group of people (that may previously as well have been defined as a cultural group) (Candea, 2010), “*there may be as many ontologies as there are things to think through*” (Henare et al., 2007). Furthermore, Viveiros de Castro has argued that if ontology were just another way of saying something else, it should probably be nature rather than culture (Viveiros de Castro, 2015), which is more in line with his idea of multinaturalism (i.e. there exists a multiplicity of worlds or “natures”) (Viveiros de Castro, 1998). Here it is also important to note that the term ontology, in the way it is used by ontological anthropologists, has changed from its original philosophical meaning. As Graeber has recently argued, while in philosophy the term ontology is defined as “*discourse about the nature of being in itself*”, in anthropology it is rather used as “*way of being*” (Graeber, 2015). Hence, ontological anthropologists often apply the term ontology as a synonym for “nature”, “world”, or “reality” (e.g. Blaser, 2009a, 2009b). To avoid confusion, we should clearly define what we mean when we adopt philosophical terminology such as the concept of ontology and “*be quite explicit about what work we want them to do for our argument*” (Henare et al., 2007).

What ontological anthropologists mean exactly when they are speaking of an ontological difference can be illustrated with Holbraad’s ethnography of diviners of the Cuban Ifá. During their rituals, these diviners use a kind of powder named *aché*, which constitutes their divinatory power to communicate with spirits (i.e. for them, powder is power). Holbraad has argued:

*“One must accept that when someone tells us, say, that powder is power, the anthropological problem cannot be that of accounting for why he might think that about powder (explaining, interpreting, placing his statement into context), but rather that if that really is the case, then we just do not know what powder he is talking about. This is an ontological problem through and through. For its answer is patently not to be found by searching “in the world” (...) for some special powerful powder. The world in which powder is power is not an uncharted (and preposterous!) region of our own (...). It is a different world, in which what we take to be powder is actually power” (Henare et al., 2007).*

In other words, in this example, we should not consider “powder is power” as simply a belief of the Cuban Ifá, a different way of seeing “power”, or a perspective that only makes sense in the context of Ifá culture and not in our own culture (i.e. because we know that “powder” is a thing and “power” cannot be). Instead, there exists another reality or world for the Cuban Ifá in which “powder” really is “power” (Henare et al., 2007). This is an ontological difference rather than an epistemological one, i.e. it involves *“fundamentally different realities”*, not *“different ways of knowing the same reality”* (Laidlaw, 2012). The purpose of adopting an ontological approach is then to explore potential different kinds of realities or worlds, without making judgements about *“what is”* and *“what is not”* (Pedersen, 2012).

Thus, the ontological turn in anthropology can be seen as an effort to *“take seriously the things the people we study tell us”*, as Viveiros de Castro puts it. Although it can be argued that we will probably never completely understand the ontology of our research subjects (Viveiros de Castro, 2015), and although any attempt to describe a different ontology will inevitably involve some kind of transformation of that ontology (Holbraad et al., 2014), we should always attempt a *“good enough description”* that the research subjects would at least not disagree with it (Viveiros de Castro, 2015). Two quotes of Holbraad further explain what an exploration of different kinds of ontologies may look like. First, referring to the observation of Evans-Pritchard that for the Nuer pastoralists of Southern Sudan “twins” are “birds” (see Evans-Pritchard, 1940):

*“Rather than using our own analytical concepts to make sense of a given ethnography (explanation, interpretation), we use the ethnography to rethink our analytical concepts. Rather than asking why the Nuer should think that twins are birds, we should be asking how we need to think of twins, birds (and all their relevant corollaries, such as humanity, siblinghood, animality, flight or what have you) in order to arrive at a position from which the claim that twins are birds is no longer registered as an absurdity. What must twins be, what must birds be, etc.?” (Holbraad, 2010).*

And second, referring to the existence of a different conception of time for a hypothetical group of people:

*“...the relativist reports that in such-and-such an ethnographic context time is “cyclical,” with “the past ever returning to become the present.” It is an evocative idea, to be sure. But strictly speaking, it makes no sense. To be “past” is precisely not “to return to the present,” so a past that does so is properly speaking not a past at all*



*(...). By contrast, (...) the ontologically-inclined anthropologist takes this form of e(qui)vocation as a starting-point for an ethnographically-controlled experiment with the concept of time itself, reconceptualising “past,” “present,” “being,” etc., in ways that make “cyclical time” a real form of existence. In this subjunctive, “could be” experiment, the emphasis is as much on “be” as on “could”: “Imagine a cyclical time!” marvels the relativist; “Yes, and here is what it could be!” replies the ontological anthropologist” (Holbraad et al., 2014).*

Thus, one of the challenges as ontological anthropologists is to revise our own analytical concepts in order to describe what a different ontology *could be* like (Holbraad et al., 2014; Paleček & Risjord, 2012). In other words, instead of imposing a predefined framework of analytical concepts on our findings in order to explain them, as often happens in anthropology, in ontological anthropology it's the other way around: our own analytical concepts get redefined based on what we find (Holbraad, 2010). Some have claimed this to be one of the strongest points of the ontological turn within anthropology (e.g. Henare et al., 2007; Holbraad, 2010; Viveiros de Castro, 2015).

However, as Viveiros de Castro has pointed out, taking our research subjects seriously does not necessarily imply that we have to believe everything they say (Viveiros de Castro, 2015). Similarly, some anthropologists have argued for a more realist approach than is often adopted by ontological anthropologists. For example, Graeber has argued that ontologies can only exist “*in relation*” to a certain group of people:

*“(...) when in the presence of assumptions, or (...) “conceptions” that are sufficiently foreign to the ethnographer’s own (e.g., that stones are persons, or powder is power), the ethnographer must act as if those conceptions are (...) constitutive of reality, and therefore of nature, itself. This “as if” is crucial. Saying there are “many natures” might seem like a very radical claim. But no one is actually arguing that there are parts of the world where water runs uphill, there are three-headed flying monkeys, or pi calculates to 3.15. They are not even suggesting there are really places where tapirs live in villages (...). Each different nature, then, can only exist in relation to a specific group of human beings sharing the same ontology” (Graeber, 2015).*

In addition, he has pointed out that some anthropologists take their “*could be*” descriptions of different realities or worlds a bit far by declaring the actual physical existence of such worlds (such as in parts of Henare et al., 2007) (Graeber, 2015). While on the one hand we should not deny the existence of such worlds “*behind the native’s back*” (Viveiros de Castro, 2015), on the other hand we can also wonder whether “the native” would agree with the statement that they live in a different world (Graeber, 2015). Consequently, ontological anthropologists have to be careful with the kind of language they adopt when exploring different ontologies.

Moreover, there are other difficulties with writing about the existence of multiple ontologies as well. Many attempts to explore different kinds of realities or worlds have not gone much further than “*the wishful unthinking of multiculturalism*”, to put it in Viveiros de Castro’s words (Viveiros de Castro, 1998). The problem is that it is difficult or perhaps even impossible to leave out the anthropologist’s own ontological assumptions in the analysis. Even when multiculturalism is denounced by the anthropologist, the end result is often a description of different ontologies “out there” and hence the

modernist ontological assumption of a single reality or world gets enacted, despite mentioning that this world consists of multiple ontologies (Blaser, 2014; Candea, 2014; Pedersen, 2012). This is what Blaser calls *“the problem of the claim of ontological multiplicity as an ultimate reality”* (Blaser, 2014). Similarly, Pedersen has argued that *“insisting on the ‘reality’ of multiple worlds commits you to a meta-ontology in which such worlds exists”* (Pedersen, 2012).

### *Enactments of ontologies*

Then how can we study and write about different ontologies? And how do we avoid making the claim of ontological multiplicity as an ultimate reality? Following the work of different anthropologists, it can be argued that it is possible to study ontologies by looking at (1) practices, (2) stories, and (3) interactions.

First, Blaser has proposed that we should look at the *enactment* of ontologies (Blaser, 2009a, 2009b, 2013). Here, he borrows ideas from Science and Technology Studies. In this field of study, it is assumed that reality is shaped in practices. Therefore, it can be argued that it is different practices that bring into being multiple worlds or ontologies (Mol, 1998). In other words, rather than ontologies influencing practices, ontologies are shaped through practices. This way, ontologies perform themselves into worlds (and hence “ontologies” and “worlds” can be seen as synonyms) (Blaser, 2009a). Thus, ontologies are what Blaser has named *“a way of worlding”*, i.e. a way of enacting a certain reality (Blaser, 2013). Similarly, Latour has argued that facts (or reality) should be seen as *“factishes”* – a term that combines the words “facts” and “fetishes” – since they are at the same time real and being done. In other words, reality is real because it is being performed; it is the ongoing effect of practices (Latour, 1999). As a consequence, worlds or ontologies are constantly becoming or *“in the making”* (Blaser, 2009b). Blaser has argued that by always describing different ontologies as constantly becoming or in the making (i.e. as ways of “worlding”), we can avoid reinforcing the idea of there being fixed ultimate ontologies “out there” (i.e. the claim of multiple ontologies as an ultimate reality) (Blaser, 2013).

Second, Blaser has argued that different ontologies can also be studied by looking at stories, because the enactments of practices are *storied* and these *stories* in turn are enacted (he calls this *“storied performativity”*). In other words, stories do not refer to a certain reality “out there” or to a certain practice that is being enacted, but they participate in the enactment of the practices that they narrate, i.e. they have *“world-making effects”* (Blaser, 2013).

And third, others have argued that besides practices and stories, interactions between people and other entities (both human and non-human) are what shape worlds or ontologies. More specifically, it can be said that *“worlds are created through concrete relations and actions among persons, things, spirits, and deities”* (Ishii, 2012).

### *Political ontology*

So far we have mainly looked at the *ontology* part of the political ontology framework (i.e. the ontological turn within anthropology), but what makes it *political*? It is precisely by studying the interactions between different ontologies that ontological anthropology becomes political. One of the main assumptions within the political ontology framework is that different worlds or ontologies

are partially connected, i.e. they are connected but this does not imply that they share common rules or principles. Therefore, multiple worlds or ontologies do not form a universe, but rather a *pluriverse*. The political ontology framework looks at the dynamics that take place in the encounter and interaction between the different worlds or ontologies in this pluriverse (Blaser, 2014), i.e. in the *“partially connected unfolding of worlds”*. Besides the word “political” pointing at a certain political sensibility or commitment to the pluriverse (Blaser, 2013), it also refers to the power-laden negotiations and conflicts that often take place in the interaction between different types of worlds or ontologies (Blaser, 2009b). Thus, as Blaser has put it, the problem space within the political ontology framework *“... can then be characterized as the dynamics through which different ways of worlding sustain themselves even as they interact, interfere, and mingle with each other”* (Blaser, 2013). In addition to studying the types of different ontologies that exist and the way they come into being, the political ontology framework therefore explores a question that has not yet been covered in the ontological turn within anthropology: what do interlocutions or disagreements between different ontologies look like? (Candea, 2014).

A few anthropologists have already written about the interactions that might take place in the encounter between different ontologies. For example, Blaser has argued that the modernist ontology protects itself by suppressing or containing the enactment of other possible worlds or ontologies (Blaser, 2009b). This is enabled by processes of coordination (i.e. adding different enactments of worlds or ontologies – thereby assuming they are multiple perspectives of one single reality – and eliminating conflicting ones) and distribution (i.e. keeping different enactments separate from each other) (Mol, 2002). Another type of dynamics that can take place in the interaction between different worlds or ontologies is called *“uncontrolled equivocation”*. This is a type of communicative disjuncture that takes place as a result of the interlocutors being unaware that the other is enacting a different world or ontology (Viveiros de Castro, 2004). A quote by Wagner illustrates this nicely; he indicated that *“their misunderstanding of me was not the same as my misunderstanding of them”* (Wagner, 1981, in: Viveiros de Castro, 2004).

Thus, in short, there are two ongoing debates between anthropologists related to the interaction between actors with different ways of being. First, the debate about the ontological turn within anthropology: can we really speak about multiple worlds or ontologies rather than multiple perspectives on the same world? Second, the debate of political ontology: what do the dynamics of interaction in the encounter between different worlds or ontologies look like? This thesis contributes to both of these current debates by using the case of the Waorani and “outside” actors to provide arguments in favour of the ontological turn and explore the dynamics of interaction between actors that enact different worlds or ontologies. This is done by answering a number of research questions that will be described in the next section.

### 1.3 Research questions

Applying the political ontology framework to the case of the Waorani and “outside” actors (i.e. extractivist and environmentalist actors), the main research question can be defined as:

*How are ontologies enacted in the interaction between the Waorani and other actors engaged in issues of oil extraction and nature conservation in the Ecuadorian Amazon?*

The main research question can be divided into the following three sub-research questions:

1. How do the Waorani enact their ontology regarding natural resources in practices and stories?
2. What are the dynamics of interaction between the Waorani and extractivist actors?
3. What are the dynamics of interaction between the Waorani and environmentalist actors?

The first sub-research question focuses on the traditional and current practices and stories of the Waorani, specifically regarding the use of natural resources; this focus was chosen because this thesis is about the interaction with actors that are interested in natural resources. In other words, the first sub-research question is about enactments of “Waorani ontology”, in order to get an idea of what this ontology *could be* like. The second and third sub-research questions focus on the dynamics of interaction between the Waorani and “outside” actors (i.e. between different kinds of worlds or ontologies). Eventually these questions are also about the enactments of Waorani and other ontologies, as ontologies are also shaped in their interactions with one another. The dynamics of interaction that were studied specifically are the power relations, processes of decision-making, conflicts, and misunderstandings that occur in the interaction between these different actors. In the third sub-research question, I also take on board the issue of how environmentalist actors deal with or make sense of “Waorani ontology”. However, I did not do the same for extractivist actors as I did not have access to a sufficient amount of informants to make claims about how they deal with this. In order to guide the research, the sub-research questions were further operationalised – almost at the level of interview questions – during the proposal-writing phase of this thesis, but for the sake of overall clarity these questions have not been included here.

## 1.4 Methodology

In this section I describe the methodology that I used in order to collect data for answering the above research questions. First I will give a description of the study location and the way that access was obtained, followed by the methods of data collection and analysis.

### *Study location and access*

The data collection for this thesis was done during three months of field work in (mainly) the Ecuadorian Amazon (after an initial phase of two months that were spent in Ecuador’s capital city Quito in order to improve my level of Spanish). The first step in starting the field work was to get access to Waorani territory, which covers a large part of the provinces of Pastaza, Orellana and Napo in the Amazonian region (also called “*el Oriente*”). Only a small portion of their original territory is officially recognised as the Waorani Ethnic Reserve, but the area that is now Yasuní National Park used to belong to the Waorani as well. Together, the Waorani Ethnic Reserve and Yasuní National Park form the Yasuní Biosphere Reserve (Finer et al., 2009). There are currently around 40 permanent Waorani communities dispersed around this area, although the number sometimes changes when communities are abandoned or new ones created (Beckerman et al., 2009). Due to the remote location of these communities in the jungle and the occasional distrust of the Waorani towards “outsiders”, it was not possible to visit them by myself. Therefore, I obtained access through the women’s organisation of the Waorani which is called AMWAE (*Asociación de Mujeres Waorani de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana*). This organisation consists of six Waorani women from different communities, as well as two non-Waorani women; one of mixed indigenous descent (i.e. Kichwa-

Shuar) and one *mestiza*. Although this is an organisation that was originally set up by an oil company, they now primarily cooperate with NGOs and have several projects in Waorani communities. Their largest project focuses on the cultivation of cacao by women and the subsequent production of “Wao chocolate” as a sustainable alternative to hunting for commercial purposes.

Prior to arriving in Ecuador, efforts were made to establish contact with AMWAE through the contacts of another student that had cooperated with them before (also for his MSc thesis, which focused specifically on the cacao project; see Giallombardo, 2014). However, as the women of AMWAE were unresponsive to e-mails, I decided to visit them at their office in Puyo, a small city in the province of Pastaza, at the start of my field work. There I talked with one of the Waorani women that was previously the president of AMWAE and is now in charge of the cacao project, in order to “negotiate access” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). We agreed that I could come to AMWAE’s office every day and participate in all of their activities, such as meetings with different “outside” actors. In addition, on several occasions I joined the women of AMWAE on one- or multiple-day visits to Waorani communities in the jungle. The Waorani communities that I visited were Gareno, Konipare, Meñepare and Tepapare (in order of distance from Puyo). Whereas the first three communities could be reached by car as they are located next to a road constructed by an oil company, Tepapare was still a five-hour trip by motorised canoe away from the nearest road.

Besides doing the majority of my field work in the Amazonian region, I also spent a number of weeks in Quito, as most of the offices of NGOs and oil companies as well as universities are located there. Contact with these actors was established whenever I encountered them during my field work, for example during meetings in AMWAE’s office in Puyo or during visits to Waorani communities (e.g. sometimes NGOs would join on these visits). At a later moment, I visited these actors in their offices in Quito. Further contacts were then also obtained by asking each of these actors if they knew any other actors relevant to my research (i.e. these actors were found by “snowballing”). In addition, I searched for relevant actors on the internet and contacted them through e-mail, after which some invited me to meet them in their offices as well.

### *Methods of data collection*

The research method that was chosen for this study is ethnography. Ethnography *“involves the researcher participating (...) in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts”* in order to understand their ways of life, beliefs and values (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Thus, within ethnography, a variety of qualitative data collection methods are used, such as participant observation, formal and informal interviews, and secondary data collection. During my field work, I used all of the above methods. In other words, there was a triangulation of research methods. Although some researchers have argued that triangulation enables them to confirm the validity of their findings (e.g. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), it can also be argued that there is no single “truth” or reality (i.e. one of the main assumptions of ontological anthropology). Therefore, combining different research methods should rather be seen as a way *“to make better sense of the other”* and *“add richness and depth to any inquiry”* (Silverman, 2011).

### Participant observation

Participant observation involves “the researcher participating to a greater or lesser extent in the field that they are studying” while observing what is happening. In fact, it is sometimes used as a synonym for “ethnography” as the definitions are very similar (Green & Thorogood, 2014). During my field work, I participated in all of the activities of AMWAE. Hereby I sometimes adopted an active role, whereas at other times I had a more observing role. In Puyo I participated in activities such as meetings with other actors (mostly NGOs), helping out in the shop where AMWAE sells the “Wao chocolate” as well as various handicrafts made by Waorani women, and just talking to the Waorani women that were present in the office or joining in their social activities after office hours. During the visits to Waorani communities on which I joined the women of AMWAE, I participated in the workshops that were held with these communities and helped to pick up cacao, but also attempted to participate as much as possible in the daily activities of the Waorani living in these communities, such as going on walks through the forest, gathering plants and fruits, and preparing food. Although many of these visits were primarily focused on the project activities of AMWAE (e.g. delivering workshops or picking up cacao), on several occasions we stayed overnight and hence there was enough time to participate in the “daily lives” of the Waorani living there as well. At the end of each day, I made notes in a field diary about the activities I participated in and the conversations I had during that day.

### Formal interviews

The formal interviews that I conducted were in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The advantage of this type of interviews is that it gives flexibility in how to ask the interview questions (Green & Thorogood, 2014). Before the start of an interview with a certain actor, a topic guide or list of questions was prepared which was adapted to that specific actor. However, other topics or questions were also discussed as these came up in the conversation. At the start of each interview I explained my research topic and what I was planning to do with the information that they would share with me during the interview, i.e. there was informed consent. In addition, I asked for permission to record the interview, which was granted by most of my informants. In the few cases that it was denied, written notes were made instead. In total, I conducted 21 interviews that on average lasted around one hour or more, resulting in almost 26 hours of recorded data which were all transcribed. The majority of the interviews were conducted in Spanish. Of these 21 interviews:

- 10 were held with Waorani women and men, mostly part of AMWAE, but also of NAWÉ (*Nacionalidad Waorani del Ecuador*), which is the Waorani organisation that signs the agreements with oil companies, and Ome Yasuní, which is a small initiative to protect Waorani territory;
- 10 were held with environmentalist actors, including two NGOs called *EcoCiencia* and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the Tiputini Biodiversity Station of *Universidad San Francisco de Quito* (USFQ), which is a research station located in Waorani territory, and a number of anthropologists of USFQ and other universities such as *Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales* (FLACSO) and *Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador* (PUCE) that are or were previously involved as consultants in projects by NGOs or studies about the Waorani;
- 1 was held with an extractivist actor, which was an engineer that previously worked for various oil companies in Waorani territory but recently started working for an NGO.

The latter was the group of actors that was hardest to gain access to. However, further insight into the interaction between the Waorani and extractivist actors was also gained through my interviews with other actors.

### Focus group discussion

In addition, a focus group discussion of 2.5 hours was held with nine Waorani women of AMWAE and NAWA. This discussion was organised by an NGO that was interested in starting a new project focused on the impacts of oil companies in Waorani territory. I participated in this discussion as the topic was relevant for my thesis, and the NGO allowed me to ask questions as well. The focus group discussion was also recorded and transcribed.

### Informal interviews

Throughout my field work, I held informal conversations with various Waorani whenever the occasion arose. Although there was not always an opportunity to conduct formal interviews with these Waorani, the conversations I had with them did cover topics that were relevant for my thesis and I often tried to incorporate some of my interview questions in these conversations. This was the case when spending time with the Waorani women of AMWAE in their office, when other Waorani came to visit their office, when people from NGOs joined on visits to Waorani communities, and especially with the Waorani that I encountered while visiting Waorani communities. Notes were made about these conversations afterwards.

### Secondary data collection

Furthermore, I collected secondary data during my field work, such as a number of books on the Waorani made by AMWAE in cooperation with NGOs, project reports and flyers of AMWAE and NGOs, and ethnographies on the Waorani that I could not access in the Netherlands. During participant observation in various activities and particularly during my visits to Waorani communities I also took pictures, which will be shown throughout this thesis. All pictures shown in the subsequent chapters of this thesis belong to me.

### Data analysis

The data analysis started with a process of reading and re-reading all of the interview transcriptions and field notes in order to get familiar with the data. I entered all the data into the computer software ATLAS.ti in which I assigned codes to the text, following a coding scheme that I made based on reoccurring themes in the data. Later I grouped these codes into code families that enabled me to structure the presentation of the data in this thesis. I selected several quotations of each theme to include in this thesis and translated them from Spanish to English.

## 1.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is important in doing qualitative research, as *“researchers are part of the social world they study”* (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This is particularly the case when doing ethnographic research, as this involves actively participating in the daily lives of the research subjects. The concept of reflexivity refers to the recognition that this inevitably influences the process of data collection (or rather: “generation”), as well as to the practice of critically reflecting on this influence in order to



account for it (Green & Thorogood, 2014). Therefore, in this section I reflect on my role as a researcher in generating the data for this thesis. I hereby focus on my interaction with the Waorani, as I spent the majority of my field work with them.

First of all, as a white, blond, tall girl from the Netherlands I was inevitably seen as an outsider by the Waorani. In fact, the Waorani even have a special word for all non-Waorani people in their language *Wao terero*: they call them “*cowode*”, which means “non-humans” (as opposed to the word “Waorani” which means “humans”). Initially, I also felt like I was treated as an outsider by most of the Waorani women of AMWAE. It was only after spending more than a month with them that I appeared to have gained their trust; from then on they were more willing to talk to me and they started to invite me more often to community visits, meetings, and social activities. Although they were aware that I am a student and that I was going to write a thesis about the Waorani, NGOs and oil companies as I had explained this to them at the start of my field work, I was considered to be a volunteer rather than a researcher. For the purpose of doing participant observation this was an advantageous role, as I was expected to participate in all of the activities of AMWAE. However, arranging formal interviews with them proved to be more difficult. Although most of the women of AMWAE as well as Waorani from other organisations agreed to do interviews with me when I asked them, generally the interviews were postponed several times before they finally took place or they never took place at all. Towards the end of my field work, they were more willing to do interviews with me, perhaps because I had then finally gained their trust.

Second, my interaction with the Waorani sometimes involved misunderstandings. For example, during interviews Waorani would sometimes tell me very long stories that did not have any relation to the interview question I had asked – or at least, it seemed like that to me. Such misunderstandings could have simply been caused by language barriers, as the Waorani have *Wao terero* as their mother language and I had only recently learned Spanish. Consequently, some stories may therefore have gotten “lost in translation”. In contrast, I also considered such misunderstandings to be relevant observations for my research rather than constraints, because this thesis is about the interaction between the Waorani and “outside” actors (i.e. actors that enact different ontologies) and I am an “outsider” that enacts a different ontology as well. As ontologies are also shaped in their interaction with one another, my interaction with the Waorani during interviews or while participating in activities was arguably of influence on the data this generated. However, I tried to be aware of the influence of my own ontology while writing field notes. Although it is perhaps impossible to describe “Waorani ontology” without transforming it, I tried to focus on redefining my own analytical concepts in order to understand “Waorani ontology”.

### *Subsequent chapters*

In the following chapters, I elaborate the empirical evidence. In *Chapter 2*, I provide a description of common Waorani practices and stories in order to give an idea of what “Waorani ontology” *could be* like; thereby answering the first sub-research question. In *Chapter 3* I describe the dynamics of interaction between the Waorani and extractivist actors in order to answer the second sub-research question. In *Chapter 4*, I describe the dynamics of interaction between the Waorani and environmentalist actors in order to answer the third sub-research question. Finally, in *Chapter 5*, I discuss the findings of the previous chapters in light of my main argument and compare this to the findings and theories of other anthropologists.



## Chapter 2: The Waorani

In this chapter, I provide an introduction to the Waorani, their (traditional) practices, and their stories; in other words, to some of the *enactments* of “Waorani ontology”. Although it is most likely that there exists a multiplicity of Waorani ontologies rather than just one, I focus on a number of enactments that I think are shared among most of the Waorani. By doing so, I attempt to describe what that “Waorani ontology” *could be* like. At the end of the chapter, I specifically aim to redefine the concept of “*the availability of natural resources*”, as the Waorani have a very different understanding of what this means compared to many other actors (and in subsequent chapters I show that this has various consequences for their interaction with these actors). This chapter is largely based on the participant observations and interviews that I performed, but as I could not possibly have understood everything about “Waorani ontology” during three months of field work, I add to this by referring to the work of other anthropologists as well in order to be able to provide a more complete description.

### 2.1 Waorani practices and stories

#### *Social organisation*

The traditional social organisation of the Waorani consists of the *nanicabo*, which is a family group of up to 12 families from the same clan (Omene, 2012). These families live together in an *onko*; a long house of around 40 meters in length that is made of palm leaves, with an opening on each side (Izquierdo, 1999). The Waorani arrange marriages between cross cousins, i.e. between the children of a brother and a sister. After marriage, the couple takes up matrilineal residence; the husband is incorporated into the *nanicabo* of the wife’s family (AMWAE et al., 2009). Subsequently, he has more obligations towards this *nanicabo* than to the one in which he was born. This type of residence leads to close relations with other *nanicaboiri* nearby to which men of the family have moved because of marriage. Relatives in those *nanicaboiri* are called *waomoni*, as opposed to *wadani*, or enemies, from other *nanicaboiri* further away (Omene, 2012). Nowadays, a small version of the traditional *onko* can still be found in many *nanicaboiri*, but houses of wood and cement are also common (see Figure 1). The Waorani now also have started to arrange marriages with non-relatives, even *wadani*, for the purpose of making alliances (AMWAE et al., 2009).



Figure 1: Small traditional *onko* in the community of Gareno (left) and wooden house in Konipare (right).

The *onko* is the meeting point for the members of the *nanicabo*. Next to the fire or stove, food is shared, stories are told and songs are sung. Stories and songs are important for the Waorani, because that is how they pass along their knowledge, skills and history to their children and grandchildren. As one Waorani woman explains:

*“In the case of my family, my grandparents taught me, my mother taught me, and I am teaching my children, our culture, our food, our language, the stories, the songs that our grandparents used to have.”*

– Interview Patricia, AMWAE

And the following Waorani song also indicates the importance that is given to passing all these things along to the next generations:

*“Everything that my grandparents taught me, I never forget and I am doing what they taught me now. My grandchildren will follow it; it is the same walk. When I die this song has to stay in the hands of them.”* (In: AMWAE et al., 2009)

### *Myths of origin*

Often, myths are told about the origin of the Waorani or about events that happened a long time ago. Although there are different versions of myths about how the Waorani people originated, for example saying that they came from maize or that they started out as people only walking on tree tops (Omene, 2012), the following myth of origin is perhaps the most common one:

*“It is said that one time the anaconda was lying in the sun on a large beach when a harpy eagle attacked it with its strong claws. The anaconda tried to escape but the eagle killed it and split it in two. From the head came the women, and from the tail came the men, and so the Waorani people came into the world.”* (In: Nenquimo, 2010)

Another often-told myth is about how the Waorani became such skilful hunters. This myth tells about a Waorani man that found a child next to the river and believed it to be the son of his deceased daughter. He therefore raised it as his own grandchild and named him Nenkiwenga. It turned out to be *el hijo del sol*, the son of the sun, who came to the earth to teach the Waorani to be better hunters and make various hunting tools:

*“The Waorani learned to build their houses, make spears of chonta, machetes of the pambil palm, blowpipes, bags, baskets, axes of stone, and more instruments to be the best hunters of the Amazonian jungle.”* (In: Nenquimo, 2014)

### *Hunting and relations with animals*

Hunting is one of the main forms of subsistence for the Waorani. During my visits to Waorani communities, freshly hunted meat was eaten almost daily, and Waorani informed me they hunted various monkeys, birds, peccaries, deer and rodents. Other studies confirm this and show that the preferred species of prey are woolly monkeys, curassows, collared peccaries, white-lipped peccaries, and red brockets (Omene, 2012; Rival, 1996a). Most of these animals are hunted with blowpipes,

which are used to blow darts with poison made from the *curare* vine in order to paralyse the animal. Blowpipes are made by splitting a long stick of wood from the *pambil* palm, making a groove in the two halves, and reattaching them to each other by wrapping them in vine bark. Spears, on the other hand, are only used for killing white-lipped peccaries and jaguars. They are made from a strong piece of wood of the *chonta dura* palm, their tips are sharpened and hardened in fire, and they are decorated with feathers (see *Figure 2*). Nowadays, the Waorani also increasingly use shotguns.



Figure 2: A variety of spears.

The difference between using a blowpipe or a spear can be described as: “*we blow-hunt and we spear-kill*”, as Rival has explained it (Rival, 1996a). In other words, blowpipes are using for hunting and spears for killing. Thus, white-lipped peccaries and jaguars are not actively looked for and hunted for consumption, as is the case for many other animal species such as monkeys and birds, but rather they are killed when they are encountered. In the case of the white-lipped peccaries, this is because they are considered invaders of the territory. They are aggressive, come in large groups and eat everything. Therefore, the Waorani kill groups of white-lipped peccaries whenever they get close to the *onko*, followed by a feast of meat consumption (Rival, 1996a, 2002). Jaguars, on the other hand, are only killed with spears because they are considered humans. For the Waorani, the jaguar is a warrior, disguised in the clothes of a jaguar, because spirits of the Waorani turn into jaguars after they die. When a *wadani* or enemy dies and its spirit becomes a jaguar, it can come to kill you. Therefore, the Waorani make sure they kill the jaguar first. They do this with a spear, just like they would kill their human enemies (Rival, 1996a, 1996b, 2002). When walking through the forest, the Waorani are always looking out for possible jaguar tracks to know if they are nearby (see *Figure 3*).

However, the jaguar is not always an enemy. Family members that have died and turned into jaguars are also able to visit their relatives, through shamans. For the Waorani, shamans are the fathers of the jaguars; they have adopted them as their sons. During spiritual dreams, they visit their adoptive fathers, which then become possessed by the jaguar, and give them information about the location of groups of animals or pass along messages from relatives living far away (Omene, 2012; Rival, 1996b). Nowadays, there are not many Waorani shamans left, as it is said that many of them have died from polio when the missionaries arrived (AMWAE et al., 2009; Omene, 2012).



Figure 3: Jaguar tracks near Tepapare.

Whenever I would ask a Waorani asked directly, he or she would usually answer that in Waorani communities there are no rules for hunting. When you want to go hunting, you just hunt; you can hunt almost any animal and at any location. For example:

*“Yes, we hunt. There are no rules, we hunt when we want. This is the free life I am talking about.”*

– Interview with Penti, Ome Yasuni

However, it could be said that there are some kind of norms for going hunting. As an Ecuadorian anthropologist working for the NGO USAID explained to me:

*“Before they used to have rules, for example like they always gather, travel around the territory, the grandparents sing at night, and say for example: ‘In this path there is a female monkey, a monkey with a baby, pregnant, so don’t hunt it’. So the hunters respect this female monkey. Yes, they never kill babies, for example. They have their own norms.”*

– Interview with Kati, FLACSO/USAID

Another animal that the Waorani respect and would never hunt is the harpy eagle, which is considered a divinity (Omene, 2012). It is a large, majestic eagle with excellent hunting capabilities, for which the Waorani admire him. Waorani like to keep harpy eagles as a pet in their *onko* because it protects them and advises them when there is danger. They go hunting to find food, such as small monkeys or ant eaters, especially for their harpy eagle pet. This also shows the respect that the Waorani have for the harpy eagle, as they tend to only share their hunt when they consider you an equal or a relative. Other animals that the Waorani keep as pets are parrots, parakeets, monkeys, collared peccaries and dogs. On one occasion I was present when a parrot was caught in order to keep it as a pet. It was during a visit to the community Tepapare and we went for a walk in the forest. We reached a waterfall and in the wall was a parrot nest. A Waorani man climbed up a wooden pole to reach the parrot nest, threw out the hatchlings, and caught the mother parrot (see *Figure 4*). They made a few cuts in her wings so that she would be unable to fly and escape.



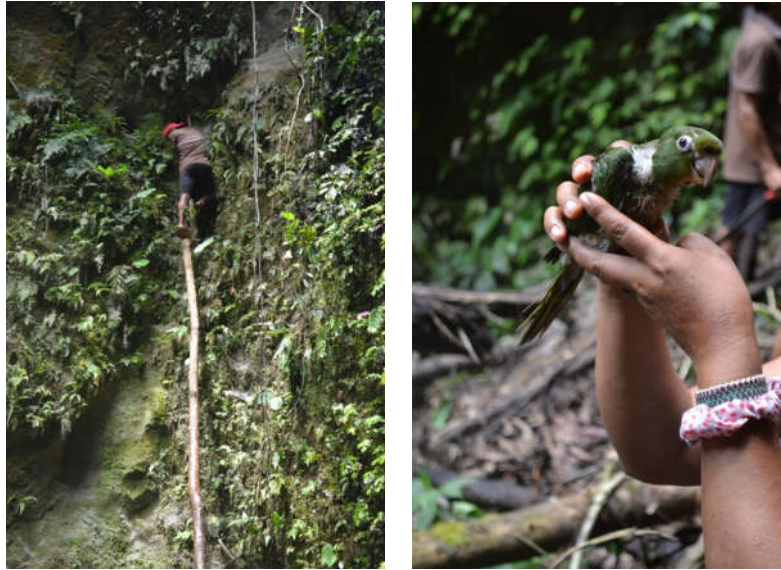


Figure 4: Waorani man catching a parrot from its nest (left); Waorani woman holding the parrot, after her wings were cut (right).

Although different from the respect they have for the harpy eagle, with most of their other pets the Waorani, especially the women, have a close relationship as well, as in the following example:

*“You see when they domesticate an animal it is like another member of the family. And they treat them as such. (...). The women, the most traditional, give breastfeeding to the puppies, to the collared peccaries, to the monkeys, they give it. So I would say that the relation of the woman to nature is as a mother.”*

– Interview with Kati, FLACSO/USAID

It may seem contradictory that the Waorani hunt and eat some of the same animals that they seem to have such a close relationship with when they keep them as pets. However, as explained above, for the Waorani hunting is not the same as killing. In other words, hunting is not really *killing* animals, but rather *gathering* or retrieving them from the forest (Rival, 2002).

### *Gathering and relations with plants*

Gathering is the other main form of subsistence for the Waorani. Besides meat, the diet of the Waorani mainly consists of a variety of fruits that they gather in the forest. The Waorani often go on walks through the forest to gather various fruits, but also leaves, bark, juice of trees, flowers, vines, and seeds, either for consumption or for other purposes such as medication, personal hygiene and body decoration. During my visits to a number of Waorani communities I accompanied them on such walks, and for every plant we encountered, they would be able to tell me what kind of uses it has (or that it should not be used at all because it is poisonous). In order to gather fruits from tall trees, they either climbed it or used a stick to make the fruits fall down, and they carried the fruits in bags made from palm leaves (see *Figure 5*). These daily walks through the forest to gather various natural resources have been described by other anthropologists as well (e.g. Rival, 2002). Although some Waorani nowadays also include other types of food in their diet, such as rice, pasta, oil, flour and canned tuna (i.e. food that has been introduced by outside actors), they continue their way of walking through the forest to gather fruits and other natural resources.



Figure 5: A Waorani boy climbing a tree to pick fruits (left); A Waorani man gathering fruits from a tree with a stick (middle); Waorani women making bags out of palm leaves to carry fruits (right).

One important fruit that is part of the Waorani diet is the *chonta* (see Figure 6). It is eaten either boiled or as *chicha*; a fermented drink that is made in a communal process:

*“I also helped to make chicha; a drink that is made of the chonta fruit, which to me tastes a bit like a dry potato. This is a process that the women do together and even some kids helped. The fruit is cut in pieces and mashed with a stick in a large wooden bowl. Then everyone puts a bit in their mouth, adding a lot of saliva and making a mass before spitting it back. They mix it with water and let it stay overnight or even longer, for a maximum of three days, so it can ferment. (...). They seem to love it and they drink a lot of it.”*

– Field notes from my stay in Tepapare

The same kind of drink can also be made of yucca, which has to be boiled before the process of chewing and mashing starts. Which type of fruit they use to make *chicha* depends on the season, as the Waorani adapt their diet according to different seasons of food availability. For example, most of my visits to Waorani communities were during the months in which there is a high availability of *chonta* fruits (i.e. from January to April). High availability of *chonta* or other fruits is celebrated during *fiestas de la abundancia*, parties of the abundance, together with other families that are invited to visit the *nanicabo*. During this party of multiple days, a lot of fruit is eaten, as well as meat that has been hunted in large amounts especially for the occasion (since a high abundance of fruits is followed by a high abundance of animals such as monkeys and birds that are attracted by the fruits) (AMWAE et al., 2009; Omene, 2012).



Figure 6: *Chonta* fruits (left); Waorani woman carrying *chonta* fruits back to the *onko*, Tepapare (right).

### *Mobility and sowing*

Fruits such as *chonta* and *yucca* are gathered from small plantations, or *chacras*, in the forest, which have been sown by previous generations of Waorani. When encountering such small plantations when walking through the forest, the Waorani were able to tell me exactly by which grandparents they were sown. As one woman explained, her grandparents used to move to different sites in the forest, leaving seeds in the soil and returning when the plants were fully grown and the fruits edible:

*“The grandparents say that they did not use to live like now, we are living in a community, for years, I was born, I grew up in the same community, but the isolated are travelling around the territory. They sow what they sow, and they leave to the other side where it is already ready to consume, they return, consume, and leave to another place, like that they used to travel around, our grandparents.”*

– Interview with Patricia, AMWAE

Although many Waorani (especially the ones living close to cities, oil companies and roads) are living in more permanent communities, the mobility they used to have still continues today. In fact, while going on these walks through the forest to gather natural resources, the Waorani continue to spread seeds to sow new plants. Moreover, they do not only travel through the forest to visit the plantations that their grandparents have sown, but they also tend to move to or visit different communities regularly. As an anthropologist working as a consultant for the government told me:

*“The Waorani move; they have a very active mobility. (...). Now less, but they keep it because they continue to change between communities; they do not stay there. They go to another, they go to their family, they go to Coca, they go to Puyo; they always have mobility. They keep this logic. That does not disappear in one generation, or two generations.”*

– Interview with Roberto, Fiscalía



This also became evident in many conversations I had with various Waorani, in which they would often tell me the history of their life and all the different communities they had lived in, or where their children have lived and are currently living. In fact, a questionnaire that was conducted in 2009 among 261 Waorani showed that 94.9% of the men and 91.2% of the women are currently not living in the same community as they were born, and that 70% has lived in more than 3 communities in their life (AMWAE et al., 2009). Thus, both men and women have this form of mobility, as another anthropologist also indicated:

*“As they are a group with a lot of mobility, not farmers but rather gatherers, their form of mobility is together, unlike other indigenous nationalities where the woman is closer to the chacra and the man goes hunting. In this case men and women travel around, transit through the jungle, providing themselves with different products, seeds, fruits, insects for alimentation, or configuring (...) cultivated forests. (...). This practice of mobility of the whole group also generates that there are much more equal relations.”*

– Interview with Ivette, FLACSO

### *Gender roles*

Similarly, it is often said that the Waorani have very equal or flexible gender roles (e.g. Lu, 2001; Yost, 1991). Starting from a young age, both boys and girls are taught all the different tasks that are involved in hunting, gathering and travelling through the forest. They get to know the forest by accompanying their parents and they learn to hunt and gather by observing and imitating them (Rival, 1996a). During the various walks through the forest that I joined during my field work, the children would always join as well and on several occasions the parents would encourage them to try different ways of gathering resources (see *Figure 7*).



Figure 7: A Waorani boy from Tepapare practicing the skills he learned from his parents in order to gather fruits (left) or catch animals (right).

However, Waorani men and women do have slightly different roles. While the men are the warriors who defend against *wadani* or enemies and often do most of the hunting (although women hunt as



well), the women are rather the gatherers and the experts of the availability of natural resources, and are therefore the ones that decide when it is time to move:

*“The women have an important role. The women (...) are those that end the times of peace and the times of war. The man is man, or the man is warrior. (...). The woman is the great reader of the territory, the gathering expert, because they are, I believe, those that prepare the food, they have a better feeling of the abundance or not. (...). They are the great readers of the jungle, the conditions of the jungle. A lot of pressure; we move. But I am not going to move just like that.”*

– Interview with Roberto, Fiscalía

So far I have described several of the practices and stories of the natural resource use of the Waorani, or better said the *traditional* Waorani. In addition, we have seen that although many changes have happened in the lives of the Waorani (e.g. more permanent communities, different diet), many of the traditional practices have remained largely the same (e.g. hunting and gathering, visiting plantations of ancestors in the forest, mobility between different communities) and many of the myths and stories continue to be told to the next generations. Having these practices and stories in mind, we can already imagine that they might be quite different from the outside actors the Waorani now interact with.

## 2.2 The notion of unlimited natural abundance

Here, I describe one particular part of “Waorani ontology” that I think particularly influences the interaction between the Waorani and outside actors; a notion that I call “the notion of unlimited natural abundance”.

### *Natural abundance for the Waorani*

When talking with Waorani about the availability or scarcity of natural resources in their territory, it becomes evident that for them, the forest provides them with an abundance of natural resources in an unlimited way. For example, this can be seen in the following quotations from interviews:

*“And when we talk about poverty, eradicating poverty in the Amazon, poverty does not exist, because everything is there present. When you want to fish, you grab a net and you go to the river, you swim and you fish. When you want to do hunting, you take a blowgun and spear, you go walking, and you will find animals. When you want to pick fruits, you go and search and you already find them.”*

– Interview with Timoteo, NAWÉ

*“If you want food, you can go hunting, fishing, or collecting fruits. It is all there. (...). We have everything. In the jungle the water is clean and there is food.”*

– Interview with Vicente, NAWÉ

The same notion is expressed in several Waorani myths, where you can find descriptions such as this one:

*"The smoking volcano will never cease to smoke, and the trees will keep growing, while the hunter goes on an adventure without destination." (In: Nenquimo, 2010)*

Similar descriptions were given in interviews and conversations with various other Waorani. In addition, as in the quotations from a number of interviews above, Waorani often use this argument of "poverty does not exist" when they are talking about the availability of natural resources in their territory. For instance:

*"Life is when there is our territory, we have to protect it. We always say: we are not poor; we have a greater richness which is our nature."*

– Interview with Manuela, AMWAE

*"And another thing about poverty: why is there no poverty in our territory? Because we have territory and inside the territory we live surrounded by nature, and you have to learn to work, cultivate, feed yourself, feed your children, and that is all."*

– Interview with Vicente, NAWA

Furthermore, often descriptions are given of all the natural resources that are available in their territory. For example:

*"The river has clear water and small fish. There is no contamination. There are birds. My dad has everything: cacao, mandarin, orange, lime, chonta, chirimoya, sugarcane, wild grapes, chicken, duck. I always used to eat a lot of fruits."*

– Interview with Timoteo, NAWA

For Waorani that live or have lived in the city, this natural abundance in the jungle is often compared to the situation in the city, which does not have the same unlimited unavailability of resources for them:

*"Here in the city, you have to first get money to go to the Supermaxi [a large supermarket in Ecuador]; if you don't have it, you can't. (...). There in the Amazon I can enter and live. (...) if I want to have three women, I get three women and there I go, I have to maintain the family, give them food, raise the kids, but nothing more. Here in the city I can't maintain three women because you need to work a lot, all the time, you need to dress them, health, education, travel, a lot of things, it's a problem."*

– Interview with Timoteo, NAWA

*"We say: you eat well in the community, there is fish, there is everything, but in the city we are suffering. When we have money, we eat well, if there is not any, we only drink water and sleep."*

– Interview with Silvia, AMWAE

Thus, for the Waorani, the jungle is an environment of unlimited natural resources. It has many natural resources that are easy to encounter and there are enough for everyone (as opposed to the city where natural resources are limited).

### *Causes of natural abundance*

The above notion of unlimited natural abundance raises some important questions: for the Waorani, what *does* influence the availability of natural resources? Why are natural resources unlimited? Can they influence it? The answers to these questions can largely be distracted from the practices and stories described in the first part of this chapter. There, we have seen that the grandparents of the Waorani are the ones who have been responsible for spreading seeds and planting different plants in the forest. It is because of them that the Waorani have an abundance of natural resources in their territory, as indicated by several Waorani:

*“...Waorani that have lived, like the grandparents, like ancestors, they left us healthy food that they used to eat, healthy lives.”*

– Manuela, AMWAE (focus group)

*“Because seeing what historically our grandparents have told us, they used to defend the territory, the rivers, the trees, the winds, fresh and clean air for the health. (...). They used to live healthy, they used to eat healthy food; everything that exists in the Waorani territory.”*

– Patricia, AMWAE (focus group)

The role the grandparents had for the abundance of natural resources today also becomes evident in Waorani songs. For example:

*“When I was a child my grandmothers woke up at 3 in the morning to drink sweet chicha of yucca, later with the whole family they gathered the seeds and went to sow. I did not leave this custom, what my grandfather and mother taught me makes me who I am today. That is how I should work for my family and my grandchildren.”* (In: Omene, 2012)

*“We should remember what the grandmothers taught us, now we forget, but we lived like birds, now we forget, like birds we lived, our grandmothers taught us.”* (In: AMWAE et al., 2009)

In addition, these songs also highlight the importance of continuing the tradition of sowing the territory; this is one way to ensure the abundance of natural resources for future generations. This tradition of sowing does not only lead to an abundance of fruits, but also to an abundance of animals, as many of such animals are attracted to fruits. As we have seen, the Waorani recognise these different seasons of fruit and animal availability and celebrate them during *fiestas de la abundancia*.

Besides continuing the sowing of the territory, availability of natural resources is also ensured by maintaining a good relationship with the ancestors. As described in the first part of the chapter, the spirits of Waorani that have died remain in the forest, in the form of jaguars. These spirits or jaguars control the distribution of animals in the jungle and are able to attract animals closer to the *onko*. Communication with ancestors is established through shamans, but also by visiting the *chacras* that are left behind, and visiting the graves of the grandparents:

*“...the cemeteries to go to, maybe tell stories, visit the grandparents to see their bodies.”*

– Alicia, NAWÉ (focus group)

That is another reason that the Waorani continue to have mobility and do not stay in the same place, as an anthropologist explained:

*“The mobility continues, so if they are in one site also at some moment they leave, because the old people want to return to areas from which they left, or where the grandparents died and there are integrated chontas.”*

– Interview with Ivette, FLACSO/WCS

## *Conclusion*

In this chapter, we have seen what “Waorani ontology” *could be* like. In the first part, I described various (traditional) practices and stories related to the use of natural resources that are enactments of this ontology, such as practices of hunting, gathering, spreading seeds, moving around the territory, and telling myths of origin. Many of these practices and stories have remained the same, while others have changed. In the second part, I argued that “Waorani ontology” can be characterised by the notion of unlimited natural abundance, i.e. for the Waorani, the forest will always provide them with an abundance of natural resources. However, the Waorani are able to ensure the availability of natural resources by spreading seeds throughout their territory and maintaining good relations with the spirits of their ancestors (who have taken the shape of jaguars). The subsequent chapters focus on the dynamics of interaction between the Waorani and “outside” actors (see *Chapter 3 and 4*), in which the enactments of “Waorani ontology” that have been described in this chapter play an important role.

## Chapter 3: The Waorani and extractivist actors

In this chapter, I describe the interaction between the Waorani and the extractivist actors that are present in their territory. By “extractivist actors”, I mean the actors that are in favour of oil extraction, which are most importantly the oil companies, but also the Ecuadorian government. In addition, the interaction with missionaries that were involved in the initial entrance of oil companies in Waorani territory is also briefly described. First, I provide an introduction of the oil extraction that is occurring in Waorani territory, the impacts this has, and the way the Waorani have experienced this. Second, I describe the (unequal) power relations between the Waorani and extractivist actors, specifically focussing on the (lack of) involvement of the Waorani in the process of decision-making about oil extraction in their territory. And third, I describe the conflicts and misunderstandings that have occurred in the interaction between the Waorani and extractivist actors.

### 3.1 Oil extraction in Waorani territory

Oil reserves in Waorani territory and other parts of the Amazonian region were first discovered by foreign oil companies, with oil extraction starting in 1937 by Shell Oil (Peláez-Samaniego et al., 2007) and highly increasing in 1967 with the entrance of a large consortium of foreign oil companies led by Texaco and Gulf (now part of Chevron). This quickly led to an “oil boom” in which large amounts of crude oil were extracted from the Amazon and exported to other countries (Kimerling, 2013). In the decades that followed, a series of policy reforms by the Ecuadorian government facilitated nationalisation and privatisation of the oil sector, changing it from first being almost completely run by state-owned oil companies such as *Petroecuador*, to now also contracting foreign private oil companies that are granted rights to extract oil from certain oil blocks (Korovkin, 2002). Currently crude oil is one of the most important export products of Ecuador, accounting for 50% of foreign revenue and 15% of the gross domestic product (Escribano, 2013). However, although oil extraction has been an important driver of economic growth in Ecuador, it has also had negative consequences for indigenous nationalities such as the Waorani that are living in the areas where oil extraction is taking place.

#### *Effects on health and food*

During my interviews, several Waorani described the negative impacts of oil extraction in their territory. One concern that was mentioned often is the contamination that is caused by the oil companies and the effects this has for the health and food of the Waorani. In some areas of their territory, they are noticing that the harvests are not as good as before due to contamination of the soil, and that drinking contaminated water or eating fish from this water can negatively influence their health. For instance:

*“They have violated our territory, our biodiversity, the birds, the animals. Every time they have destroyed and contaminated. (...). They have destroyed where we have lagoons, those they are contaminating, every time we want to catch clean water, now clean water does not exist anymore in one community Dicaro. Where they used to provide for food, fish, now they cannot consume like they used to consume, and*

*neither can they sow seeds like before, so every single time they go to harvest and they cannot harvest anymore.”*

– Patricia, AMWAE (focus group)

*“The oil company takes out a lot of petroleum, they exploit there and make a hole and leave it there. Because it rains full, full and it unites, and it goes to a big river. I eat the fish, the Waorani eat. My brother-in-law died. My grandfather died. Another nephew of my cousin died. They are dying, when they get sick. (...). More when they are pregnant and they stay skinny and die. Therefore I noticed.”*

– Interview with Silvia, AMWAE

Contamination of the soil and water such as described by these Waorani women is a common occurrence. For example, in 28 years of its presence in Ecuador, the Texaco-Gulf consortium extracted almost 1.5 billion barrels of crude oil, producing more than 3.2 million gallons of toxic wastewater daily which they disposed of directly into the environment (Kimerling, 2013). Although other oil companies have been more careful in preventing such large-scale spills, contamination can never completely be avoided. Studies in the Amazonian region of Ecuador have confirmed that living close to oil fields indeed increases the risks of various forms of cancer (Hurtig & San Sebastián, 2002; San Sebastián et al., 2001) and miscarriages (San Sebastián et al., 2002). The quotations above indicate that the Waorani themselves have started to observe these effects on their health as well. However, these effects are not yet evident in all areas of Waorani territory; in the province of Pastaza there is considerably less presence of oil companies as compared to the provinces of Napo and Orellana. Therefore there is not as much contamination of the soil and water in this province and consequently the harvests are still relatively good and the water relatively clean. The Waorani also mentioned this difference between different areas of their territory:

*“My mother in Orellana harvests yucca, until 6 months you can take it and it all dies. Plantain as well, you harvest it one time and it dies. In Pastaza if they sow; two or three times they harvest, after three years it dies. But there no; only one year and it dies. That I noticed.”*

– Interview with Silvia, AMWAE

*“But now seeing when (...) the oil companies came, there are communities that do not have the food like they had before in the harvest: peanut, yucca, plantain, sugarcane, like that, things that before our grandmothers used to have, now it does not exist where our companions live. We have travelled to the people where presence of oil companies does not exist; there it still remains like our grandmothers used to have.”*

– Patricia, AMWAE (focus group)

*“Where oil companies enter, there is almost no food. The women of Pastaza have chacras, sugarcane, papaya, orange... there is always pineapple, they have everything. But there, the women of Orellana, where there is presence of oil companies, they do not have the same food as they are eating here. When I go there I need to eat yucca with meat or fish with something, but there the only thing*

*they cook is meat and they only eat meat, and they don't have yucca and plantain anymore."*

– Interview with Manuela, AMWAE

### *Effects on women as mothers and gatherers*

In addition, several Waorani women indicated that they are specifically affected by these bad harvests and severe health effects (i.e. they are affected in a different way than men) because of their role as mothers and as the principal gatherers of natural resources:

*"It affects the women as mothers; we take care of the house, we do sowing, we collect fruits, we take care of our children, we serve our husbands, we help our grandmothers, the families that need it. The men on the other hand see a benefit, with the oil company they make an agreement, for them they have work, for them it is diversion, they don't arrive at the house, the needs that the family has. So this worries us as women, we struggle and we suffer daily at the house. Who listens? Who protects our family? So we say as women: no more petroleum."*

– Patricia, AMWAE (focus group)

*"As women we say, better we close it, we do not want them to come damage our territory. When the oil company enters, it is going to contaminate the river. Where are we going to drink? If they contaminate, by drinking we are going to get sick. Because before there were no diseases. No. When I was born, when a snake bit you, you would die. They died like that. (...). But now this is happening, a lot of people died. Therefore we do not want them to come contaminate. Where are our grandchildren, our children going to live? The men negotiate, but as women we are mothers. We are not going to allow that they come to exploit our territory."*

– Interview with Silvia, AMWAE

### *Effects on relations with isolated clans*

Furthermore, another concern that was mentioned is that the presence of oil companies has led to a reduction of the territory size, causing conflicts with the Tagaeiri and Taromenane clans that are living in voluntary isolation. As explained by the following Waorani woman, for example:

*"The problem of the people Taromenane, is the problem of the territory, because before the Taromenane used to have a large territory and the Waorani as well. But now, with the entrance of the oil companies and also the colonisation, this territory has reduced. And therefore more colonisation is entering, which produces a small territory for the Taromenane and a small territory for the Waorani. We want the state to respect this territory; no more oil exploitation. If the oil companies do not enter, the Waorani world and the Taromenane world would be better, the life of peace, and they can live. If the entrance of the oil companies; if they enter the territory, we continue to die, the life of the Waorani, Taromenane, because of the oil companies."*

– Alicia, NAWA (focus group)

The conflicts between the Waorani and the clans that are living in voluntary isolation that have started to occur are violent and often result in deaths. For example, in 2003 a group of nine Waorani warriors went to attack the Tagaeri and Taromenane clans and killed 26 of them (Kimerling, 2013), followed by a similar attack in 2013.

### 3.2 Power relations and decision-making

During the history of oil extraction in Waorani territory, the Waorani have not been very much involved in the decision-making by oil companies. When large-scale oil extraction first started in Waorani territory 1967, this decision was made by the Ecuadorian government and oil companies and there was no prior consultation with the Waorani (Kimerling, 2013; Korovkin, 2002). During my interviews with them, many Waorani indicated that at this moment they did not know that oil extraction was happening in their in their territory. For example:

*“Some indigenous people knew what was the petroleum, the contamination. (...). Some knew, but the Waorani did not.”*

– Interview with Manuela, AMWAE

Similarly, often it was said that oil companies did sign agreements with other indigenous nationalities of Ecuador, but initially not with the Waorani. For instance:

*“They signed agreements with other nationalities, but not with us. We did not know.”*

– Interview with Silvia, AMWAE

#### *The role of missionaries*

Moreover, many of my Waorani informants claimed that the missionaries of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) were involved in enabling the oil companies to start oil extraction in Waorani territory by ensuring that the Waorani left large parts of the territory where oil companies had discovered oil reserves. For example, as the following Waorani man describes:

*“During the contact with the program of the SIL, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, from the United States, they negotiated with, well, the state negotiated with SIL, the military, and the oil companies, so that the Waorani were contacted, or another word civilised, and to catch the Waorani so that the jungle stays empty, just forest and animals. And to be able to take advantage of all the resources that were there in that time.”*

– Interview with Timoteo, NAWA

This was confirmed by various experts on the topic, such as an engineer that previously worked for various oil companies:

*“In the 50s and 60s some oil companies entered, for example Shell, and later also Texaco. Texaco used a strategy by means of a process of evangelisation and the SIL came here to work in the whole social theme.”*

– Interview with Sebastián, oil company



Indeed, missionaries of the SIL established sustained peaceful contact with the Waorani for the first time in 1958. Until then such efforts had failed, with a group of five missionaries of the SIL getting attacked and speared by Waorani warriors in 1956. Two years later, two other missionaries of the SIL were more successful because they had the help of a Waorani woman called Dayuma, who until then had worked as a slave on a *hacienda* near Waorani territory and was freed by the missionaries. Starting in 1968, the missionaries together with Dayuma managed to convince a large number of Waorani to join them in settlements in one part of the territory where the missionaries had created a “protectorate zone” of around 1700 km<sup>2</sup>. By 1972, Waorani families of most clans had joined them in this zone (Beckerman et al., 2009; Kimerling, 2013). The missionaries had arrived at a time when there was a lot of conflict and warfare between different clans of the Waorani and taught the different clans how to live together peacefully (in addition to teaching them about the Bible and discouraging customs such as polygamy and infanticide that were common then) (Lu, 2001). Several of my Waorani informants told me that they appreciated the work of the missionaries for that reason. For instance:

*“For the love that they had, we are civilized. Without them, like before we would have made war. (...). We should not talk bad about the missionaries; because of them we are saved. Without the missionaries we would have died already. (...). They evangelised us. We have to be good and we have to give a good example to our kids. (...). Between Waorani we were killing each other; we should not do that.”*

– Interview with Silvia, AMWAE

However, at the same time, the arrival of the missionaries was advantageous for the oil companies, particularly the Texaco-Gulf consortium, as a large part of the territory became available for them to invade and start extracting oil without much resistance of the Waorani, as many of them had moved to the protectorate zone of the missionaries (Kimerling, 2013). Later, many Waorani left the protectorate zone because there were conflicts between families from different clans and because Waorani were getting sick as the missionaries had brought diseases such as polio along with them (Beckerman et al., 2009). However, when the Waorani returned to the parts of the territory where they used to live, the process of oil extraction had already started:

*“I think they were forced to accept oil extraction in their territory; they were pushed out of their big territory held between the Napo and Curaray river. (...). Afterwards they recuperated, they recovered some part of the territory, they returned, but when they returned oil activities were already going on. So I think the SIL was very functional to the oil extraction industry.”*

– Interview with Ivette, FLACSO/WCS

In fact, some say that this process of evangelisation by the SIL was sponsored by the oil companies. The missionaries needed money for their mission and therefore accepted, as the director of a research station in Waorani territory explained to me:

*“The oil companies in so many places in the world have donated so much money to missions, and it’s so perverse. (...). It was the easy way to do it. (...). We need some sponsorship, we have these people that are trying to do the work of the Lord here, but*

*they do need money to do it, and if that money comes from church members in the US or if it comes from an oil company, the Devil himself, does it matter? Apparently not."*

– Interview with Kelly, USFQ/Tiputini Biodiversity Station

### *The Waorani organisation*

Later, oil companies did start to sign agreements with the Waorani, or better said with the Waorani organisation ONHAE (*Organización de la Nacionalidad Waorani de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana*); nowadays called NAWA (*Nacionalidad Waorani del Ecuador*). However, the oil companies themselves were the ones that created ONHAE in 1990, so that they would have a party to sign contracts with in order to receive "permission" for oil extraction in Waorani territory. However, this did not mean that the Waorani men of ONHAE were informed about the effects the oil extraction would have on their territory either. Rather, they negotiated with the oil company to gain benefits in the form of various material resources in return for signing oil contracts. As a Waorani man of NAWA (i.e. what was previously ONHAE) explained:

*"So one part is that the Waorani that were in this time, like they did not know, they wanted negotiation about the petroleum. (...). They controlled where the road entered, they were like guardians of the jungle, they directed, because they knew their territory very well. And in this moment nothing happened, they did not understand much during 15, 20 years. They did not understand the oil exploitation because it was like it did not mean anything to them, but to the state it did mean the sale of petroleum."*

– Interview with Timoteo, NAWA

In addition, neither the Waorani living in the jungle were aware of the oil extraction that was happening in other parts of their territory:

*"Before, we did not know. When I was small, 13 years, when they recently made the agreement (...). They didn't operate here, but operated at Yasuní National Park, where the Tagaeri attacked. There. We didn't go there, so we didn't know."*

– Interview with Silvia, AMWAE

As ONHAE consisted of Waorani that were recruited by the oil companies and were not elected by the Waorani people themselves, they were not an organisation that had a lot of power or respect in Waorani communities. The same continues to be the case for NAWA today. In addition, imposing such an organisational structure on people that traditionally did not have a very hierarchical structure does not work, as someone from an environmental NGO explained:

*"When I work with the Waorani it always surprised me that communities, they don't seem to have any recognition of hierarchy among them. (...). You know, you live in your group, your clan, your nanicabo, and this is it, and you have your relationship within and you can have some interactions with the other clans. But there is no notion of hierarchy between groups, so when you come up with something like a women organisation, or the Waorani organisation, NAWA, and you talk with people from the communities, they usually don't care about these organisations. (...). In my experience they didn't care about what happened in Puyo with NAWA. So there is a complete*

*separation between the organisation and the communities. (...). I think it's probably just a result of how they live, you know, you live in your clan and you're isolated in the forest, moving around, and then you have some interactions but these interactions never involve some sort of hierarchy or organisation. So when you impose this on the Waorani, because some of them get organised, there is no real connection between the organisation and the communities. And that's a big problem, I think."*

– Interview with Esteban, WCS/USFQ

In addition, the social organisation of the Waorani in various clans is another reason why Waorani organisations such as ONHAE and now NAWA are not representative of the Waorani as a nationality. The Waorani that are part of these organisations are from only a few of the clans, and they tend to benefit their own families. This is the case as well for the Waorani women's organisation AMWAE (*Asociación de Mujeres Waorani de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana*) that was created in 2005. For example, the visits that I made with AMWAE were all to communities in which one of the women had family members and these are the communities that they tend to focus on for their projects.

### *Agreements with Waorani communities*

Nowadays, agreements are not only signed with NAWA (i.e. formerly ONHAE), but also with Waorani communities. However, the issue of representativeness remains here, as they are signed with just one or a few members of the community. As one of the directors of a research station in the area explained to me:

*"Essentially you give things like an outboard motor to this family, and all the sudden they are your friends. Basically you sign agreements with them and kind of ignore everybody else, and say that they were representing the entire community, or the entire nation. It's absolutely manipulative and I see it almost in the category of evil. It's so abusive, and usually it's for very short terms, it's usually somewhere between 5 and 20 years, and in most cases it does turn out to be less than 10 years that an oil company shows up and they offer these things and get access and then they go.(...). Of course some individuals get real benefits. (...). Along the Maxus road, some community leaders of Dicaro (...) have actually been given pick-up trucks. (...). So those guys are very much in favour of oil, whereas some of the other people in the same community that haven't benefitted so much, (...) they have a different perspective about what oil has meant in their lives."*

– Interview with Kelly, USFQ/Tiputini Biodiversity Station

Thus, the oil companies "get permission" from Waorani communities to extract oil nearby by offering various economic or material resources to community members (but not to all of them). Some of the resources that I have been informed that the Waorani were given by oil companies are: money, food (e.g. rice, pasta, oil, flour, sugar, salt, canned tuna), cooking pots, medicine, cigarettes, alcohol, boats, outboard motors for boats, pick-up trucks, gas, agricultural tools, machetes, shotguns, shotgun shells, plasma TVs, fridges, zinc roofs, windows, chairs, complete houses, balconies, schools (see *Figure 8*), and playing fields, among other things.



Figure 8: A school building constructed by the oil company *Petroamazonas* in Meñepare.

The engineer that previously worked for various oil companies explained this process of providing the Waorani with various material resources as follows:

*“Starting from (...) the end of the 80s, beginning of the 90s, other oil companies came here in Ecuador. At the end of 80s comes Maxus for example. Maxus is one of the oil companies that arrived to operate in an area where a large part of the population of the Waorani nationality lives. So then the things changed. They had already changed with the process of evangelisation. But what happened is that the oil companies came with other perspectives, with other ideas of how the relations with the Waorani should be managed. At the end of the 80s, Maxus signed an agreement of cooperation with the Waorani to help them in a process of development, of improvement of their life conditions. (...). And from then the oil companies that have been working, they have entered the same logic of negotiation with the Waorani for the projects. So there are things that they negotiate at the general level with NAWA, and there are things that they negotiate specifically with each one of the communities. (...). To be able to do a seismic prospection for example, what they do is sign an agreement of cooperation, and that agreement of cooperation is: ‘What is it that you want?’ ‘Ah, we want this, this, this, this, this, this’; a long list. And that they analyse and they say: ‘We offer you this, this, this, this, this, this’. It’s a paternalistic relation, right? I need this, give it to me, and if you don’t give it...”*

– Interview with Sebastián, oil company

Giving various material and economic resources is a strategy of the oil company to prevent conflicts with the Waorani, as the former oil company engineer further explained:

*“So we see it like, from our perspective, if we give them what they want, they are going to be calm. But this process is permanent. (...). So one day I want this, another day I want this. It doesn’t prevent the conflict, it doesn’t manage the conflict as such; rather it manages it indirectly. If we give them things, they will calm down, if we don’t give them things, they demand them. So it is rather a kind of game, a permanent game.”*

– Interview with Sebastián, oil company

And by accepting these resources, the Waorani “allow” oil extraction to happen in their territory:

*“So this also creates dependence on oil companies, because if you receive money from them, you cannot question what, if there are impacts or if you have contamination, it’s like a form of dissipating a contesting process.”*

– Interview with Ivette, FLACSO/WCS

During my interviews with several Waorani, they explained that they are accepting these resources from oil companies because they are the only actors that are trying to help them. For example:

*“Why are there so many oil companies in the Amazon? What is happening? It is because there is no help for them. There is not. For example Pastaza, the indigenous people, the people that live there, they have many problems. And the oil company comes: ‘You know what? I can give you a house, put schools, put a centre, how does that seem to you?’. ‘Ah yes, because there is nobody that helps me. So let’s go.’ ‘Do you agree?’. ‘We agree, yes, yes, yes.’ So what can we do? It is a problem.”*

– Interview with Manuela, AMWAE

### *Responsibility of the state*

Many other Waorani that I spoke to also considered the government to be a very absent actor in their territory. In fact, it can be argued that oil companies have taken over many responsibilities of the state, such as building schools and health facilities in Waorani territory. Because the government is not providing these or other resources, the Waorani accept them from oil companies. However, it can be questioned if the way in which oil companies have assumed these responsibilities is the best way. For example, although oil companies have constructed various school buildings in Waorani territory, even in small and relatively isolated communities, often they are not in use because there are no teachers present. During my visit to the community Tepapare I was informed that there had not been any teachers for two years. Although oil companies have been providing various resources, their main interest was and is the extraction of oil and not warranting the welfare of the Waorani. Someone from a research station in Waorani territory explained this as follows:

*“So due to the fact that the government was and has been always absent in the decisions on how to handle the Waorani, so that transferred that responsibility to oil companies because they were the ones that have been there. So oil companies have solved the problem with an oil view: ‘they are going to interfere with our daily business and we solve this at some kind of expense and we add that expense to the production of oil’. So there were no incentives or responsibilities from them to warrant a long-term welfare of the Waorani.”*

– Interview with David, USFQ/Tiputini Biodiversity Station

Indeed, oil companies are only present in Waorani territory for a limited amount of time, and often even leave before the end of their contract, leading to very short-term incentives to manage their relations with the Waorani (which explains their “quick” solutions such as providing all those material resources that are requested by the Waorani). This has especially been the case since the government started to grant extraction rights to foreign oil companies on short-term contracts (Rival, 2015).

### 3.3 Conflicts and misunderstandings

Despite oil companies now making agreements with the Waorani and providing them with various material resources in order to prevent conflicts, it cannot be said that the relationship between these two groups of actors has been a peaceful one. In fact, conflicts regularly occur. Often, these conflicts have to do with the oil company not complying with the agreements that were made and not providing the desired resources. For example, as a Waorani woman explained:

*“They made a contract, an agreement between the communities and the oil company, so there the commitments have to help the communities in the affected oil blocks. They made a document, but meanwhile, one year passed, two years, and the oil company did not comply. So therefore they made an obstruction. The oil companies have to comply with what they put in the agreement with the community.”*

– Alicia, NAWA (focus group)

Similarly, a former engineer of various oil companies also explained the non-compliance of agreements by oil companies as the cause of most of the conflicts with the Waorani:

*“I believe that a big part or the majority of the large conflicts are owed to fault of compliance with the agreements you firm. (...). Basically they become brave when the companies do not comply with the agreements. For example, (...) buying the pick-up trucks took a lot longer than was on the paper, because on the paper it said: ‘we are going to buy three pick-up trucks before a certain date’. Because of an internal problem this was not possible. So of course when this date arrived, there were no pick-up trucks, and they went to tell them that the pick-up trucks had not arrived. But one day when the pick-up trucks still had not arrived, a lot of time had passed, there was a big conflict. With the Waorani I don’t remember any big conflicts because of environmental themes for example; something that did happen with others, for example with the Kichwa or the Shuar. Or because of land negotiation; with them I don’t remember that there has been a claim from them to defend the land or the nation, or any problem like that. More for small and concrete things, not delivering things...”*

– Interview with Sebastián, oil company

Conflicts due to not delivering the resources that were requested by the Waorani usually consisted of actions such as blocking the road or stealing things from the oil company. However, sometimes the conflicts also turned violent:

*“Some were very simple, day-to-day conflicts. I used to work in block 14 and there one of the problems, there is a Wao there that (...) lived at the entrance of National Park Yasuní at a road where you enter to the oil wells. And one moment he wanted, he put a string, and nobody could pass from any side. So this was to ask for a soda, or to ask for food, or to ask that they give them money. Those are the simplest ones. There were others, and they had more to do with cultural themes of them. For example I was present on a few occasions in which a grandchild of a Wao had died (...). So the*

*conflict was because (...) inside their vision of the world, the death of this girl was the fault of the oil company. And he had the obligation to go and revenge her. So he went to search for the oil company employees and went after them. I was present a few times in which a Wao who lives on the Maxus road, went around a pick-up truck with a spear to go after one of the workers to kill him, because a kid had died and he wanted to revenge his death with another death."*

– Interview with Sebastián, oil company

In addition, some of my informants claimed that the conflicts worsened when started receiving fewer material resources from the oil companies, due to policy changes made by the Ecuadorian government. For example:

*"Until the point that Correa started to govern and all the benefits ended, the signature between community and oil companies, from there the living well of the Waorani ended. The oil companies do not give them things anymore, and that was a problem. (...). There always was this form of negotiation with the Waorani, and they were accustomed to that. When the president said: 'No, no more', the strikes started, the conflicts started. It is difficult to get this out of the mentality and way of living of the Waorani. For 20 years they lived like this and now not anymore."*

– Interview with Romelia, AMWAE

Indeed, since his election in 2006, president Correa has renegotiated the contracts with foreign oil companies, changing them from production-sharing agreements to service contracts. This change was introduced so that a larger share of the revenue would be for to the Ecuadorian government instead of for the oil company (as before it was the other way around). One of the consequences of this is that foreign oil companies now have fewer economic resources to spend. In addition, president Correa has signed more contracts with Chinese oil companies (Escribano, 2013). According to my Waorani informants, Chinese oil companies do not offer them any material resources or employment. Certainly, this will lead to new tensions between the Waorani and these oil companies.

## *Conclusion*

In this chapter, we have seen that the dynamics of interaction between the Waorani and extractivist actors involve unequal power relations and decision-making processes in which the Waorani have barely been involved. When oil extraction first started to take place in their territory, the Waorani were not aware of this. Neither did they know about the impacts this would have on their territory, but they are starting to notice the effects of the contamination on their health and harvests now. Later, contracts were signed with Waorani organisations (which were created by the oil companies themselves) and with Waorani communities. In order to prevent conflicts with the Waorani, oil companies have provided them with a variety of material resources. However, when there has been non-compliance with the agreements about these resources, various conflicts have occurred. These conflicts have worsened since the oil companies have started to provide fewer resources to the Waorani. The next chapter focuses on the dynamics of interaction between the Waorani and another group of "outside" actors: environmentalist actors.



## Chapter 4: The Waorani and environmentalist actors

This chapter focuses on the interaction between the Waorani and another group of actors in their territory that I call the “environmentalist actors”. This group of actors is interested in the conservation of natural resources in Waorani, particularly of animal populations. It includes a number of environmental NGOs that have wildlife conservation projects with the Waorani and a biological research station that is located in Waorani territory. The outline of this chapter is similar to the previous one. First, I give an introduction to the issues of nature conservation in Waorani territory and the types of projects that the environmentalist actors try to involve the Waorani in. Second, I describe the power relations between these two groups of actors, with a specific focus on the way that environmentalist actors have tried to involve the Waorani in the decision-making on conservation projects. And third, I describe the conflicts and misunderstandings that have occurred in the interaction between these two groups of actors. Here I also elaborate on the way that the environmentalist actors make sense of “Waorani ontology”.

### 4.1 Nature conservation in Waorani territory

The Yasuní Biosphere Reserve, which consists of Yasuní National Park and the Waorani Ethnic Reserve (i.e. the part of Waorani territory that is officially recognised by the government, although before contact the whole Biosphere Reserve area used to belong to the Waorani), is one of the most biodiverse places on earth in terms of the number of animal and plant species (Bass et al., 2010; Finer et al., 2008). However, many environmentalists are concerned that since the entrance of oil companies and the subsequent changes in Waorani hunting practices, many of these species are now in danger of extinction. Oil companies in Waorani territory have constructed various roads in order to reach oil reserves. Many of the current permanent Waorani settlements are located along these roads and the Waorani from these communities are able to make use of the free transportation service that the oil companies provide. Therefore, these Waorani have easy access to a larger hunting area (Espinosa et al., 2014; Suárez et al., 2009). For example, a study of 33 Waorani households showed that while on average Waorani hunters would only walk a maximum of 7 km from their settlement to hunt, they are now hunting as far as 37 km away (Espinosa et al., 2014). In addition, the roads with free transportation service give the Waorani access to markets in cities which were previously hard or expensive to reach. They are now able to sell bush meat at these markets, and are thus no longer only hunting for their own subsistence, but also for commercial purposes (Espinosa et al., 2014; Lu, 2007; Suárez et al., 2009). As a consequence of all this, the Waorani that live close to these roads have increased the amount of hunting they are doing. Studies have shown that this has led to a decline in wildlife populations in these areas, particularly of those species that the Waorani commonly hunt (Franzen, 2006; Suárez et al., 2013). For instance, one study in Waorani territory showed that wildlife densities were almost 80% lower than at a control site without any human disturbance (Suárez et al., 2013).

During my interviews with various environmentalist actors, they expressed these concerns about the decrease in wildlife populations and attributed this to the unsustainable hunting practices of the Waorani. Besides the increased access to hunting areas and markets, other problems were mentioned as well, such as the increase in the number of Waorani and their use of new types of



hunting tools (e.g. blowguns) and transport methods (e.g. canoe with an outboard motor) which have a bigger impact on animal populations. For instance in the following quotation:

*"I think it's the context in which hunting is occurring right now, because in the past it was with smaller populations, with different hunting techniques, and it was probably not a big problem because the core area of the park is big enough, I think, to provide more animals and to replenish the populations relatively quickly. The problem is that the context in which hunting is happening has changed. So right now in the case of the Waorani for example, they are incredibly good hunters, because they learn to hunt with a blowgun and killing an animal that's 30 meters up in the canopy with a blowgun is incredibly difficult. If a hunter that has that amount, that type of skills, you give them a shotgun then the impact becomes devastating for the populations. And in addition to that you have other changes that are happening, for example the incorporation of the Waorani into the trade system and the incentive for them to sell bush meat and wild animals. So all of these things are coming together and making hunting an unsustainable practice as it is in the present. And then you also have the problem with the oil companies that provide a lot of resources to the Waorani that allows them to expand the area of hunting to areas that would not be very accessible otherwise. (...). But then the oil company gives the Waorani money for gas, or just gas directly, and they come down the river and kill everything that they find."*

– Interview with Esteban, USFQ/WCS

An engineer that used to work for various oil companies also admitted that oil companies are influencing the amount of hunting that the Waorani are doing:

*"Now with the roads we have helped the people there to do bad things, like for example the hunting. The bush meat leaves the jungle in enormous quantities; they commercialised it in the Oriente for the consumption in restaurants."*

– Interview with Sebastián, oil company

Because of this, there is now yet another group of outside actors present in Waorani territory. Environmentalist actors such as NGOs and biological research stations implement projects in which they try to cooperate with the Waorani in order to conserve animal populations and diminish the unsustainable hunting practices of the Waorani. For these actors, working together with the Waorani has not always been an easy process. Although there used to be more before, currently there are only two environmental NGOs that cooperate with the Waorani: an Ecuadorian NGO called *EcoCiencia* and an international NGO called Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). Many other NGOs have left because the cooperation with the Waorani was too complicated or because the government has made it difficult for NGOs to operate in Ecuador. *EcoCiencia* offers sustainable alternative livelihoods to hunting, whereas WCS adopts a strategy of developing management plans and zonification of the territory in order to control the amount of hunting. In addition, there is one permanent biological research station that is located inside Waorani territory, which is called Tiputini Biodiversity Station and is part of *Universidad San Francisco de Quito* (USFQ). Although this research station focuses on biological data collection, it occasionally also holds workshops with the Waorani and adopts an approach similar to WCS.

### *Alternative livelihoods*

The Ecuadorian NGO *EcoCiencia* attempts to diminish hunting for commercial purposes by offering the Waorani alternative livelihoods so that they are able to generate an income in a more sustainable way and their impact on wildlife populations can be reduced. This is a project that was started in 2010 by IUCN/TRAFFIC, but is currently run by *EcoCiencia*. They chose to cooperate with AMWAE, the women's organisation of the Waorani, and therefore the project activities have also been focused specifically on women. The main intervention of the project was the plantation of cacao trees in already deforested plots. Waorani women are responsible for growing the cacao on these plantations with only organic inputs, and harvesting and drying the cacao beans (see *Figure 9*). These beans are then be collected and purchased by AMWAE, initially with the financial aid of IUCN/TRAFFIC and currently *EcoCiencia*, offering a price above the regional market value.



Figure 9: Harvesting cacao in the community of Konipare (left); dried cacao beans that have been collected from communities, in the office of AMWAE in Puyo (right).

The cacao beans are transported to Quito, where they are processed into chocolate by a large chocolate producing firm called BIOS. The end product is two types of chocolate bars, one with a content of 50% cacao and the other with 70% cacao, giving the Waorani women their own brand of organic “Wao chocolate”. This chocolate was initially sold in Waorani shops managed by AMWAE in several cities in the Amazonian region (Puyo, Tena and Coca; of which only the shop in Puyo is currently still open), but during my field research also became available in one of Ecuador's largest supermarket chains called Supermaxi which is located all over the country (see *Figure 10*).



Figure 10: “Wao chocolate”, in the Waorani shop in Puyo (left) and in Supermaxi in Quito (right).

In addition, the intervention also focuses on selling handicrafts produced by Waorani women, such as bracelets, necklaces, earrings, crowns, bags, hammocks and baskets. These are sold in the Waorani shop in Puyo (see *Figure 11*) and occasionally on markets at various locations in Ecuador.

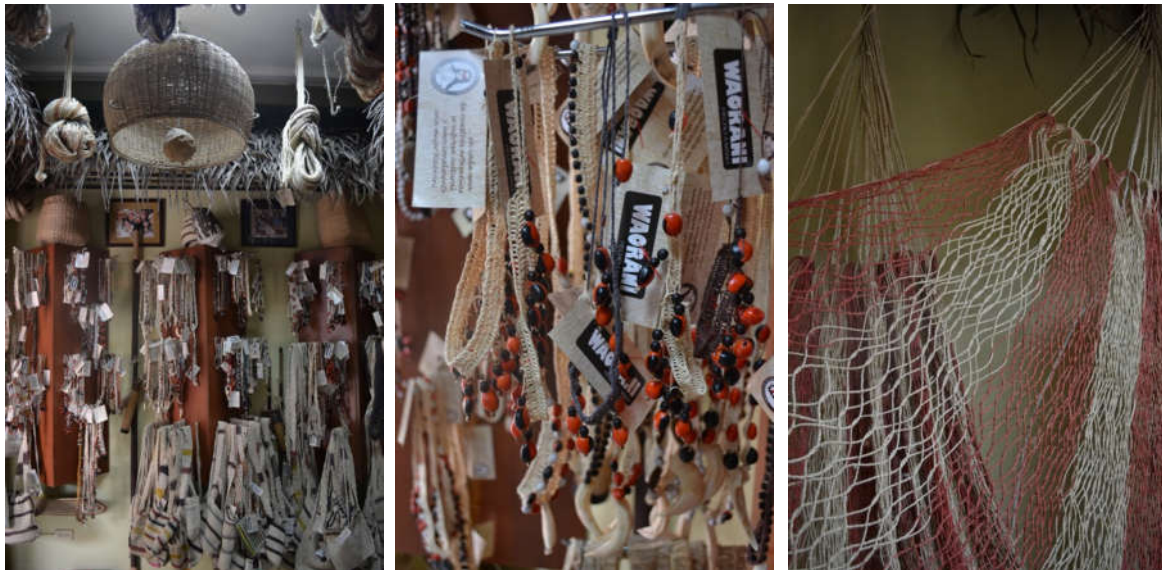


Figure 11: The Waorani shop in Puyo (left) which sells various handicrafts made by Waorani women such as necklaces (middle) and hammocks (right).

The idea behind selling the Waorani chocolate and handicrafts produced by women is to enable them to gain an extra income, so that there may be less incentive to hunt for commercial purposes and consequently the pressure on wildlife populations decreases. The coordinators of *EcoCiencia*, together with the women of AMWAE, occasionally visit the Waorani communities that are involved in the project, and hold workshops to remind them of the importance of conserving wildlife populations in their territory, and to capacitate them to be able to properly take care of the cacao trees and harvest and dry the cacao beans (see *Figure 12*).



Figure 12: An agronomist of *EcoCiencia* explaining the importance of wildlife conservation to the women of Meñepare (left) and demonstrating how to maintain cacao trees in Gareno (right).

### *Management plans and zonification*

In contrast, the international NGO WCS as well as the Tiputini Biodiversity Station of USFQ have adopted a strategy of developing management plans together with Waorani communities in order to achieve a better management of their natural resources and diminish unsustainable hunting



practices. In contrast to *EcoCiencia*, these actors have chosen to mainly cooperate with NAWE. During workshops in Waorani communities, they first tried to determine how the Waorani manage the forest surrounding their communities and what types of natural resources they make use of and in which quantities, which involved making maps of the territory. Next, they tried to come up with agreements in order to reach a more sustainable way of managing their natural resources, especially in terms of the hunting of wildlife. For example, by introducing rules about which animal species are allowed to be hunted, as was explained to me by one of the coordinators of the project:

*“We are trying to come up, or helping them to come up with potential regulations for hunting. What usually happens is they go out and if they see an animal they will hunt the animal. And the idea was to maybe help them to develop certain small or very simple rules, making it a little bit more selective in terms of what they hunt. (...). For example if you can avoid the tapir, or if you can avoid certain monkeys that are already in very low abundances. Try to concentrate on the smaller rodents and things like that.”*

– Interview with Esteban, USFQ/WCS

In addition, the management plans involved zonification, meaning a division of the land around the communities into different zones, each of which has a different purpose such as residence, conservation, hunting, gathering, or agriculture. Thus, the strategy was to reduce the amount of hunting by only allowing it in certain areas and on certain animal species. All these agreements were written in a management plan by the project coordinators of WCS and handed over to the Waorani, reinforcing the agreements during workshops so that they would be put into practice. This project has recently ended and WCS is therefore currently not visiting Waorani communities. In their current projects they are focusing on Kichwa rather than Waorani communities.

Furthermore, in the past WCS has also cooperated in the handicrafts project for Waorani women (in which *EcoCiencia* is also involved, as described above) and has provided financial assistance to both AMWAE and NAWE for the payment of rent for the office and salaries for the Waorani of these organisations. It also continues to perform various biological studies on the biodiversity in Waorani territory, as Tiputini Biodiversity Station is doing as well.

## 4.2 Power relations and decision-making

When projects such as described in the previous part were started, environmental actors tried to make an effort to involve the Waorani in the decision-making about what the exact focus of these projects would be. They would first discuss their plans with one of the Waorani organisations, AMWAE or NAWE, as this is also necessary to gain access to Waorani communities. For example, for their project on sustainable alternatives to hunting, *EcoCiencia* picked AMWAE because that was the Waorani organisation that was the most interested in *EcoCiencia*'s aim of wildlife conservation:

*“The project had the goal to generate sustainable alternative economies to reduce the illegal trade in bush meat. In reality when we entered, we were not that sure of everything that it could be, but we picked our counterpart organisation very well, which was AMWAE. We validated where there was enough concern about the topic,*

*and NAWA did not have any concern about it, but AMWAE did. They defined the zones where it was the most strategic to enter, where there was the most illegal trade, they knew all of that. (...). They were an incredible counterpart.”*

– Interview with Ana, *EcoCiencia*

When the focus of the project was agreed on by AMWAE, *EcoCiencia* also tried to involve the Waorani communities where they were planning to implement the project in the decision-making about what kind of sustainable alternatives would be offered:

*“It actually was a process that was really participative. We listened a lot, we did not enter giving the solutions; we only knew that we wanted to see if the topic of reducing the illegal trade interested them. And we did not even enter saying that it was illegal. Only if it interested them to maintain the wildlife, because they take advantage of it for alimentary security; for the women it was important, super important. So really listening a lot which is something that we always do in the projects, listen, listen, and ask, and see. (...). We arrived and we listened and we were open to see which alternatives for this seemed interesting to them.”*

– Interview with Ana, *EcoCiencia*

However, this decision was not only up to the Waorani, as *EcoCiencia* had requirements for the project as well. Being an environmental NGO with the aim of conserving nature, *EcoCiencia* did not want any deforestation to occur during the project, which the Waorani initially did not agree on:

*“If it was going to be something agricultural, it had to be zero deforestation (...) which was a long agreement, it was not fast. Coming and going and a lot of dialogue... After that, the thing of not clearing areas was hard for them, they wanted to clear, but no, we were going to only use degraded zones. So it was great because there were really a lot of strong discussions with the Waorani, until we reached an agreement.”*

– Interview with Ana, *EcoCiencia*

Similarly, in the decision-making process of their management plan and zonification project, WCS also tried not to impose any regulations upon Waorani communities, but rather tried to help them to come up with these regulations themselves:

*“A problem with all these regulations is that if you come with a regulation that you hand to the community, it will not work. It has to be something that they feel comfortable with, it needs to be something that they realistically think that they can do; otherwise it has no prospect of success. (...). We are working with the communities, trying to help them to quantify their resources, and giving them guidelines to see if they can come up with their own regulations. But things that they can agree, and if they do it, it's probably going to be good for the community, if they don't do it, there's nothing we can do about it. We try to step back at the moment of coming up with these regulations.”*

– Interview with Esteban, USFQ/WCS

However, sometimes the agreements stay at the level of Waorani organisations rather than the Waorani communities themselves, such as when the Tiputini Biodiversity Station was first started in Waorani territory:

*“Early along, as an institution, we sought out agreement with the Waorani nation, as it was represented back then. (...). We signed some agreements, basically with the Waorani nation, with the president of what was called ONHAE as the representative. And it involved things like support for the nation, as opposed to individuals. Things like support for the office of (...) ONHAE, and support for education, for students to come here to study, or at different levels. (...). Basically the way it works is that this university offers the opportunity to study for almost free to any indigenous person.”*

– Interview with Kelly, USFQ/Tiputini Biodiversity Station

In addition, some projects of NGOs seem rather imposed on the Waorani. During my field work, I was able to witness a case of a decision-making process of NGOs at the start of a new project. AMWAE was approached by an NGO that wanted to cooperate with them in a project about the negative impacts of oil companies in Waorani territory with the aim of capacitating Waorani women to do something about this. For one day, the NGO came to the office of AMWAE in Puyo, and some Waorani women that were living in communities in the jungle were present as well. The NGO held sessions with these women to determine the exact focus of the project, after which the NGO would write a project proposal in order to obtain the required funds. However, during the sessions I regularly got the impression that the NGO was “putting the words in the mouths” of the women. Particularly at one part of the session, in which the answers of the women were recorded by the NGO, it became evident that the NGO was instructing the women what to say for the recording. For example, as can be seen in the following transcript:

*“Which rights are principally violated? Here we can talk about what we have talked about; the right of the territory and also of healthy and sufficient food. Why are they moving and why are they exercising pressure as well? It’s because the water is contaminated, the territory is contaminated, and the animals leave. True? We are going to record this. You talk? So: which are the rights principally violated in this territory, in these communities?”*

Subsequently, one of the Waorani women would basically repeat the points that were just mentioned and this would be recorded by the NGO, after which she would continue (off-record):

*“Very good. Perfect. So this, according to you, are the principal violations. Is there another thing that you think is violated as a right? We have said the right to water, to food, to biodiversity, to sovereignty over the territory, right? Also two things; collective rights seem important to me: prior consultation that is not applied and free determination that is not respected either. Can we say this as well, that those rights are violated? Tell me.”*

Although I have no doubts about the good intentions of this NGO, this way of involving the Waorani in the decision-making process of a new project did not seem very participative to me.



Furthermore, it cannot be denied that despite the efforts of environmental actors to involve Waorani in the decision-making on projects and the good intentions to improve their situation, this interaction also involves unequal power relations. The environmental actors are the ones with the economic resources and are ultimately the ones who take the decisions, which always are in their interest of the conservation of wildlife populations. As a non-Waorani woman that is part of AMWAE indicated:

*"I cannot be so loyal to an NGO that in the end does not bring a personal benefit for me; it's rather a benefit for them."*

– Interview with Romelia, AMWAE

In addition, during their interaction in projects, the Waorani often become dependent on the resources and help of the environmental actors, as explained by an anthropologist:

*"If an NGO enters with a project, they have to accompany them for very many years to see the results of that project. In the case of the handicrafts they have accompanied them for more than 10 years. And USAID withdrew, WCS withdrew, and they entered into crisis. And at the same time the agreement with REPSOL of 20 years ended, where they received a million dollars each year, and of that 7% was for AMWAE. So by taking away the NGOs and by taking away those funds of oil companies, AMWAE entered into crisis."*

– Interview with Kati, FLACSO/USAID

Several Waorani women of AMWAE also realised that they have this dependency on the resources of environmental actors, and indicated that they wanted to be more independent. For instance:

*"Like AMWAE we are working in the theme of wildlife trade, cacao, something like that we want to continue to work in the communities, so that they can sustain themselves alone. (...). Sometimes there are projects that are giving you things; at this moment, but later nothing is left for the communities."*

– Interview with Patricia, AMWAE

AMWAE has also started to notice that NGOs do not offer their help for unlimited amounts of time, as many NGOs with whom they were working before have now left:

*"It is like they are in a moment of comfort, there is a project and they are managing it, they are doing it, but there is more out there, there is not always going to come an NGO; all this is not always going to be there. So it's like they have to move themselves more, search for other options, other things. (...). Right now one of the shortcomings that I see is the lack of leadership to do things in a more coordinated way, to search for more projects. It is like NGOs have helped them many times, they thought that NGOs were always going to be there, but with the departure of some NGOs it is as if AMWAE stays alone, and doing this alone has been super hard for them."*

– Interview with Romelia, AMWAE

### 4.3 Conflicts and misunderstandings

Although the interaction between the Waorani and environmentalist actors has not been a very conflictive one, it has not been a very easy cooperation either. There have happened a number of conflicts (or perhaps rather problems or disagreements) in the interaction between the Waorani and environmentalist actors, focused on a number of issues that I will describe here.

#### *Continued hunting for commercial purposes*

One of the main problems in the interaction between the Waorani and environmentalist actors is that, despite being involved in various conservation programs, the Waorani continue to hunt, not only for subsistence purposes but also for commercial purposes. Although there are no recent quantitative studies available of the current amounts of bush meat trade, many of my informants confirmed that this is still happening. For example:

*"I had to laugh because it's like you cannot tell a Waorani to not go hunting in this sector, because they were putting references, right? Here you can hunt, here not. Things like that. I believe that one time I was in a workshop, and it could be, yes they are good ideas, but for me they were not that functional, because a Waorani hunts to eat or to sell. While it is true that the cacao has mitigated the hunting a lot in its abundance, in large quantities to sell, ultimately the Waorani need the money; you cannot say 'don't do this'. I know that they are selling the bush meat, maybe not in the quantity that they used to sell, but yes they sell it. The people hunt and sell, and have some money. So it's the only economy that they know."*

– Interview with Romelia, AMWAE

The project that aimed to implement management plans and zonification of the territory has not yet accomplished a reduction in the amount of hunting by the Waorani. Although the plans were developed together with various communities, they are not put into practice. As an anthropologist said:

*"It stays in documents, it stays in archives, it stays in maps."*

– Interview with Ivette, FLACSO/WCS

Some Waorani openly admit that they still hunt for commercial purposes. Sometimes, they even refuse to cooperate in the conservation projects of NGOs, as described for example by someone from WCS:

*"Because we're interested in the communities that are located along the Maxus road and since they sell the meat they are not interested in working with us and regulating the amount of meat they are selling."*

– Interview with Galo, WCS

In contrast, there are Waorani that interact regularly with NGOs or other environmental actors in conservation projects and tell them that they have stopped to hunt for commercial purposes and are now only hunting to feed their own families. I noticed this various times during my visits to Waorani communities in which coordinators from *EcoCiencia* were also present. During their workshops in

Waorani community about the importance of wildlife conservation, they would always ask the Waorani that were present if they had stopped to sell bush meat. These Waorani usually confirmed this, but other informants have ensured me that this is not true.

Similarly, the women of AMWAE often promoted themselves as having accomplished a decrease in the amount of hunting in Waorani communities, because of the increased control and subsequent closing of the largest bush meat market in Pompeya and the sustainable alternatives they are offering (such as the cacao) in cooperation with *EcoCiencia*. For instance, as was indicated in the following interviews:

*"Yes, we have accomplished diminishing the theme of hunting, the markets that used to be there, a market in Pompeya and here as well. Of course it is not that they are not hunting, of course they hunt, but now for feeding the family."*

– Interview with Mary, AMWAE

*"And all of this closed the market, because we are now selling bars of chocolate."*

– Interview with Patricia, AMWAE

*"It is certain that the topic of cacao has already mitigated a lot the hunting in abundance, in large quantities to sell."*

– Interview with Romelia, AMWAE

Some people working for NGOs believe the Waorani when they tell them that they have stopped hunting for commercial purposes. For example:

*"(...) because the whole world used to say that they are going to sell the cacao and they are going to sell the bush meat. (...). But today I do believe them what they are saying. We are all agreeing, yes I think so."*

– Interview with Ana, *EcoCiencia*

These NGOs often said that the Waorani have stopped or decreased their hunting for commercial purposes because the main market in Pompeya where the bush meat was sold is now closed and because the Waorani have sustainable alternatives (as is indicated above as well by a number of the women of AMWAE). For example:

*"They made an agreement in which they ratified this thing of stopping to take out bush meat and starting economic alternatives. So it was not only the cacao, also in the northern zone of Dicaro (...), close to there for example was where the biggest market for bush meat in Ecuador was located. They commercialised almost fourteen tons of bush meat each year, and that was closed, because the Waorani were the principal providers of meat for that market because they are still the best hunters; the Kichwa don't hunt as well as the Wao. So this was like a big impact that they accomplished in a very short time, which we ourselves didn't even understand. But it was like to everyone that was involved in illegal trade, they gave alternatives."*

– Interview with Ana, *EcoCiencia*

In contrast, other NGOs are aware that the Waorani continue to hunt for commercial purposes despite closing the meat market in Pompeya and gaining income from alternative livelihoods. They indicated that the Waorani are now selling bush meat in more hidden ways. For instance:

*“The market in Pompeya is closed, but that does not mean that the meat has reduced. What we know is that the bush meat is still going out. But now it’s not going out through the market in Pompeya, but through other places, like more clandestine. It’s possible that instead of reducing it has increased. It is simply like it turns into something like drug trafficking; it’s there but you don’t see it. And this I believe is a bit the result of when they went to their markets and did the confiscations, which is not necessarily a solution. The problem does not necessarily go away; rather it hides the problem. And now it is more difficult to study the meat and the trade, so in a sense we have not been able to collect information either.”*

– Interview with Hernán, WCS

Several people indicated that the problem is that there is still a demand for bush meat, especially because of other indigenous nationalities such as the Kichwa of which many are not living in the jungle anymore and therefore are unable to hunt themselves:

*“We were working with Kichwa communities in several cities and in northern Yasuní, like Tena, Coca... And the people that generate the demand for wild meat are Kichwa people that live in urban areas now but still have this traditional taste for wild meat and they have the money to afford the wild meat so they are paying. And every time they have a festivity, they have a wedding, or they have a baptism, or celebrations like those, they contact middle men, and these middle men contact the Waorani hunters and they get the meat. And for every one of these celebrations they can order like half a ton, 2 tons of wild meat, basically monkey and white-lipped peccary.”*

– Interview with Galo, WCS

So how does the trade process work now that the most important markets are closed? Besides using middle men as indicated in the quotation above, the current more hidden or clandestine way of selling bush meat involves trade on the rivers, as a number of experts informed me:

*“So what did this do? The trade turned more hidden. So the Waos now don’t go out to Pompeya or San Pedro to sell bush meat. We know that the most important market is Tena, which buys the most bush meat. So what do the Waorani do? They take small quantities and leave them next to the river, at night like that. It became more clandestine, in reality.”*

– Interview with Kati, FLACSO/USAID

*“You cannot see people now selling meat. But people are still selling meat, but not in the market, they do it at different places, different times, different days of the week. Sometimes they make the transactions while navigating in the river. So it’s completely different now.”*

– Interview with Galo, WCS

### *Stealing*

Another conflict in the interaction between the Waorani and environmentalist actors is that the Waorani regularly steal from them. This is especially the case for the Tiputini Biodiversity Station of USFQ, which is permanently based close to Waorani communities (as opposed to NGOs such as *EcoCiencia* and WCS which usually only make short visits to Waorani territory for workshops or studies). For instance:

*“It is horrible because just two months ago, a Waorani family went with a boat and stole 2000 dollar worth of goods out of the station.”*

– Interview with David, USFQ/Tiputini Biodiversity Station

*“They don’t really see that this is a problem. (...). They will come and steal things from the station, from the boats, and they think somehow that this is part of their ancestral rights.”*

– Interview with Esteban, USFQ/WCS

### *Disagreements on projects*

Finally, another problem in the interaction between Waorani and environmentalist actors is that there is not always on agreement regarding project activities. As explained by one of the women of AMWAE, for example:

*“Sometimes some of the people say to you: ‘ah, how do I make chocolate? I don’t know anything.’ (...). So like that they have to learn many things, because many years ago indigenous people did not know what agriculture is. Agriculture is very different; you have to work the whole day. And our indigenous people work in the morning, only a little of the day. This work of agriculture is the whole day. (...). And sometimes they say: ‘oh, a lot of work.’ So they do not like it.”*

– Interview with Manuela, AMWAE

Similarly, NGOs sometimes also experienced reluctance on the part of the Waorani to engage in certain project activities. For instance:

*“There are always Waorani individuals that have more presence than others. So one moment these Waorani individuals, that do not represent all of the Waorani, you may enter in a conflict with them at a certain moment. For example, if we are in a reunion, and EcoCiencia made a management plan, it could be that there is a Wao that says: ‘No, that is a lie, you made it wrong, it is not like that, you will do damage.’ But I do not know who he is, I have not seen him in my life, why does he say that we are going to do damage? (...).”*

– Interview with Rommel, PUCE

### *Explanations by environmentalist actors*

Environmentalist actors themselves explained the conflicts with the Waorani (particularly that they continue to hunt unsustainably) by saying that the Waorani have a different “perspective” on the world. For example, as someone from an NGO said:

*“In general, I believe that all of the indigenous nationalities have different perceptions of what conservation means to them. Like one time someone, a Waorani, told me: ‘Well, if the jungle has always given food to my grandparents, why would it not continue giving food to me?’ So that is their perception of their home, right? That it is never going to run out.”*

– Interview with Paulina, WCS

Often, this difference in “perception” is seen as the cause of difficulties when trying to work together with the Waorani in conservation programs. For instance, in comparison with other indigenous nationalities who do have the same perception as the NGO (i.e. wildlife populations are decreasing):

*“In Kichwa communities, for example, they realise they have a problem. They say: ‘Well, 20 years ago, I used to hunt right behind my house, I had to walk like 5 to 10 minutes and I could find peccaries and monkeys, and now I have to walk like 6 to 7 hours to find animals. So we have a problem, animals are disappearing’. And with them it’s very easy to work in wildlife management programs, because they know they have a problem. But the Waorani don’t have that perception yet.”*

– Interview with Galo, WCS

Often, the different “perception” of the environment that the Waorani have (i.e. natural resources are unlimited) was seen as the result of what this environment used to look like (i.e. in history, Waorani territory was much larger and less populated so that it must have seemed like it really did have an unlimited amount of natural resources). For instance:

*“Historically that was real. There was this unlimited kind of resource base, because their population density was probably like 1 person per 10 square kilometres or something. (...) And if you talk to older people and say: ‘You know, you could be running out of monkeys here’, they’ll look at you like: ‘I’ve been hunting here my whole life, there’s monkeys, there have always been monkeys, are you crazy?’.*

– Interview with Kelly, USFQ/Tiputini Biodiversity Station

*“They were living in an environment where they didn’t really have the concept of limits; at least this is my impression. (...). When I talk with them I have this impression that they don’t really understand the concept that you can run out of animals. Because they will live for example in this settlement, they would hunt around there, and the moment that the animals decrease they would probably move to another place, and you can walk for weeks in every direction and find nothing but forest. So they don’t have this concept of limits. But the moment that the context changes, and you give them better weapons and better means to move, then it’s something completely different, but they still don’t have the concept of you can run out of animals, they can go extinct, at least locally.”*

– Interview with Esteban, USFQ/WCS

Some environmental actors try to incorporate the knowledge of the Waorani into their projects. For example, *EcoCiencia* now wants to start a new project in which medicinal plants are harvested and commercialised. For them, this Waorani “perspective” on the world is a true and useful one, whereas



others are not. Environmental actors are able to disregard such “perspectives” of the Waorani because they have proof that their own “perspective” is the only one that is true, i.e. it is the only “perspective” that matches with what the world out there really looks like. For example, many environmental actors often stated “facts” about the declines in animal populations that they found during their biological research activities in Waorani territory. For example:

*“Populations are decreasing. We just finished last year a comparison of estimates of population density along Maxus road with baseline data we gathered in 2006. And there are huge differences in population density. And also the number of species that we recorded in 2006 was much higher than the one we recorded last year. So yeah, it’s really bad. And the 20 tons that people extracted from Maxus road in 2011, that’s like emptying almost 45 hectares of forest of animals. So it’s a lot.”*

– Interview with Galo, WCS

Furthermore, these NGOs were certain that the decrease in wildlife populations that they are observing in Waorani territory is caused by the unsustainable hunting practices of the Waorani, and not by other factors such as habitat destruction due to the presence of oil companies. For example:

*“Along Maxus road it’s basically hunting, because the access of people to Maxus road is very restricted; you need a permit from Quito to enter Maxus road. So basically you can still travel along the road and see forest on both sides. So it’s not like habitat availability, it’s basically hunting.”*

– Interview with Galo, WCS

In addition, they tried to make the Waorani understand that their “perception” of the world is not true (i.e. that the amount of natural resources is not unlimited but is in fact decreasing):

*“We try to provide them with the information, to generate with them the information, trying to help them to understand that (...) this context is changing. The context in which they have been hunting is changing, and if they keep doing the same thing that they used to do in the past, they will run out of animals, and that is going to be a problem for them because that’s their source of protein.”*

– Interview with Esteban, USFQ/WCS

However, their experience was that the Waorani did not believe them. For instance:

*“We have organised several meetings with them along the years, and tried to explain to them that hunting is causing a decline in animal density. I think they understand the problem, but (...) it’s clear to them that they are located in a very good position in terms of hunting because they are in the heart of Yasuní National Park. So they think that wildlife is not going to disappear anytime soon.”*

– Interview with Galo, WCS

That the Waorani continue to hunt was often explained by attributing this to cultural differences. For example, by saying that the Waorani are unable to change their “culture”:

*“It is one of those things that is a very delicate kind of topic, because I think culturally it is part of who they are. (...). And I don’t know if they’re culturally capable of saying: ‘okay, I’m not going to hunt anymore’.”*

– Interview with Kelly, USFQ/Tiputini Biodiversity Station

In contrast, actions such as stealing were rather explained as a “loss of culture” (as a result of interaction with oil companies):

*“All of these things are the result of the way in which they learned to interact with the missionaries and with the oil company workers. (...). At least for the generation that right now is living in this area, it’s a very difficult thing, I don’t know... They have no culture, or at least the good things of their culture are probably gone, and they have adopted all these very nasty customs, and the way in which they behave is very sad. And they are the victims of the system. It’s not like they are bad people and that’s why they are stealing these things.”*

– Interview with Esteban, WCS/UFSQ

*“You can go back and think like the Waorani, and the Waorani believe that things are there because, not because they belong to somebody, but because they have to be used by somebody. And if somebody needs something, you just take it. But they know better now. So the concept of stealing is not a Waorani concept. 40 years ago. But they understand; it is one now.”*

– Interview with David, USFQ/Tiputini Biodiversity Station

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have seen that the dynamics of interaction between the Waorani and environmentalist actors also involved unequal power relations and decision-making processes that were not always very participative (although admittedly more participative than the decision-making processes of extractivist actors that we have seen in *Chapter 3*). The environmentalist actors attempt to involve the Waorani, but the projects that they implement are always primarily in their own interests of conserving animal populations. Despite such projects, the Waorani continue to hunt for commercial purposes. We have seen that many environmentalist actors are aware of the Waorani notion of unlimited natural abundance, but that they explain this as a cultural belief of the Waorani and attempt to change it in their conservation projects. The next chapter discusses the findings of the previous chapters (see *Chapter 2, 3 and 4*) in light of the main arguments of this thesis.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This thesis has focused on the Waorani, one of the indigenous nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon that has only recently started to engage in peaceful interaction with actors from outside of their territory. By adopting a political ontology framework, I have described what I consider to be common enactments of “Waorani ontology” related to the use of natural resources (*Chapter 2*) and looked at the dynamics of interaction between the Waorani and two groups of “outside” actors with each their own interests in the natural resources of Waorani territory: extractivist actors (*Chapter 3*) and environmentalist actors (*Chapter 4*). The encounter between the Waorani and these “outside” actors involved unequal power relations, decision-making processes that were not always very participative, and various conflicts and misunderstandings. In this chapter, I will look back on these dynamics of interaction and argue that they can be explained with an ontological approach, i.e. the Waorani and other actors are enacting different worlds or ontologies. In addition, I will look at the way in which the Waorani and environmentalist actors are dealing with or making sense of the other’s enactments of a different world of ontology (for the extractivists actors I did not have access to a sufficient amount of informants to make claims about this).

### 5.1 Multiple ontologies

First, what is “Waorani ontology”? These words are put between quotation marks because a singular Waorani ontology might not exist; in fact, it could even be argued that each individual Waorani is enacting a different ontology. However, by looking at the practices and stories that are shared by the majority of the Waorani, we can get an idea of what “Waorani ontology” *could be* like. In other words, we can study “Waorani ontology” by looking at *enactments* of Waorani ontology (as argued by Blaser, 2009a, 2009b, 2013). Such practices and stories have been described in *Chapter 2*, with a focus on those related to the traditional use of natural resources. There we have seen that the Waorani hunt various animals with blowpipes and spears, gather fruits and plants for a variety of uses, spread seeds throughout their territory in order to ensure the availability of natural resources for the next generations, have a high level of mobility, and maintain close relations with the spirits of their ancestors which have taken the shape of jaguars. Moreover, I have argued that “Waorani ontology” can be characterised by a notion of unlimited natural abundance, in which the forest will always continue to provide them with an abundance of natural resources. So far, these practices and stories of the Waorani (i.e. enactments of “Waorani ontology”), including their notion of unlimited natural abundance, are most likely quite different than what the average reader of this thesis would consider their own world or ontology to look like. However, does that mean that the Waorani are enacting a different ontology, or can we also say that it is just a different perspective on the same world “out there”?

The difference becomes clear when looking at the interaction between the Waorani and other actors, as worlds or ontologies are also enacted and shaped in the interaction with other ontologies (Blaser, 2009b, 2013, 2014). This is most evident in the interaction between the Waorani and environmentalist actors (see *Chapter 4*). We have seen that environmentalist actors such as NGOs and biological research stations are concerned with a decline in biodiversity in Waorani territory, which they attribute to the unsustainable hunting practices of the Waorani who have started to hunt

for commercial purposes. These actors attempt to cooperate with the Waorani by offering them sustainable alternatives to hunting or developing management plans in order to reduce their impact on wildlife populations. However, despite these efforts, the Waorani continue to hunt for commercial purposes, as opposed to just hunting for the subsistence of their families as many of them have agreed on with the environmentalist actors. That the Waorani continue to hunt in what for the environmental actors seems to be an unsustainable way, can be explained by the Waorani notion of unlimited natural abundance. For the Waorani, the forest will always provide them with an abundance of natural resources, and therefore they are not concerned about a decline in wildlife populations. As we have seen before, when the Waorani are hunting animals, they are not really *killing* them, but rather *gathering* them from the forest, just as they are gathering fruits and seeds. It is possible for them to influence the availability of natural resources, but this is done in a different way than proposed by the environmental actors. Rather than reducing the amount of hunting they are doing, the Waorani ensure the availability of natural resources by continuing the tradition of spreading seeds throughout their territory and by maintaining good relations with the spirits of their ancestors. Both of these practices lead to an abundance of animals, because animals are attracted by the fruits of the plants sown by the Waorani, and because the spirits of their ancestors control the dispersion of animal populations and are able to attract them to the *onko*. Thus, it can be argued that the Waorani have a *reciprocal* relation with nature: when the Waorani “give” to nature (e.g. spread seeds), nature “gives” back (e.g. provides an abundance of animals) (an expression borrowed from Holt, 2005).

For the Waorani, this is what their world, or ontology, looks like (or perhaps rather: what their ontology *could be* like). Only by taking seriously what the Waorani tell us about the availability of natural resources and by redefining our own concepts of natural resource availability (as argued by Holbraad, 2010; Viveiros de Castro, 2015), we can really understand what is happening in the interaction between the Waorani and environmentalist actors. When the Waorani tell us that natural abundance is unlimited, we might be tempted to eliminate this notion as simply a different perspective on a singular world “out there”, which only makes sense in the context of Waorani culture. However, only by assuming that for them this is really the case, we can understand why they continue the hunting practices that for us may seem unsustainable. This is because these are enactments of a world or ontology in which the availability of natural resources, including wildlife populations, is ensured by different actions than we consider to be of influence (i.e. by spreading seeds throughout the territory and maintaining relations with the spirits of ancestors). This is a considerably different world or ontology than environmentalist actors are enacting; if “Waorani ontology” can be characterised by the notion of unlimited natural abundance, “environmentalist ontology” can be characterised by the notion of *limited* natural abundance, or *loss* of natural abundance due to unsustainable hunting practices.

Graeber has argued against an ontological approach by saying that the research subjects might not agree with the statement that they are enacting a different world (Graeber, 2015). Therefore I would like to add here that on several occasions Waorani expressed this idea themselves by speaking of their own world compared to another world of the “outside”. For example:

*"It's not fair to us, because we have recently arrived outside, who is going to help us, or how are we going to live in this world? We are worried, the other world of outside shocks us. That is not good for us."*

– Alicia, NAWÉ (focus group)

Other anthropologists that have written about the Waorani have described a similar notion of unlimited natural abundance (e.g. Holt, 2005; Rival, 2002). For example, Holt noted that the Waorani are sure that the next generations will have the same amount of natural resources as the current generation, and describes this as *"the environment as always giving"* (Holt, 2005). Rather than explaining this as a different ontology, these anthropologists see it as a belief that is part of Waorani culture. Rival as well as Rivas and Lara have argued that this cultural belief is the result of what the actual world "out there" looks like, as the territory of the Waorani indeed used to be very large with a seemingly unlimited amount of natural resources (Rival, 2002; Rivas & Lara, 2001). However, this approach does not explain why the Waorani continue to express the notion of unlimited natural abundance despite living in an environment in which, according to environmental actors, natural abundance is becoming *limited* (as will be discussed in the next section).

## 5.2 "Contradictory" notions

We have seen that the Waorani have started to notice that their harvests are not as good as before, which they attribute to the contamination that oil companies are causing (see *Chapter 3*). This might seem contradictory with the notion of unlimited natural abundance, as bad harvests entail a scarcity rather than an abundance of natural resources. And, consequently, we might think that "Waorani ontology" has changed and that the Waorani now do not have this notion anymore. Some anthropologists have argued that many Waorani indeed no longer have the idea that the availability of natural resources is unlimited (e.g. Holt, 2005; Rival, 2015). It can even be argued that ontologies are always changing; they are constantly becoming or *"in the making"* (Blaser, 2009b). However, this does not mean that the notion of unlimited natural abundance is not present anymore. In fact, we have seen that the same Waorani that said they were concerned about the decrease in harvests also expressed the notion of unlimited natural abundance. Thus, rather than discussing whether "Waorani ontology" has changed, the question here should be: in the world or ontology that is enacted by the Waorani, how can these two notions coexist? The fact that these are two contradicting notions for "us" does not mean that this is also the case for the Waorani.

Here, it is useful to again look back at the enactments of "Waorani ontology" (as described in *Chapter 2*). Some of these enactments have changed (e.g. there is less mobility as many Waorani now live in permanent settlements), but at the same time many practices and stories remain largely the same. The Waorani continue to hunt animals, gather fruits, spread seeds, and move through their territory. Although for the Waorani the forest will always be providing them with natural abundance, they do recognise seasonality in the availability of natural resources, such as the fruiting seasons of trees and the animals this attracts. When the abundance of natural resources would be low in a certain area, they used to move to different locations where previously sown plants would have their fruits ready for consumption. The reason that the Waorani were able to move to these other areas of abundance is that they themselves (and their ancestors) had ensured the availability of natural resources there

by sowing plants (of which the fruits would in turn be eaten by animals that the Waorani could hunt). Thus, the Waorani recognise that the availability of natural resources is not constant, but as long as they maintain this reciprocal relationship with the forest, there will always be availability of natural resources. Conversely, when this reciprocal relationship does not exist or is disturbed, the forest will not continue to “give”.

The above could explain how, for the Waorani, the notion of unlimited natural abundance can co-exist with a concern about bad harvests (i.e. *limited* natural abundance). This concern about bad harvests indicates a disturbance in the reciprocal relation with nature. Indeed, due to the presence of oil companies in their territory, many Waorani now live in more permanent settlements and are no longer able to move around their territory as freely as before in order to spread seeds and make use of the natural abundance of other areas. Therefore, first of all, they themselves are not able to sufficiently maintain their reciprocal relation with nature. In addition, the oil companies themselves have also caused a disturbance in this relation, as they are causing contamination of the territory while currently not “giving back” (as will be discussed in the next section). Many Waorani are now starting to notice this, but the notion of unlimited natural abundance remains because if the reciprocal relation with nature would be restored, the forest would resume providing an abundance of natural resources (and in the parts of Waorani territory where oil companies are not present yet it still does, as the reciprocal relation with nature is not disturbed there).

### 5.3 Hunting and gathering in interaction

If the Waorani notice negative impacts of the oil companies on the availability of natural resources, then why do they continue to interact with these actors and “allow” them to be present in their territory? As we have seen, the oil companies, just like the forest, constantly give resources to the Waorani (see *Chapter 3*), i.e. they are providing an unlimited abundance of resources. However, we have also seen that conflicts occur whenever the oil companies do not comply with the agreements about the resources to be provided, and that these conflicts have worsened since oil companies have started to offer less of these resources due to policy changes by the current government. In other words, the Waorani only want to interact with the oil companies when they are “giving”, i.e. when there is a reciprocal relation, just as with nature. For them, this reciprocal relation is now perhaps not sufficiently maintained as the oil companies are providing them with fewer resources, and therefore conflicts ensue.

Interestingly, it is generally the men who tend to cooperate with the oil companies (such as NAWÉ and previously ONHAE, which mainly consist of men), whereas the women are less supportive of oil extraction in their territory and prefer to cooperate with environmentalist actors (as is the case with the Waorani women’s organisation AMWAE). As the Waorani women indicated during interviews, the men see a benefit in cooperating with the oil companies because they provide them with various resources, but the women are concerned about the effects on the harvests and health. This reflects the gender division of labour that we have seen in *Chapter 2*. Although both men and women are taught to perform all tasks related to the use of natural resources since a young age, they do develop a certain division of labour after marriage. Whereas the men can be seen as the hunters and warriors for the provision of meat and the defence of the territory, the women are rather the gatherers of



fruits and plants and the readers of the availability of natural resources, who decide when it is time to move to a new location. Thus, the Waorani women, as readers of the availability of natural resources, notice that the harvests have started to decrease, and therefore decide that it is time to move. In other words, they do no longer want to cooperate with oil companies. The men, as hunters, do want to cooperate with oil companies as long as this brings them enough benefits (i.e. as long as there is reciprocity), but if not, assume their role as warriors and seek conflicts with the oil companies in defence of their family and territory. Thus, the same practices that these Waorani men and women have regarding the use of natural resources are applied in their interaction with “outside” actors; they continue to hunt and gather.

The same dynamics of hunting and gathering can also explain why some of the Waorani seem to be switching or moving between cooperation with extractivist and environmentalist actors. For example, in the case of AMWAE we have seen that although they claim to be against oil extraction and want to conserve the natural resources of their territory, they are an organisation that was created by oil companies and they continue to accept financial resources from them, as opposed to just cooperating with environmentalist actors. Similarly, NAWA primarily signs agreements with oil companies that allow them to extract oil from their territory in return for material resources, but at the same time have worked together with environmentalist actors to create management plans for their territory in order to conserve wildlife populations. Thus, it seems as if the Waorani interact with each “outside” actor as long as this brings along benefits for them (i.e. as long as there is a reciprocal relation). In other words, they seem to be hunting and gathering in their interaction with “outside” actors. As soon as the resources that are provided are considered to be insufficient, the Waorani move to the next actor from which they can gain something, just as they would move to different areas of their territory when natural abundance is low. However, in some cases this is not possible, such as with the oil companies that have a relatively permanent presence in Waorani territory (as compared to NGOs, for example, that usually only make short visits) and therefore conflicts occur instead.

## 5.4 Coordination and distribution

Finally, we have seen that the dynamics of interaction between the Waorani and “outside” actors often involved unequal power relations and that the processes of decision-making about oil extraction or nature conservation were not always very participative (especially in the case of the oil companies, but to a lesser extent also in the case of NGOs). Extractivist and environmentalist actors each have their own interests in the natural resources in Waorani territory, whether that is the extraction of oil or the conservation of nature. They are the actors that have the financial resources and ultimately take the decisions. When there exist such unequal power relations, we might wonder what consequences this has for how these actors deal with enactments of “Waorani ontology” that they encounter, which are quite different from the enactments of their own world or ontology.

In the case of environmentalist actors (for which most of the data was collected), we have seen that they do seem to be aware of the Waorani notion of unlimited natural abundance (see *Chapter 4*). However, instead of seeing this as a difference in ontology, they rather believe that the Waorani have a different perspective on the same world “out there”. Often this perspective was explained as

a belief that is part of Waorani culture and as the result of their relation with the natural environment, which used to be a large territory with a seemingly unlimited amount of natural resources (as some anthropologists have explained it as well, e.g. Rival, 2002; Rivas & Lara, 2001). However, the “perspective” of the Waorani was often disregarded as “untrue”, because the environmentalist actors have quantitative data that proves that their own perspective is the only true representation of the singular world that exists “out there”. Although some “perspectives” of the Waorani are seen as a useful addition to the environmentalist perspective (e.g. the medicinal uses of plants), the environmental actors tried to change the “perspectives” that simply do not match the “real” world (e.g. that there is an unlimited natural abundance). In other words, they are trying to impose their own “perspective” on the Waorani.

Here, we can see what Mol has described as processes of coordination and distribution (Mol, 2002). Through such processes, actors are able to maintain the unity of a singular world “out there”, despite being confronted with enactments of different worlds or ontologies in their interaction with other actors. Processes of coordination involve adding the enactments of different worlds or ontologies together by assuming that they are different perspectives on the same world (i.e. more perspectives give a more accurate representation of the world) and discarding conflicting ones (i.e. some perspectives are simply not true). Such processes can be seen when environmentalist actors are interested in some enactments of “Waorani ontology” such as their medicinal uses of plants. Although they see this as a different perspective than the environmentalist actors have themselves, they consider it to be a true and useful one because it can eventually be made compatible with their own knowledge. In contrast, they try to change other enactments such as the notion of unlimited natural abundance, because they see this as a perspective that is inaccurate since it cannot be made to concur with their own knowledge. Processes of distribution, on the other hand, involve keeping the enactments of different worlds or ontologies separate, so that they do not clash with each other and there needs to be no trial of which one is the true “perspective”. Such processes can be seen when environmentalist actors are aware of certain “perspectives” of the Waorani (e.g. jaguars are the spirits of ancestors), but do not try to convince the Waorani of the “inaccuracy” of this – that is, as long as it does not interfere with the conservation of wildlife populations.

Thus, environmental actors (and perhaps also extractivist actors) are protecting their own ontology by suppressing certain enactments of “Waorani ontology” (a type of dynamic which has also been described by Blaser, 2009b). This does not mean that this is a conscious process; in fact, the environmentalist actors are unaware that the Waorani are enacting a different world or ontology, which leads to conflicts and misunderstandings between them. Such a type of misunderstanding has also been called “*uncontrolled equivocation*” (Viveiros de Castro, 2004).

## 5.5 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to understand the dynamics of interaction between the Waorani and the “outside” actors (i.e. extractivist and environmentalist actors) that are present in their territory, by adopting the political ontology framework and specifically looking at the enactments of different ontologies in these interactions. Following from the empirical data that I have described in the previous chapters (see *Chapter 2, 3 and 4*) and the discussion of these findings in the previous sections of this chapter, two main conclusions can be drawn:

First, in the interaction between Waorani and “outside” actors different ontologies are enacted. For example, “Waorani ontology” can be characterised by the notion of unlimited natural abundance, whereas the ontology of environmentalist actors can rather be characterised by a notion of *loss* of natural abundance. This has led to conflicts in their interaction as the Waorani continue to hunt unsustainably – that is, according to the environmentalist actors. For the Waorani, the abundance of wildlife can be ensured by other practices (e.g. spreading seeds or maintain good relations with spirits) than the environmentalist actors suggest in their wildlife conservation projects. Thus, conflicts and misunderstandings between these actors could be explained by the enactments of multiple ontologies. Here, this thesis contributes to the debate on the ontological turn within anthropology as it argues in favour of it by showing its usefulness in explaining what is happening in the case of the interaction between the Waorani and “outside” actors.

Second, the interaction between the Waorani and “outside” actors (i.e. between actors that enact different worlds or ontologies) is characterised by unequal power relations, decision-making processes that are not always very participative, and various conflicts and misunderstandings. In addition, it involves various dynamics by which the different ontologies of these actors are sustained even as they interact with one another. The Waorani continue to hunt and gather (i.e. they continue the same enactments of “Waorani ontology”) in their relation with “outside” actors and interact with them as long as they provide an abundance of resources. If not, the Waorani move to other actors just as they would move to other areas of natural abundance in their territory in times of natural scarcity. When mobility is not an option, conflicts ensue between the Waorani and these “outside” actors, as is the case for the extractivist actors that do not comply with the agreements to provide material resources. Conversely, “outside” actors deal with enactments of “Waorani ontology” by processes of coordination and distribution. Through such processes, notions of “Waorani ontology” (such as the notion of unlimited natural abundance) can be disregarded as “untrue” perspectives of the same world that have to be changed. Hereby, such actors are (unconsciously) suppressing “Waorani ontology” whilst protecting their own. Here, this thesis contributes to the problem space of the political ontology framework, by exploring the dynamics of interaction between actors that enact different ontologies and theorising how these actors deal with or make sense of the ontologies of the “other”, thereby sustaining their own ontology even as it interacts with others.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the foregoing discussion and conclusions, a number of recommendations can be made, both on a scientific and a more applied level:

For further research, I recommend to do more studies on the dynamics of interaction between actors that enact different worlds or ontologies, in order to contribute to the political ontology framework. Particularly interesting to investigate further are questions such as: how do notions that may seem contradictory to “us” make sense in “other” ontologies? And: how do different actors deal with the enactments of “other” ontologies they encounter and how do ontologies change or sustain themselves while interacting with other ontologies? This is still a relatively new field to explore and this study is just one example of it (another is e.g. Blaser, 2009b).

More practically, for the attempts of various “outside” actors to cooperate with the Waorani, or any other group of indigenous people or other actors that are different from them, I recommend that

they are aware of the possibility that these actors are enacting a different world or ontology. As we have seen, many of the conflicts and misunderstandings that have taken place between the Waorani and other actors could be explained by them enacting a different ontology. In addition, we have seen that the Waorani continue to enact “Waorani ontology” in their interaction with “outside” actors. Awareness is important as it is exactly when the interlocutors are not aware that the other is enacting a different ontology that misunderstandings, or “uncontrolled equivocations”, ensue. In addition, these actors should be aware that when they are trying to change the ontology (or “perspective”, as they will most likely see it) of actors such as the Waorani, they are using processes of coordination and distribution that in fact enforce unequal power relations by suppressing “Waorani ontology” and privileging their own. Consequently, these actors should then decide for themselves if they want to be part of such a process.

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