Introduction

Meeting the Waorani

It was late March 2013. Ecuador was reaching a peak in terms of its political polarization. The ruling leftist government was losing credibility for its 'eco-socialist' narrative, while opting to expand the extractive frontier in the heart of Waorani land. I received a message over Facebook from Moipa, a Waorani leader whom I had just met, but with whom I had already shared an *anka totamonipa* ('how much we have laughed') moment when he subverted an attempt at censorship by a governmental officer, as discussed in Chapter 1. I have experienced the deep complicity that one develops when subverting authority and laughing together with the Waorani numerous times since then. But in March 2013, it meant that Moipa was confident enough to share some terrible, breaking news: some Waorani men had taken two children with them after killing in an act of revenge the children's family, who, we now know, were part of the Waorani cultural bloc (Rival 2022) in voluntary isolation. This revenge killing was triggered by the death of two elderly Waorani who were killed with spears by the people in voluntary isolation, all of which happened near an oil camp (Narváez 2016).

When Moipa broke this sad news to me, I was working with the Ministry of Health in the intercultural section, and after the news spread, I was part of the commission that travelled to assess the health of the two children. After driving twelve hours from the

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Ecuadorian capital, Quito, and crossing what at that point seemed like a labyrinth of oil roads, we reached a small gravel road that was the entry point to a Waorani village. There, by the side of the road, we were met by a line of Waorani women, some of them with spears. Even though the content of what these women were saying was unintelligible on our side, the presence of spears and their high-pitched tone of voice, maintained throughout their long speech, left no doubt that they were scolding us. This is a form of Waorani speech that I have respected ever since then, even when in the following years I would be standing by their side, on the other end of their spears; in this book I call this form of speech *nangui tereka* ('strong speech'). As discussed in Chapter 4, strong speeches are attuned to a pitch that suggests anger, euphoria and courage; the content of these speeches often includes moral evaluations, since it is a discursive form used to scold people or motivate them to follow Waorani values.

When the strong speech finished, we managed with the help of some bilingual Waorani to identify ourselves as a health team, and since the women had good relationships with the doctors at their own health post, they allowed the doctor, part of our commission, to assess the health of the children and vaccinate them against diseases. But, to my surprise, the doctor's diagnosis was that the children were in good health, meaning that a physical assessment did not show anything wrong, overlooking aspects of their emotional state, as expressed in the behaviour of the eldest child, such as a clear passivity in the face of the adults' commands, which, as I now know, is rare among Waorani children. Two months later, I resigned from my job, unable to make peace with the profound ignorance with which we, the government, Ecuadorians, approach the Waorani people. A degree of ignorance is something that one might overcome with time and effort, but what was truly lamentable in March and April 2013 was that any efforts towards reaching a better understanding of the whole situation – the killing of a whole family, the fate and health of the two children and the fate of the Waorani men who led the revenge killing – were overshadowed by Ecuador's dependence on oil revenues. While most people with whom I worked in the Ministry of Health seemed to have the best intentions, their voices were lost in the thick mist of the extractive state. Wherever one looked

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in the governmental sphere, there was a similar atmosphere, in which the elephant in the room – that is to say, the fact that the killings of the two elderly Waorani, which triggered the revenge killing of March 2013, happened near an oil camp – was too heavy to avoid. Despite that, official discourses seemed more worried about ensuring that oil operations kept going in Waorani land rather than overcoming ignorance and paying the historical debt owed to the Waorani people, both those who have been in contact with national society since the late 1950s and those who are still in relative isolation.

This was a first-hand experience of how different hierarchies of knowledge work in relation to Indigenous people in Ecuador, the country in which I grew up and a place where class and ethnicity inform deeply unequal relations between its citizens. The doctor's criteria, overlooking Waorani notions of health, which extend beyond a physical assessment, were listened to by the authorities in a way that recalled the centuries-old mechanisms of 'population management' analysed by Andrés Guerrero (1997) when considering how relations between state institutions and Indigenous people have been mediated by mestizos (mixed-blood people). In this case, the status quo dictated that the criteria of the doctor, especially if favourable for the state's interests, should not be contested by an anthropologist. The criteria for defining who is listened to and how in the dealings between the state and Indigenous people follow a hierarchy of knowledge in which dissident voices tend to be ignored, if not silenced or ridiculed – as was the case with the activists who opposed the expansion of the oil frontier in Ecuadorian Amazonia, who were consistently labelled 'infantile leftists' by President Correa.

Guerrero (1997) notes that Indigenous people have historically been denied agency in national politics until a few decades ago, in particular when they gained political recognition through direct action in the 1990s. Since then, striking has remained one of the main mechanisms for forcing national authorities to listen. Guerrero introduces the notion of 'ventriloquism' when considering nineteenth-century mechanisms of population management for peoples not considered capable of political representation. He describes how mestizo scribes used to write down Indigenous testimonies or demands in ventriloquistic ways. In this way, the

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scribes produced documents in the name of Indigenous people while mediating their access to state justice or the political sphere. I raise the 2013 case here as a way of illustrating the extent to which this book, while being an ethnography about the Waorani notion of living well, also calls for attention to the different layers of cultural encounters and regimes of knowledge intertwined with the Waorani contemporary experience of well-being.

While this initial encounter with the Waorani people influenced my interest in better understanding what happens on the oil frontier and engaging in non-governmental projects to work with Waorani, the choice of subject also responds to a national debate about *Buen Vivir* (living well) that we have had in our country during the last two decades, as discussed in Chapter 1. The way in which the government made use of the Indigenous notion *Sumak Kawsay* (living well) to promote an 'official' version of it, finally emptying it of all meaning (Acosta 2017: 2606), is another example of contemporary ventriloquism. This is a country in which fourteen different Indigenous nationalities live, each with their own practices, aspirations and conceptualizations related to what it means to have a good life. Yet the version of living well promoted by the government offered little room to integrate this diversity of experiences into state-led policies.

After the events of 2013, the Ecuadorian debt to the Waorani has only grown, even though during the last decade the extraction of oil and lumber in Waorani lands and the fate of their families in voluntary isolation have been matters of intense public debate (see Wasserstrom et al. 2018). In terms of the extractive state, in 2023 we have a right-wing government showing little shame over expanding the extractive frontier, although it faces strong opposition from the national Indigenous movement, as seen in the June 2022 national strike, to which I will further refer. Today, little has changed in terms of the profound ignorance or lack of vision of those taking decisions or representing the Ecuadorian state in matters related to the provision of healthcare to the Waorani people. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic the response of the Ecuadorian state authorities was such that in May 2020, the Waorani president, together with some other leaders and human rights organizations, decided to present a demand to the Ecuadorian state for interim relief (*medidas cautelares*), asking for assis-

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tance. A year later, when I visited the Waorani leaders, they noted that after the demand, the government sent their *waonologo* – which can be translated as 'waonologist', as they call him to make fun of his claimed expertise on Waorani affairs; he is the same doctor who assessed the health of the two children in 2013. In 2020, this 'waonologist' visited some health posts and made a diagnosis of what was lacking in them, yet, as the Waorani leaders noted, he did not come back with any relevant assistance, and the leaders of the Waorani National Organization NAWE ended up requesting that the authorities choose a different person to represent the state in such matters. Despite this request, in 2022, the Ecuadorian state continues to consult this doctor on matters related to isolated Waorani families.[1]

This book does not focus on the isolated Waorani families, except for a brief section in Chapter 4, which addresses the Waorani perception of proximity to them, and wonders about the difficulties of speaking in the name of isolated people. In the same chapter, I discuss Waorani relationships with different outsiders who are considered enemies and allies; as an anthropologist living in Waorani villages, my relation with them oscillates between friendship and allyship, but cultural encounters tend to be asymmetric (see Sempértegui 2019). One way to overcome such asymmetries, or at least avoid ventriloquism, is to approach ethnographic research as a dialogue in which different people are engaged in conversation through participatory methods, as this book shows. Whether I have succeeded or not in dwelling in and permeating the epistemological and cultural border in which the Waorani and I met, time will tell. I invite the reader to listen to the polyphony of Waorani speeches included in this book; the reader will note that there are some voices that are quoted and discussed more often, and these are the voices of six collaborators: Juana Enqueri, Daniel Gaba Ehuengei, Juan Pablo Enomenga, Fausto Namo Ima, Byron Ima and Manuela Gaba, with whom I translated and discussed the results of this research. With the first five I also collected most of the data via interviews, surveys and recordings of treks. Since the research that I carried out with these collaborators had to be translated into a doctoral thesis and then into this book, my solitary writing somewhat flattens the richness of the collaborative process (see Rappaport 2016). But apart from this introductory

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chapter, all the other chapters follow a writing style that reflects the conversations that we had in the field and when chatting on social media. I often prefer to introduce long quotations of what my collaborators said instead of speaking for them. When I feel more confident about having reached an understanding of a certain aspect of their culture, I present my argument, but there is an overall attempt to draw a distinction between what is my personal interpretation from participant observation and what was learned in collaboration.

The Waorani Peoples

The Waorani peoples' recent history is marked by the beginning of peaceful contact in the late 1950s, when the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) started a process of pacification and evangelization. Until then, the Waorani had remained in relative isolation, occupying mainly inter-riverine territories, which seem to have favoured their survival of colonial impact, contrary to their riverine neighbours who perished (Rival 2002: 20–45). The Waorani are the most recently contacted Indigenous people in Ecuador, and their population at the moment of contact was estimated to be five hundred people living in an area of around 20,000 km^2 (Yost 1981b). The current Waorani population that maintains peaceful contact is estimated to be between three thousand five hundred and four thousand people. Waorani have land rights in what is known as the Waorani Ethnic Reserve, encompassing 6,125.6 km^2, a territory that overlaps with the Yasuní National Park (YNP), over which the Waorani have rights of use.[2] The number of Waorani people who still remain in voluntary isolation is unknown. The Waorani process of contact has been gradual; I have met people who came into contact in their childhood or adolescence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During the first decades of contact the SIL promoted a relocation of the Waorani into one village. Meanwhile, the oil business expanded into Waorani land (see Cabodevilla 1994: 341–410).

The first reliable historical accounts that differentiate the Waorani peoples from other ethnic groups date from the twentieth century,[3] and are related to a process of encroachment first by

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rubber tappers and later by oil explorations (Cabodevilla 1994; Wasserstrom 2016). The Ecuadorian state allowed oil exploration in Waorani territory from the 1940s; the Waorani, who were known by outsiders as *aucas*,[4] responded by attacking the outsiders, killing some of them and getting hold of goods such as metal tools (Cabodevilla 1994: 204, 287–99). Waorani killings of outsiders, from oil workers to missionaries, and most recently isolated people, have generated newspaper headlines, portraying them as fearless warriors; even early ethnographic accounts focused on internal warfare described the Waorani as 'the most violent society on earth' (Robarchek and Robarchek 1998: vi). Yet this image of Waorani warriorhood has already been demystified in High's work (High 2006, 2010b, 2015b; Reeve and High 2012). High (2010b) has noted intergenerational differences that position the potential to kill as something that belongs to the ancestors' times. Furthermore, there is a continuity between the Waorani regard for a peaceful life and the new ideal of living peacefully in a 'community'[5] that includes former enemies, such as Kichwa people (High 2015b). Likewise, Wasserstrom (2016), through a historical analysis of the region, concludes that there was not a 'traditional war complex' (ibid.: 3) among the Waorani, but that warfare was linked to 'periods of heightened external pressure or opportunity' (ibid.: 15).

By the time of their emergence from isolation the Waorani seem to have been divided into four main territorial groups (see Cabodevilla 1994: 272); the differences between these groups are marked by their mutual acknowledgement of humanity, while describing each other as *warani* ('other'). Rival (2002: 55, 62–63) notes that those considered *warani* (unrelated others) were potential enemies with whom marriage alliances were avoided. Intra-ethnic differences are such that it is better to talk about Waorani peoples, denoting a heterogeneous cultural bloc, as Rival (2022) argued in her expert witness testimony at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

The reasons for which Indigenous Amazonian people have accepted peaceful contact vary in each case. Some scholars have noted an 'openness' to the Other (Vilaça 2010; Viveiros de Castro 1992b) that includes the incorporation of outsiders' goods, vitality, medicine and even religion, the latter often to test whether the

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Others might have responses to existential issues, such as the inevitability of death (see Viveiros de Castro 1992b). There are several pragmatic reasons for incorporating what Others bring, for instance, the acknowledgement that biomedicine has the power to deal with epidemics, or in the case of goods, their usefulness. Among the Waorani, peaceful contact promoted by the SIL started in a time when some families were dealing with a prolonged cycle of internal warfare. Thus it is argued that peaceful contact was a way to finish this internal cycle of war[6] (Boster, Yost and Peeke 2004; Cabodevilla 1994; High 2015b; Yost 1981c). Fausto Namo Ima, one of the collaborators in this research, decided to conduct extensive conversations with his grandfather, with whom I had little or no interaction even when I visited his wife several times. From Namo's conversations I learned that his grandfather, whose peaceful contact started in the late 1960s, affirms that he still lives *durani bai* ('like the ancestors') because he has never established relationships with outsiders; instead, he notes that unlike his grandchildren, he allows *kowori* (non-Waorani) only to pass by – along the road – but he does not 'speak' with them (speaking being a main way of cultivating relations, apart from eating together) (cf. High 2018).

The Waorani mass conversion to Christianity, promoted by the SIL, was a temporary post-contact circumstance rather than a spiritual conversion (High 2016: 274). After the SIL were expelled from Ecuador in the early 1980s, the majority of Waorani people gradually abandoned the Christian identity, and for many young Waorani Christianity is no longer appealing (High 2016). However, there is a second wave of Christianization, now promoted mainly by Ecuadorian Baptists who have established churches in Amazonian cities. There is a link between these Ecuadorian churches and Christian organizations based in the United States of America – names of the latter appear in donation boxes that reach Waorani territory. I was unable to conduct further research on this aspect. In Miwaguno, at least half of the population consider themselves to be Christian and frequently attend Christian events, including Sunday mass. In contrast, Tiwino, which experienced internal tensions during my fieldwork, seemed less committed to Christian activities, particularly in times of village tensions.

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Before contact, the Waorani lived in longhouses formed by a single household group (*nanicabo*) – normally a couple with unmarried children and married daughters with their husbands – with each *nanicabo* located at considerable distance from other *guirinani* (extended kin) longhouses, with whom relations were consolidated during feasts and warfare alliances; these endogamous groups of *nanicabo* were called *waomoni* ('we people'), and marriage alliances were preferred within *waomoni*. In recent decades, while an identification and solidarity as an ethnic group has been reinforced among the Waorani, intra-ethnic differences persist (High 2015b). For instance, proximity to the oil roads is a new marker of difference. The oil road network is a system of mostly gravel roads opened to allow the expansion of the oil frontier in the Waorani territory, where most roads are maintained by the oil companies. This road network is a locus or actor that has witnessed and enacted the emergence of new Waorani ways of life. Proximity to oil roads as a contemporary geographical marker of differentiation among the Waorani is encompassed by others, such as the province in which the village is located. Waorani territory extends over three Ecuadorian provinces: Napo, Pastaza and Orellana. The villages in which I conducted research are located in Orellana and its border with Pastaza. People from villages located in Pastaza, with whom I have not worked closely, have recently won a lawsuit against the Ecuadorian state; they denounced irregularities in the process of consultation for acceptance of oil exploration. Their win means that they have managed to stop the advance of the oil frontier in Pastaza, whereas in Orellana there is ongoing oil extraction.

When discussing Amazonian literature I avoid drawing distinctions between hunter-gatherer (Rival 2002) and hunter-gatherer-horticulturist (Beckerman et al. 2009: 8135) societies, except when the Waorani ethnographic material seems to be directly informed by their egalitarian hunter-gatherer ethos. While in recent studies, Rival (2016) discusses an agro-ecological system, her initial analysis of the Waorani hunter-gatherer ethos (2002) noted their skills for surviving exclusively on non-cultivated forest resources for long periods of time; they also practise slash-and-mulch agriculture rather than the widespread slash-and-burn form (Zurita

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2014). Furthermore, their economy is based – with few exceptions – on immediate return (Woodburn 1982). Families who were not fleeing from internal wars frequently cultivated manioc and plantain, which were part of their diet, except in the peach palm season, when they relied entirely on non-cultivated crops.

Waorani history resonates with what has been described in studies of 'forest people', or hunter-gatherers in Amazonia – see for instance the Makú case (Århem 1989; Jackson 1983; Silverwood-Cope 1972), or the Akuriyo (Brightman 2016; Grotti 2022). During the colonial expansion these 'forest people' have managed to maintain autonomy through a very mobile lifestyle within interfluvial forest, while relatively isolating themselves from powerful neighbours, with few exceptions; whereas when peaceful relations have been established with their sedentary neighbours, those relations tend to be asymmetrical, because the latter have considered 'forest people' to be 'wild' and morally inferior (Århem 1989; Brightman 2007). The difference between Waorani and other hunter-gatherer situations (Widlok 2015), which is consistent with my interviews, is that in times of relative peace the Waorani moved between houses when a cultivated crop was ready for harvesting, to a house in which they would dwell for a few months; in contrast, the cultivation of manioc or other crops was not practised among other 'forest people', such as the Akuriyo in Guyana (Grotti 2007: 122–61) or the Awá-Guajá in Brazil (Garcia 2015); meanwhile, among the Siriono (Bolivia) horticulture is described as 'incipient' (Jordán 2011), and among the Makú (Colombia) it is said to be 'rudimentary' (Århem 1989). Waorani cultivation of manioc encompasses their historical narratives of long-distance trekking to search out new hunting areas, which seems to have been part of their forest management strategies; Rival (2002) has rightly described them as a trekking society. The Waorani emphasis on movement also goes beyond forest trekking; small but continuous movements are seen within the village, and in addition, they maintain several secondary houses across their territory, and allocate enormous amounts of time and resources to visiting other Waorani villages and places beyond the forest. These trips, even when challenging – such as for elderly people with no money dealing with urban public transport – generate good material for *anka totamonapa* ('how much we laughed') storytelling.

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The Context

Living along Oil Roads

Fieldwork for this book was carried out mainly in 2017 and 2018, when I lived in the Waorani villages of Tiwino and Miwaguno. Both are reached via the Auca road. I have further reviewed my initial findings while conducting research on the Maxus road during the COVID-19 pandemic.[7] The Auca and Maxus roads are the main roads that cross the Waorani territory, and the daily life experiences of Waorani people living in villages located along these roads share some similarities, in particular due to the hegemony of the oil business. But effects related to the road, such as noise and pollution, are more notorious on the Auca road, since it is a public road with no controls on outsiders passing by, such that logging and expansion of colonization are a constant along it.

Tiwino is known as a 'petrolera' village, this adjective being related to its links to the oil business. I have heard the adjective used in positive terms, such as when people from other villages praise their oil-related wealth, but I have also heard it used as a criticism of the values related to the oil frontier. Elderly people from Tiwino have a historical memory of dwelling over a vast area around Tiwino, most of which was lost to colonizers after they accepted peaceful contact in the late 1960s. Upon accepting contact, Tiwino's people joined a missionary settlement in the south of the Waorani territory, but their arrival coincided with an epidemic. Those who survived the epidemic attempted to go back to their land, but only in the late 1970s did they manage to establish a new settlement in an area closer to their ancestral territory. In the late 1980s, Tiwino's people decided to move further north, claiming back the land that is now Tiwino, and their relocation was facilitated by the oil company; from then on, Tiwino's local economy has included periods of variable access to oil-related money and goods, but also logging and tourism.

While Tiwino's territory extends over a vast forest area, four hours downriver and two upriver, the settlement is located in an oil field in which oil exploitation started in 1971. When Tiwino's people returned to their land, the area along the oil road was already occupied by *colonos* ('colonizers') and cleared for cattle-

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raising. Accounts of Tiwino's recent history, collected by missionaries and scientists, describe a contested frontier, featuring both internal tensions and confrontations with outsiders (see Alban 2015; Cabodevilla 1994; Lu, Valdivia and Silva 2017). Local memories recall the role of the late warrior Babe, who was a leading figure in defending this still-contested frontier in the Waorani territory. The reasons for which Tiwino's people waited two decades before claiming their land are unclear; however, their return to Tiwino coincided with a need to establish physical distance from some misfortunes that Babe's family faced in the late 1970s. At that point, they also had news of an oil road (the Auca road) being built in their ancestral land, which in turn favoured oil-related colonization.

Tiwino is a larger village, which in 2018 had a population of 273, in contrast to the 134 inhabitants of Miwaguno. The latter was formed in 1998, by a group of people who fled confrontations in Tiwino village. So some families in these two villages are relatives, and they maintain good relationships, visiting each other's villages, which are connected by the road network and are no more than a three-hour drive from each other. Miwaguno's territory was also part of ongoing oil extraction and colonization, but these families settled in an area that was still largely forest. Furthermore, Miwaguno is located in the YNP and the village centre is connected to the main road by a smaller road (see Map 0.3). Throughout this book, Miwaguno is described as a more cohesive and peaceful village in comparison to Tiwino, since the latter is dealing with oil-related tensions. Nevertheless, Miwaguno's people have also asked the Ecuadorian state to declare a 'state of emergency' due to a depletion of the forest near the village and difficulties in accessing external resources, as discussed in Chapter 5.

New oil drilling started in Tiwino at the time of my fieldwork in 2017, which brought great pollution-related discomfort (see Chapter 3) and a rise in internal tension due to unequal distribution of resources. Miwaguno is not without gossip or sporadic disagreements among different family clusters, but apart from a family that abandoned the village after some gossip, tensions did not seem to last long or to affect what, throughout this research, was a very cohesive village. This is in part due to the strong com-

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mitment to peaceful relations that the elderly village founder has; likewise, his children have been open to sharing leadership with younger people from different clusters. The young village president does not belong to the family that founded Miwaguno. This leader is very energetic and proactive in sharing with the whole village the outcomes of his *gestiones* ('management'), which are directed towards obtaining resources from outside. In contrast, the family that founded Tiwino are less prone to sharing leadership and promoting equal distribution of resources.

The differences between these villages are also seen in what I analyse as *sensory ecology* and in the daily dealings with the oil company that Tiwino's people face, which have an effect on people's willingness to live well together. Life in Miwaguno has a flavour of tranquillity that was not felt in Tiwino during the oil drilling; this was pointed out by Namo, a collaborator who lived in both villages during the time of this research. Tiwino centre is located along the road (see Map 0.2) and several cars pass along the road every day. These cars are mainly from the oil company, which has a camp at one end of Tiwino's road and some oil pipes at the other end, and also in the next village. In contrast, only the end of a small road reaches Miwaguno village's centre, and this is a calm road used only by those who want to visit the village. In the latter village, the proximity to the oil business is not felt on a daily basis, apart from some distant noise. The time and effort that people from Tiwino dedicated to getting 'fair' oil compensations were a primary aspect of my fieldwork; I witnessed long and tedious negotiations with the oil company and state representatives, whereas in Miwaguno I met more environmental activists, scientists, tourists and state environmental workers who carried out activities related to the YNP.

While both villages are close to oil roads, Tiwino village, at least during my fieldwork, presented a closer relationship with the oil business. As their village president says, the oil company is on their doorstep. Tiwino's people often express their disappointment with the oil business, noting that it has depleted their lands and brought no good to their people; they also express distrust towards oil representatives and often complain about oil-related pollution. At the same time, oil-related employment and oil compensations are an important part of Tiwino's local econ-

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omy. During my fieldwork, each cluster in Tiwino had at least one person – men and women – working for the oil company in a temporary job, while most of the leading families have at least one man with a permanent position within the oil company. In Miwaguno, which has a more distant relationship with the oil company, people also complain about a lack of forest resources near the oil road, which means that none of these villages can rely exclusively on hunting and foraging for food. As discussed in Chapter 5, these villages presented important variations in their consumption of food from the market – particularly rice and canned tuna – that were directly related to their access to temporary jobs. If I had to sum up the local economy of Miwaguno and Tiwino, I would highlight its unpredictability. In both villages, I witnessed several cases of crop failure, but Miwaguno's people were also helpless in dealing with a plantain disease. Access to external resources was also unpredictable, with considerable variations during the same year.

When I asked my Waorani collaborators why they decided to stay living along the oil roads when they complained about pollution and its effects on their livelihoods, they could not agree on a single answer, but several responses were provided during my fieldwork. A first reason for remaining is related to what Waorani people express as *ome gompote* ('defending the forest'). Villages like Tiwino and Miwaguno have acted as frontiers to stop further colonization on Waorani land. A second reason is that they see these settlements as strategic places to negotiate access to external resources; nowadays, this negotiation is primarily done with Ecuadorian state representatives. A few young people also mentioned easy access to Amazonian cities as one reason for remaining in these villages. However, most of the families from Miwaguno and Tiwino also maintain houses in settlements located far from oil roads, which they visit particularly when children have school holidays.

Miwaguno has only one household formed through an interethnic marital alliance, and Tiwino has six interethnic marriages, including one old couple; however, when alcohol-related conflicts or accusations of sorcery arise, Waorani people tend to relate them to these non-Waorani residents. When I translated the interviews of elderly people with my young collaborators in Tiwino, they preferred to use the Spanish term *amigo* ('friend') to

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translate *guirinani* or *guiri* ('extended kin'), which were at other times connected with the *waomoni* ('we people') group. This led me to conduct a survey and interviews about how families in both villages understand this notion, from which I learned that they currently use *waomoni* to refer to the whole village, and some would use it for the whole Waorani nationality, whereas *guirinani* is used to refer to people with whom they have cognatic links that are actualized through many forms of sharing, within and beyond the village; however, not everybody in the village is considered *guiri*. In addition, the terms *guiri* or *guirinani* are used for relations resembling the notion of 'friend', a notion further discussed in Chapter 4.

Egalitarian Relationships

While both villages have similar livelihoods – a combination of frequent gardening, foraging and hunting, alongside temporary access to external resources – the solutions that the villages have found to ensure egalitarian access to external resources are somewhat different. In Tiwino, the main sources of external income – six to eight permanent jobs in the oil company, and six positions within state institutions – are mostly in the hands of the leading families, whereas the other clusters rely on temporary jobs, which last an average of a month per year. During the 2017 oil drilling, all the clusters received a monthly provision of processed food, but when the drilling finished, the provision of food stopped. In Miwaguno leadership is more diffuse, and access to external resources is more evenly distributed among clusters. There are around two to four oil-related positions offered to the village each year, and the village assembly has decided to distribute these posts among all the clusters, which is achieved through an annual rotation. This means that each cluster has an external income at some point. Miwaguno's radical egalitarian approach to accessing external resources can also be seen in daily life, which in turn favours the village's cohesion, whereas in Tiwino, village tensions are often related to failures in ensuring egalitarian values.

The Waorani egalitarian ethos is closely related to the values of kinship, which implies equal access to resources among those

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who live together. Woodburn (2005: 22–23) observes three main mechanisms through which egalitarian relations are maintained among hunter-gatherers: (1) direct access to material resources, knowledge and skills; (2) autonomy; and (3) the obligation to share. Rival (2016: 19–20) has noted that among egalitarian Waorani practices, sharing between equals is mainly done on demand, whereas sharing with children and guests is considered a form of 'giving away' (ibid.: 133).[8] Only between a married couple is there a form of reciprocal exchange, based on complementary male and female activities (Rival 2002: 107). The Waorani economy is mainly based on immediate return,[9] and people share with no expectations of reciprocity (see also High 2007: 36).

One of the ways in which people talk about *waponi kewemonipa* ('living well'), as discussed in Chapter 1, is with the synonym *watape*, which is defined as 'to love', or 'to care', 'to care for someone as one cares for a brother'. A *watape* relationship is the ideal of sharing, where there is joy and willingness in the sharing. However, along the oil roads not all current relationships are conducted with this *watape* attitude, because some are motivated by maintaining alliances. In Tiwino, sharing was done primarily within my household and our cluster. The network[10] was extended to a few families outside the cluster, with whom we frequently shared food or goods, such as in the shared use of a hacksaw. Most people in the network had a consanguineal link with my host, Nacha Ima, but not all of her consanguineous kin were within the network. Moreover, there are households in Tiwino that seem to be at the edge of the main network of distribution of resources around the leading family. These edges are also spatially evident, with the leading family at the core, my household included, in the village centre, near the local health post and the school (see Map 0.2). In Miwaguno there are also clusters, but the networks of sharing are often expanded beyond them and connect the whole village more evenly. As Buitrón (2020) has noted among the Shuar people, egalitarian practices are adjusted alongside contemporary forms of village organization and integration into the market economy, and this is discussed in Chapter 5.

The main egalitarian principle of direct access to resources seems to be respected in both villages in relation to forest resources, but in Tiwino the leading family have special rights over

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the distribution of non-forest resources, which, as I have said, are not likely to be evenly distributed. In Tiwino, the egalitarian Waorani ethos is often expressed – by those who are at the edges of the leading family core – through demand-sharing claims such as: 'What are we? Are we perhaps tourists?'

During my fieldwork, Miwaguno village had no internal conflicts over distribution of resources; nevertheless, there was a fission in the village due to accusations of sorcery, as discussed in Chapter 1, and there were tensions related to people desiring the same man or woman, something that also happens in Tiwino. But Miwaguno's cohesion makes the competition over lovers more difficult to navigate. In Tiwino, a recent case in which a young man left his wife for another woman in the village was solved by a change of home from one edge of the village to the other. The new couple now live in a cluster that has almost no relations of sharing with the cluster of the former couple.

Gordon (2016) notes that among the Mebêngôkre-Xikrin, internal tension is generated by a lack of differentiation. When people are too similar they start competing over the same resources or the same position. Marking a distance, such as when people change village, is a way to build healthy differentiation. In Tiwino, tensions have historically led to fission, and Miwaguno is an outcome of that. While Rivière's (1984: 74) work in the Guianas suggested that when a village reaches a certain size fission is almost inevitable, Graeber and Wengrow (2021) have noted more recently that archaeological evidence suggests that it has been possible to maintain large egalitarian settlements across our history. Among the Waorani, people from Tiwino envisage the settlement continuing to grow, but cohesion depends more on whether they are able to develop more or less successful attempts to maintain egalitarian values among people who do not consider each other to be close kin, and who therefore may not maintain the convivial care that dissipates tensions. In general, co-residence in Amazonia is not a stable situation (Gow 1991: 205), and even within the same village people tend to pursue movement by changing homes among neighbourhoods.

Waorani used to 'follow' or join people who were especially skilful in defending them against external dangers (Rival 2002: 131). In addition, for certain events such as big feasts, the orga-

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nizer had an ad hoc influential role as peacemaker. As discussed in Chapter 5, the warrior Babe, who defended the territory of Tiwino against colonization, was joined by people who wanted his protection. His children have inherited Babe's rights over their ancestral land, without fully maintaining his generosity or capacity to protect people. The leadership style of this warrior contrasts with the peaceful attitude of Miwaguno's founders, where leaders are elected in an assembly that privileges young people with skills in delivering good speeches and writing documents, pointing towards engaging in an economy based on projects rather than oil.

Nee anga is a term for one who speaks loudly and guides with their words. Bilingual Waorani explain that *nee anga* is a chief or a leader. When referring to the village 'president', which is a new role, the Waos[11] call them *awene*, who are often *nee anga* people. Electing a president responds to an Ecuadorian custom (High 2007: 37) and the need to have political recognition as a community. Each village deals differently with this new figure; some have elected women presidents, some change president often, others maintain presidents-for-life, but overall, the presidents tend to be primarily 'givers' with no coercive authority.

Leaders are redistributors of external resources (High 2007; Rival 2016: 255–59). But there are no mechanisms of coercion that can be applied to them if they start accumulating or mismanaging resources, other than changing to a different representative leader. This has happened in the past with national leaders who are thought to have diverted external resources to themselves or their families, instead of redistributing them within the villages (see also High 2007: 40).

The Waorani as Ecuadorians

Waorani public speeches often refer to their need to be treated like any other Ecuadorians in terms of civil and political rights and access to social services (Nenquimo 2014). This should be understood when considering the history of their relations with other Ecuadorians, but where should I start? At the time of rubber extraction, when Waorani people were fleeing to avoid being captured by the rubber patrons? Or should I consider the long his-

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tory of oil-camp raids –which has already been well documented (Cabodevilla 1994; Wasserstrom et al. 2018)? Should I discuss the killings on the oil frontiers (Narváez et al. 2022)? Or should I discuss the history of alliances (Sempértegui 2019; Vallejo, Duhalde et al. 2016) with environmental and feminist groups? This discussion could take many paths, but to address the national debate about living well in this book, it is worth considering the moments in which Indigenous Ecuadorians from around the country have led national strikes in the Ecuadorian capital of Quito since the last decade of the twentieth century.

In the 1990s the Indigenous movement led several national strikes, a 'levantamiento indígena' ('Indigenous uprising'), through which they changed the national political agenda, and notions such as plurinationality and territorial autonomy for Indigenous people entered the national political debate (Altmann 2020). *Los Amazónicos* (people from Amazonia) have joined these strikes, supporting the national movement while presenting their own petitions, such as in the 1992 march led by the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza (Sawyer 2004). In the 1990s Waorani people also joined the strikes, at a time when they were just starting to explore mechanisms for political representation, such as a first attempt to have a national organization to represent them in negotiations with the state and the oil company (Ziegler-Otero 2004). One of the gains of the 1990s for the Waorani was the recognition of land grants (Lu, Valdivia and Silva 2017: 17–56).

Ecuador was recognized as an intercultural country in 1998, and in 2008 our Constitution recognized that Ecuador is a plurinational country. This 2008 Constitution, which is in force today, also recognized rights for 'nature or Pacha Mama' ('mother nature') and discussed the 'Regimen of *Buen Vivir*' ('living well'). During the latest strikes in 2019 and 2022, 'the children of the 1990s uprising', as they recognize themselves, filled the streets of Quito, the Ecuadorian capital, once again to force the Ecuadorian government to listen to their demands. The new generation of Indigenous people acknowledge a continuity between their demands and those of the 1990s (Altmann 2020).

During the most recent national strike in June 2022, the Waorani people joined the strike, and some said, 'vamos a la lucha' ('we are going to the struggle'). A large delegation of Waorani

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people arrived in Quito to join the people's fight, but when the right-wing government responded with violent repression, most Waorani decided to go back to their villages and left, saying that otherwise the government was 'going to kill' them. Only a few leaders, and notably several women leaders, remained in Quito until day eighteen of the strike, when an agreement was reached.

The Waorani people who remained in the villages near oil camps conducted their own struggles during the national strike, blocking oil roads and entrances to the camps. When I visited the Waorani lands in July 2022, after the national strike, people shared details of their local strikes. When I enquired about the results of the strike, a friend, who is president of one of the villages and led the fight against the oil company, said that as a result of their strike, he will be 'hired by the oil company'. My friend added that in the villages, they had their 'own petitions', meaning that instead of following the ten points of the CONAIE,[12] which were proposed at a national level, the villages had their own negotiations with the oil company, which included petitions for more workplaces and access to better quality drinking water. In other words, while most Waorani people are concerned with what happens at a national level in Ecuador, it is mostly the leaders that engage in the national debate and strikes in Quito, while each Waorani village has its own struggles and allies. These local struggles present several apparent contradictions, such as denouncing oil-related harms while accepting jobs in the oil company. Several authors have already noted that while the Indigenous movement, since the late 1980s, has opposed neoliberal politics and aligned with global environmental activism, there is a middle ground, as discussed in Chapter 4, in which more heterogeneous struggles inform people's acceptance of extractive activities on their land (see for example Cepek 2018; Dayot 2021; Jameson 2011; Sabin 1998). The different approach to the national strike in Waorani land is but one example of such heterogeneity.

The differences between the experience of Waorani leaders, who come to Quito to engage in national politics, and the local experience of struggles is relevant when considering the nuances of Waorani responses to national developmental projects. While Waorani leaders in Quito have debated laws and policies related to the national project of living well, and have developed their own

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criticism of this project, as I have discussed elsewhere (Bravo Díaz 2021b), in the villages there are mixed feelings regarding social benefits developed in the name of national well-being, often conditional on their acceptance of more oil extraction (see Guzmán-Gallegos 2015; Uzendoski 2018).

Overall, relations between the Waorani peoples and the state on the oil frontier oscillate between 'equivocal compatibility' (Pina-Cabral 2010) and animosity. The former is referred to throughout this book in relation to the provision of social services; while both parties agree on their engagement, the terms of such agreements are defined in 'divergent ways' by the parties involved (ibid.: 182). Animosity is mainly marked by repression directed against Waorani road blockages, and I have witnessed such repression under different governments. In January 2015, under Correa's government, when I was working for a health NGO as part of a health team, I and a group of young doctors doing their year of public service confronted the military to prevent them from firing tear gas at Waorani on strike on the Tiwino bridge. Thus, while some state workers are allies, others are unwelcome, as discussed in Chapter 4. The use of military force against the Waorani in recent years points to how heated the oil frontier is. Militarization of the area has a particular history. In 1941 Ecuador was defeated in a war against Peru and lost 200,000 km^2 on the southern and eastern sides of the country, the latter being where 'el Oriente', or Amazonia, is. Thus, the advance of oil exploration in the 1940s by the company Shell was not only an economic strategy, but also a way for the Ecuadorian state to gain more control over Amazonian land. There is an understudied but important relationship between the military and the oil business from the early 1940s (see Cabodevilla 1994: 284). Almeida and Proaño (2008: 116) provide accounts of military repression in other parts of Waorani territory, and of violent repression of civil protest against oil companies along the Auca road, where this research is focused.

***

I will expand here on the process of colonization that bloomed with the opening of the Auca road in Waorani land in the 1970s (Tassi 1992). This colonization was facilitated by an institution

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for land reform, the Ecuadorian Institute of Agrarian Reform and Colonization (IERAC) and legislation for 'wastelands and colonization' (the Ley de Tierras Baldías y Colonización). But it was the oil extraction that has flourished since the 1970s that drove the opening of roads and the creation of satellite *colono* settlements (Cabodevilla 1994). *Colonos* come from different parts of Ecuador and more recently from neighbouring countries, and the clearings they open, often for livestock, are still expanding into Waorani land in some areas near the Auca road. The Waorani refer to the colonizers as *colonos*, and while there is a history of confrontation with these new neighbours, there are also a few marriages with the *colono* people. Many young Waorani are very keen to learn about *colono* ways, which is a way to understand the Other. My Waorani friends used to talk jokingly about their differences, but also reflected on their contrasting diets and approaches to forest management. In the 1980s the border of Tiwino's territory was already occupied by *colonos* who had transformed the forest into pasture for cattle, and therefore, when Tiwino's people reclaimed that land, they declared an intentional act of reforesting the land, which was explained to me as a way to make animals come closer. Walter, a Waorani friend who moved to Tiwino at an early age, described his first encounters with the *colonos* as follows:

> In the 1990s, I came [to Tiwino] to visit my grandmother, here were only my mother's family. … They told us to stay, they were only four families. My father wanted to go to his paradise [in the YNP], we stay here.
>
> Then, I started to see the vision of how it is; [I saw] rural technology, the road; first, we observed, that was our socialization with *Kowori colono*, they work everyday, then go to buy something, then eat, we saw that reality.

Walter's account shows that living along the oil roads was not as good as 'the paradise' of the deep forest, but by staying in Tiwino his father supported the process of claiming back Tiwino's territory. They also had access to oil compensations and social services in times when there was little presence of the Ecuadorian state in that area. But what Walter particularly notes is that by staying along the oil road they learned about the ways of *colonos*, those people who work every day to buy food, whereas the Waorani consider it harmful to work hard every day (see Chapter 5).

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Both villages provide historical accounts of confrontations with *colonos*, some of them physical, others through written documents. During my own fieldwork, the prevalent form of relation with *colonos* was peaceful, although I knew about a family in another village who burned a *colono* house to defend a border that was being invaded by livestock activities.

Young Waorani are very keen to attend regional football matches, in which they play against *colonos* and other Indigenous people. Waorani women challenge this male-dominated national sport somewhat (see Chapter 2). My host mother and her sisters were often more proactive and excited than their male partners about *peibo owonpoke* or *peibo opoki* ('playing football') with the *colonos*. In 2017, some Waorani from Tiwino and Miwaguno also supported neighbouring Indigenous people and *colonos* in strikes against the oil company, meaning that this regional alliance is also activated to fight common enemies.

Ethnography in the Digital Age

Nacha Ima, the young Waorani woman who hosted me in her home, did not own a mobile phone or use Facebook as often as her husband or sister, so I received news about her through them after I left. Although I finished my most concentrated period of fieldwork in her village in 2018, the messaging platform allowed us to maintain relations of mutual care even during the pandemic. After the end of my fieldwork, her family shared news very often; for instance, they announced the harvesting of a garden that I planted only a few months before leaving the field. Growing food for the family is a form of care, in agreement with the Waorani values of kinship and therefore the values of living well. What I want to highlight here is that the messaging platform allowed us, over these years, to maintain the relations of mutual care: sharing news about Nacha's newborn, coordinating meetings in El Coca city and providing mutual support when dealing with COVID-19 and other new diseases (see Chapter 2). During the first year of the pandemic my Waorani family shared detailed instructions about how I should care for the health of my family in the city, since the Waorani proved more successful in dealing with the dis-

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ease in the forest than we in the city did. To sum up, while the core of my learning about Waorani life has been developed when living among Waorani people, my understanding of their values and health has continued to grow over the years, thanks to social media and their willingness to keep in touch. Waorani relatives who are geographically distant used to communicate by radio, but in places where there is internet access, social media is now the most-used medium for communication. This consistent interest in maintaining relationships despite physical distance suggests that shared experiences (High 2013), even when they are virtually shared, also maintain a sense of closeness. Social media platforms also allowed me to keep in contact with collaborators during the writing up of the research, and they helped me to clarify doubts that emerged over these years.

Perhaps the main use that we have given to social media is that it has allowed us to celebrate and mourn together. When I was living with the Waorani, if there was news of a death in some part of the Waorani territory, my hosts would consult Facebook to find news about the cause of death or to look at the funeral pictures. Sometimes, if I had internet access or a phone and my friends did not, they would ask me to check a certain profile, since they knew who, among the Waorani, was more active in sharing news on Facebook. Accessing the internet and checking virtual platforms is often a collective activity, unless the user wants to have a private conversation, for instance to arrange a romantic date in the nearest town. From 2014, most virtual interactions I had with my Waorani friends were over Facebook Messenger, but more recently, they are more active on WhatsApp, and some also contact me on Instagram.

At the moment of finishing the writing up of this book, I have lived for at least four years in different parts of Waorani territory. While I have visited several villages that are accessible only by canoe or plane, my familiarity with Waorani daily life is based on villages located along the oil roads, which is a particular milieu. Since my first period of long-term residence in Waorani territory started in 2014, friendships and conversations with several Waorani people have grown over a longer period of time and in different spaces. For instance, my Waorani friends have visited me several times in Ecuadorian cities, which has allowed some sort of

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reverse hosting, whereby I have learned more about their views on my own culture.

While carrying out the research for this book since 2017, I have spent time with Waorani people of different ages, which is reflected in the accounts included in the book. The reader will note that while there are some contrasting aspirations and practices related to their experience of living well, there are also several values shared across generations. I also learned from different genders, although a reflection on gender diversity is something I have not been able to include in this work.

This book includes several long quotations from Waorani speeches, as a way to resemble or resonate with Waorani speech while sharing my own and to somehow keep their egalitarian style of polyphonic speeches. I also learned from interviews about well-being, water quality, cement houses, notions of health, and pollution. In Tiwino, in part because of the difficulties of navigating village life, I benefited – over different stages of my fieldwork in this village – from the contributions of eleven young and middle-aged Waorani research assistants (seven men, four women), who would help with translations. Some of them became my collaborators in gathering data and analysing it: Juana Enqueri, Daniel Gaba Ehuengei, Fausto Namo Ima and Manuela Gaba. In Miwaguno, Juan Enomenga, the young president of the village, was my closest collaborator, and I had extra help with translations from three other men, among them Byron Ima, who was also my host and became a long-term collaborator. The lack of female research assistants was overcome through friendships with women who opened their homes to me. All my research collaborators in this work had good knowledge of both villages, which are related by cognatic links, and therefore the reflections presented in this book as collaborative research often include considerations beyond their villages. My closer collaborators have agreed and insisted on having their full names included in this book, without anonymization, which I have respected. However, some names are anonymized in some parts of the book.

Some participatory methods, such as painting T-shirts as an art-based research method (Major and Savin-Baden 2010; Wang et al. 2017) and taking photos and videos on the theme of living well, were conducted in both villages. These methods were keys

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to explaining the purpose of my research to people who were not close to my hosts or my collaborators and engaging in a conversation about living well with a larger group of people. The results of these methods also made good material for reflection with the collaborators, who would develop their own interpretations about the outcomes of the research.

In addition, a survey of weekly dietary intake was conducted in half of the households in each village, since I wanted to understand whether the diet that I had with my host in Tiwino, which included food from the market almost on a daily basis, was similar across the villages (see Chapter 5). When possible, I conducted interviews with state and para-state actors, including the doctors at Tiwino health post, that provided some more context to what I was researching.

A Hundred Voices

The Waorani in the Anthropological Literature

My analysis builds on the work of a number of scholars who have studied different aspects of Waorani life. This body of work was initially driven by foreign researchers, but, as this review shows, Ecuadorian voices on the topic have emerged in recent years, and most importantly, the work of a few Waorani intellectuals has recently been published. The bulk of the literature discussed in this book was published by the time I finished my doctoral dissertation in 2020, but in this review I also include some more recent literature that contributes to the conversation without being exhaustive.

Laura Rival's ethnographic research – with fieldwork carried out mainly in the 1980s and 1990s – is the most comprehensive contribution to literature about the Waorani. While Rival's initial research focused on the effect of schooling (1992, 1996b), her work has expanded to almost all areas of Waorani life, discussing ecological relations, social organization and the values that informed the cycles of peace and war, as well as the relative isolation and egalitarian practices of Waorani peoples (1993, 1996a, 2002, 2005, 2016). Rival's ethnography contrasted with earlier and parallel anthropological accounts among the Waorani (Beckerman et al.

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2009; Boster, Yost and Peeke 2004; Robarchek and Robarchek 1998; Yost 1981a, 1981b); the latter tended to reinforce the missionary thesis that peaceful Waorani relations were an effect of contact and evangelization, without recognizing Waorani convivial values. Wasserstrom (2016) has recently shown that the rise in Waorani bellicosity was related to pressures on the frontier of their territory.

Casey High's ethnography – carried out mainly in the 2000s – has discussed the Waorani ideals of warriorhood and peace, and their intergenerational variations, highlighting that the Waorani with whom High has worked – in the south of Waorani land – currently pursue peaceful relationships with outsiders (High 2006, 2010b, 2015b). Rival's and High's work has also contributed to the ontological debate in Amazonian literature, noting that, in contrast to what has been documented in other parts of the region, the Waorani assume the perspectival position of prey[13] rather than predator when dealing with Others (Rival 2002: 177–88). High (2015b) argues that the perspectival position of prey is expressed as a victimhood ethos that permeates Waorani narratives of past violence, meaning that elderly people position themselves as victims rather than actors of violence. High notes that the victimhood ethos coexists with a trend among young Waorani people who perform and reinforce ideals of warriorhood, engaging with national imaginaries of the 'wild' but also highlighting Waorani values of strength and autonomy. This line of thinking has led High (2010b) to introduce a debate about contemporary young Waorani ideals of masculinity, which include representations of warriorhood inspired by their ancestors as much as by global media heroes such as Bruce Lee.

Flora Lu, a biologist specializing in ecological anthropology, has expanded the understanding of Waorani management of resources and integration into the market economy (Lu 1999, 2001, 2007; Lu and Sorensen 2013). Several Ecuadorian and American anthropologists have developed work in Waorani territory associated with Lu's research projects, focusing on environmental, socio-economic and nutritional changes in Ecuadorian Amazonia (Alvarez 2013; Doljanin 2013; Hidrobo 2013; Lu, Bilsborrow and Oña 2012; Lu and Sorensen 2013). Their data collected in Waorani villages located along oil roads shows that these Waorani experi-

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ence more environmental and socio-economic effects than those in villages located far from oil roads. These studies are largely based on surveys, including an assessment of Waorani perceptions of quality of life (Zeiger 2019) that shows an overall dissatisfaction and downward trend in its perception – examining physical and mental health, relations with the government, social services, assets and overall life satisfaction – among Waorani living in the oil milieu. While these results may be contested in terms of the difficulties of adapting surveys such as the World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL) assessment for Waorani populations, the findings still resonate with Waorani perceptions of effects recorded in this book. However, surveys fail to deliver an understanding of different dimensions of the Waorani experience of living well, such as convivial care and collective laughter, which are integral to the Waorani daily experience of happiness, as discussed in this book.

Miguel Angel Cabodevilla's (1994) comprehensive work documenting Waorani history has been a principal source for a whole generation of scholars. Cabodevilla (2004, 2013; Cabodevilla et al. 2013) has also advocated for better public policies to prevent encroachment on the lands of isolated people, adding to what is one of the most heated national debates. The discussion about the expansion of the extractive frontier in the YNP and its impacts on the Waorani people living in voluntary isolation has been enriched by scholars from different disciplines (e.g. Almeida and Proaño 2008; Pappalardo et al. 2013; Rivas 2020; Vallejo and Avila 2017; Wasserstrom et al. 2018). But still, as was evident in the 2022 public hearing in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, in the case of the Tagaeri and Taromenane Indigenous Peoples against the Ecuadorian State, which demands the protection of the isolated Waorani people, there is no agreement among the many voices speaking for those people about how to actually prevent the encroachment on their land, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Among Waorani intellectuals, Ima Fabian Nenquimo started by documenting the Waorani oral tradition as expressed in their mythical narratives (Gondecki and Nenquimo 2009; Nenquimo 2011). Anyone who has lived with the Waorani and listened to their myths, as repeated by their elders, would recognize extracts of the stories that Nenquimo manages to weave into one, as only

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a Wao would be able to do. The responses to Nenquimo's work among the Waorani with whom I worked are varied; some disagree with details of the stories, pointing out that the intra-ethnic differences among Waorani people are expressed even in the way that they have transmitted versions of their myths among different families. After the above-mentioned 2013 killing of a Waorani family in voluntary isolation, Nenquimo (2014) published a book dedicated to the Waorani people in voluntary isolation, and in this book he also delivers his own interpretation of the Waorani history of contact, their first epidemic, the issues related to the extractive oil frontier and the pragmatism with which the Waorani approach the oil company and other providers.

In recent years, Penty Baihua, a Waorani man representing the Baihuairi people, has opted to translate his people's struggles for different audiences in collaboration with the environmentalist lawyer Judith Kimerling, who has long denounced environmental encroachments related to oil (Kimerling 1991, 2015). However, Kimerling's strategy, which resembles another face of ventriloquism, has produced a great deal of discomfort among other Waorani leaders. Baihua and Kimerling (2018) denounce impositions from the state while contesting the leadership of the Waorani national organization NAWE, arguing that the Baihuairi wish to have autonomy to make decisions about their own land.

Another Waorani intellectual is Opi Nenquimo, who has advocated keeping his village free from oil extraction; in pursuing that process, he and his family have generated alliances with environmentalist and human rights organizations. This family have developed an important bloc of opposition against oil, and in 2019 they won a case in court against the Ecuadorian state (see High 2020), demonstrating that they have not been properly consulted about governmental attempts to extract oil in their land. In a recent publication, Opi Nenquimo (Scazza and Nenquimo 2021) has documented their organization and struggles.

Of particular interest for this book is Manuela Ima's (2012) work on health and well-being. Manuela also accompanied me in several stages of my research, and was always generous in sharing her insights as a Waorani leader. There is also an exhaustive analysis of Waorani grammar, which is not unified across the Waorani land, produced by Cawetipe Yeti (2012). These Waorani

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voices come mainly from among Waorani people living in areas where there is clear opposition towards oil extraction, whereas the voices of people like my collaborators, which show the nuances of living near oil camps and the contradictions they face, have not yet reached the press.

Among anthropological work produced by Ecuadorians in recent decades, we find the prolific Kati Alvarez, who started with a study of the incorporation of national societal features into Waorani contemporary funerary rituals (2010), and has focused more recently on issues related to Waorani people in voluntary isolation (2017). Alvarez's research is part of the collaborative research promoted by Flora Lu. Likewise, Dayuma Alban has also collaborated with Lu (Houck et al. 2013). Alban's (2015, 2008) work has documented maternal care practices and changes in gender relations in the village of Tiwino.

The Ecuadorians Patricio Trujillo (2011), Roberto Narváez (2018) and Alexis Rivas (2003, 2006, 2007, 2020) have developed collaborative work focusing on Waorani relations with the families in voluntary isolation (Narváez, Trujillo and Rivas 2022). Rivas, in collaboration with Rommel Lara, has also documented Waorani dealings with the extractive economy and various state institutions (Rivas and Lara 2001). Narváez and Trujillo have produced important historical accounts of several conflicts in the Waorani territory, including the 2013 killings (Narváez 2016; Narváez and Trujillo 2020; Trujillo 2016; Trujillo and Narváez 2021), in which they offer extensive analysis of what they call the Waorani 'warriorhood ethos'; these should be read in the light of High's (2009a, 2009b, 2010b, 2015b; Reeve and High 2012) efforts to demystify the portrayal of the Waorani as a war-centred society, as well as Paniagua's (2020) record of different ways to approach revenge, nuanced by the Waorani understanding of inside and outside conflicts.

Gabriela Zurita (2014, 2017; Zurita, Jarrín and Rios 2016) has offered an extensive study of current agro-ecological Waorani practices, noting that the Waorani have integrated harvested crops as part of their daily diet. Zurita's work has enriched our understanding of Waorani ethnobotany, which has also been documented by Cerón and Montalvo (1998). There is a brief but interesting collaboration between Zurita and Rival discussing changes

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in Waorani architecture (Zurita and Rival 2017), see also Izquierdo Peñafiel (2000).

Waorani shamanism has been documented by Wierucka (2015), but, as discussed in Chapter 2, there are few Waorani shamans, and the understanding of shamanism should be pursued while considering interethnic relations; see for instance High's work (2012a, 2012b). A first record of Waorani dealings with biomedicine was delivered by Fuentes (1997), and more recently other aspects of Waorani health, including a rise in suicides among young Waorani people, have been recorded (Merlyn et al. 2018; Valladares et al. 2022). Last but not least, there are relevant studies concerned with Waorani political organization (Ziegler-Otero 2004), the increasing Waorani interest in foreign goods (Colleoni 2016), transcultural linguistics (Korak 2015) and Waorani dealings with notions of conservation (Escobar 2015; Lu and Wirth 2011) and environmental activism (Gondecki 2015; High 2020).

The Book

A first version of this book was finished early in 2020, but several sections have been expanded and rewritten since, during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic started, I was in Waorani territory collaborating on a health project,[14] and so I spent the first quarantine there, and have gone back several times during these past years while collaborating with Waorani leaders working on health advocacy.

One of people's first reactions to the pandemic in villages located near oil roads was to isolate themselves or plan to retreat to the depths of the forest once the virus arrived; but most families spent less than two weeks in their forest camps before feeling the need for essentials from the store and going back to the village. Elderly people have played a central role during the pandemic, since the Waorani attribute their survival to the medicinal plant knowledge of their elders (see Chapter 2). Thus, while during my initial fieldwork period various Waorani families maintained what they called *fincas* and *reserves* (see Chapter 3) in deeper areas of the forest and declared that they wanted to change residence to those *fincas*, their pandemic attempts to isolate themselves high-

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lighted the difficulties of abandoning village life, mainly because of running out of food and products from the market (see Chapter 5). At the same time, when I recorded Waorani reflections on the contrast between the road milieu and the forest, the reflections on the former contained references to pathogenic elements; at the beginning of the pandemic there was a surge in such reflections, which makes this a timely discussion, particularly considering that the Waorani find it difficult to actually abandon the road milieu, and that new roads have been opened at the heart of their territory.

Even before the pandemic, living well in Waorani villages was more of an aspiration than a constant. It requires keeping at bay cosmological evils as well as historical ones – more recently, Ecuadorian public force and oil-related pollution. Living well is not a fixed state but something that is continuously enacted, which requires virtue-centred[15] (eudaimonic) willingness to respect the values of kinship. At the same time, sensuous (hedonic) joys contribute to the willingness of 'moral persons' to engage in the maintenance of a prosperous and peaceful life. An example of the latter is discussed in Chapter 3, in which a young man deals with his lack of strength, felt as an ailment, by walking into the forest and sensorially experiencing the *durani bai* ('ancestors' way') relation with the forest. The young man recovers his vitality while reaching a deep part of the forest, and after that goes back to the village along the road, where he is willing to help his father in the building of a house, thereby engaging in a generative activity. For the Waorani, willingness to collectively live well does not depend only on harmonious convivial relations (Overing and Passes 2000), but also on harmonious relationships with the places where they dwell. One can even say that living well, more than being a set of moral evaluations, is a way of being or dwelling that is sensed. Furthermore, while noting the relation between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being in Chapter 1, as has been discussed among other Amazonian Indigenous people (Walker 2015a), I suggest in this book that collective happiness is also part of people's ethical life. The experience of convivial living well among the Waorani is epitomized in the form of peace (*watape piyene*) and collective happiness (*totamonipa*). These two expressions of living well do not necessarily occur together, although a combination of

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both seems to be encouraged in ordinary life through narrative styles such as *anka totamonapa* ('how much we have laughed'). The peak of collective happiness is seen during the feast, when it is expressed through euphoria, as in the *toki beye* ('for laughing') dance, whereas daily life offers a more delicate balance between peace and joy. I suggest that Waorani *piyenekete* ('making peace') is often woven through forms of *toki* ('enjoyment').

If we consider that the Waorani have only recently begun building a shared ethnic identity, and that there are several intra-ethnic differences, then it is proper to acknowledge that the set of moral evaluations and practices discussed in this book may vary across communities. Moreover, when I refer to 'Waorani' values, I am considering values that were frequently praised in a somewhat coherent way; yet within the same communities, there are variations in the emphasis with which certain values are praised, or even contradictions, which I aim to show throughout this book. For instance, while the Waorani praise sharing with their extended families, some young families are exploring the possibilities of withdrawing to their cement houses as nuclear families, which also allows them to withdraw from extended sharing (see Chapter 3). In a way similar to what Londoño (2012) has noted among the People of the Centre in Colombia, ethical practice is not static, and among the Waorani there is an ongoing process of incorporating new values or adjusting existing ones in the light of new relations between different Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, contemporary changes in livelihoods, new forms of leadership, political and activist roles, schooling, and the proximity to the oil milieu. Particularly in relation to the latter, as Julie Dayot (2021) has argued, since compensations for oil extraction are seen in some communities in Ecuador as the only way to achieve access to services and goods that people aspire to integrate into their lives, there is a mixed set of values informing the decisions involved in accepting new oil drilling (see Chapter 4), which does not exclude concern for the environmental damage that the oil industry has caused across Ecuadorian Amazonia.

This exploration of the Waorani notion of *waponi kewemonipa* ('living well') is place-based. Great emphasis is put on this in the Waorani assessment and experience of living well in different places – namely, the village and its surroundings along the oil

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road, the houses, and the forest, far from the road. Even though the forest is by no means a homogeneous place, Waorani living along oil roads develop generalizations to contrast the forest and the road. Thus, while relying on Amazonian studies of virtue-based morality and conviviality (Londoño 2005; Overing and Passes 2000), in Chapters 2 and 3 this book reflects upon ecological and sensory experiences, noting that the senses, instead of being unreliable perceptive channels, are for the Waorani part of what makes beautiful, good and knowledgeable people.

Chapter 2 discusses Waorani health, which is intertwined with the experience of living well. Since health is related to Waorani intergenerational practices for the making of strong people, this chapter also discusses strength in relation to a certain kind of subjectivity, that of courageous people. The Waorani consider that there are different subjectivities, which are not given but made during a lifetime, and are not exclusively related to the soul. For the Waorani the body is a container and channel of skills, knowledge and the strength or force (*pienguimamo*) that in this book I call vitality. Waorani people do not include health as a category in their reflections on living well unless they have faced a situation that has challenged their own health. For the Waorani, as among other Amazonian people (Conklin 2015), well-being is a collective notion that requires people full of vitality, which is to say healthy people with generative skills. Therefore I suggest that beyond the convivial dimension, there are at least two other dimensions of living well for the Waorani: one related to ecological relations, and another that I call generative, which includes health and circulation of vitality.

Notes

1. For instance, he was part of the Ecuadorian state's delegation to the August 2022 Public Hearing in the Case of the Tagaeri and Taromenane Indigenous Peoples v. Ecuador, at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.
2. 'To date, the amount of territory conceded to the Waorani is 6,791.3 square kilometers' (Lu, Valdivia and Silva 2017: 20), in addition to their rights of use over the YNP.

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3. Historical accounts from before the twentieth century have generated diverse interpretations. Taylor (1999) and Cipolletti (2002) note the impact of earlier centuries of colonialism in the region, which may have caused Waorani withdrawal to inter-riverine lands. But there is disagreement about whether the Waorani were previously part of a riverine society: for example, Taylor (1999: 232) suggests that Waorani 'are probably the descendants of the complex Abijira riverside society', whereas Cipotelli (2002: 115) suggests that the Waorani may be descendants of several groups that fled colonial encroachment. Cabodevilla (1994) and Rival (1992, 2002) provide extensive analysis suggesting that the Waorani are an independent ethnic group that survived contact through their relative isolation, which is reflected in their language also being unrelated to other Amazonian groups. Based on historical analysis, Rival (2002: 38–45) convincingly argues that the Waorani are a 'different group altogether' (ibid.: 40), which remained around the Tiputini watershed and expanded towards the west only after the decline of Zaparoan populations in the nineteenth century.
4. A Kichwa word used to refer to 'wild' people.
5. Waorani people use the Spanish term *comunidad* to refer to contemporary settlements, which are a post-contact form of organization in which several cognatic groups live in a single village that is 'recognized' as a *comunidad* by the Ecuadorian state. More recently some Waorani communities have been changing their denomination to that of a *comuna* following recent Ecuadorian regulations. In this book, I prefer to use the notion of village to embrace both, regardless of their changing denomination from *comunidad* to *comuna*.
6. Elderly people with whom I have conducted interviews started peaceful contact in the late 1960s and 1970s, and their process of peaceful contact was promoted by the SIL with the help of Waorani people who were already converted to Christianity. These interviews with Waorani elders suggest that they did not fully agree with establishing permanent contact; instead, they perceived their mobilization to the settlement organized by the SIL as a temporary situation, but after dealing with the first foreign diseases, a sustained peaceful contact to access biomedicine and goods was almost inevitable. I have been unable to interview families who were contacted in the 1970s by Catholic missionaries; a historical account of this contact is offered by Cabodevilla (1994: 351–410).
7. With the Institute of Public Health (ISP) at PUCE.
8. Throughout this book I use the notion of 'demand-sharing' following Rival (2002: 104), who in turn takes this notion from Peterson (1993),

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in a similar sense to Bird-David's (1990) discussion of the 'requests to be given'; this refers to Waorani sharing by 'demand rather than by unsolicited giving' (Rival 2002: 105).

9. 'People obtain a direct and immediate return from their labour' (Woodburn 1982: 432); food is not stored but consumed the same day or in the following days, and even money is spent with this same logic along the oil roads. Nowadays, a few people who have access to refrigerators keep meat for longer periods of time, instead of distributing it all at once. The increased cultivation of crops by Waorani also implies a 'delay' in the return on labour, but what is harvested is never stored. If there is an excess that the household might be unable to consume in the following days, the harvest is broadly distributed, usually by organizing a party. In addition, some families decide to distribute their crops by inviting people from different clusters to harvest as much as they can carry back home.
10. The Waorani do not have a word that could be translated as 'network', but my use of this notion here is for analytical purposes. This network extends through relations of sharing, and it ends where there is absence of sharing or caring. What I describe as a network resembles what Rival (2016) has seen among *waomoni*, regional groups that maintain an 'endogamous nexus' described as 'dispersed networks of intermarrying longhouses separated by vast stretches of unoccupied forests' (ibid.:50); however, relations of frequent sharing beyond the household group but within the village, such as I describe here, are not extended to all the *waomoni* group.
11. *Wao* is used as an adjective but also as the singular form of 'person', whereas the plural is *Waorani*. I also use the expression 'Waorani people', which is redundant, but in this case, I am using the word Waorani as the name of the ethnic group.
12. The ten points were: reduction of fuel prices (a rise in fuel prices was also the trigger for the strike in 2019); a moratorium on debts; fair prices for rural products; employment options and respect for labour rights; no mining in Indigenous territories and water sources; respect for collective rights; no privatization of strategic sectors; control of price speculation; a budget for health and education; and security and protection policies.
13. The language of predation is widespread in Amazonian studies of alterity, in which engagement in predatory relationships with outsiders is described as essential for reproduction of Amazonian society (Descola 1993; Fausto 1999, 2012; Vilaça 2010; Viveiros de Castro 1992a, 1992b). Rival's study among the Waorani offers an alternative view in which predation is not at the core of social reproduction, but

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instead the Waorani 'profess through their cosmology that living is the source of life, and affirm through their rituals that their own social reproduction does not depend on cannibal appropriation' (Rival 2002: 184).

14. For the ISP.
15. I am referring to Overing and Passes's (2000) analysis of Amazonian morality as virtue-centred.

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