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## **Mujeres Amazónicas Waorani a synonym of resistance: Why do indigenous women in Latin America play such an important role in environmental resistance campaigns?**

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## ***Mujeres Amazónicas Waorani a synonym of resistance***

*Why do indigenous women in Latin America play such an important role in environmental resistance campaigns?*



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## 1. Introduction

The Amazon is the biggest rainforest on Earth and one of the deepest biodiverse tropics. With one-third of all animal and plant species in the world, the Amazon rainforest works as the heart of our planet and without it, life on earth would be a different narrative. The Amazon rainforest has been the home and territory for indigenous people for thousands of years, and they have been the caretakers of its nature and biodiversity. Over the past decades, extractivist companies have been taking advantage of the resource richness of the different regions where the indigenous Amazonian communities live, affecting their livelihoods and threatening their populations. This has brought mobilization around the world for demanding better environmental justice, especially in places like Latin America, where climate degradation is unevenly affected compared to the West. The participation of different ethnicities, ages and gender of people have been diverse in the environmental and social movements across the globe.

However, we have seen that in particular, indigenous women have been on the frontline and face of their environmental fight against extractivism in South America. For this reason, this Bachelor Thesis will seek to explain “*Why do indigenous women in Latin America play such an important role in environmental resistance campaigns?*”. The aim will be to analyze the different explanations of why women are so significant in this resistance discourse by looking at the Worani indigenous community from the Ecuadorian Amazon.

In previous research, gender dynamics have been raised as an important characteristic for the development of environmental resistance (Cable, 1992, p 35). Nevertheless, a small amount of this research has explained why indigenous women are so dominant in the mobilization for the environment. Therefore, this research will look at the theoretical perspective of ecofeminism, and social movement structure characteristics to understand the different reasons why indigenous women are so prominent in environmental movements.

Now more than ever after these two years of the pandemic, *Mujeres Amazónicas* (Amazonian Women) defenders and leaders have returned to take action to protect the Amazon and fight violence against women. There are different arguments that explain why women are so dominant in this resistance. For that reason, the literature review will be divided into two different arguments i.e. mobilization structure and the theoretical approach of ecofeminism.

The analysis of these two theoretical approaches will include a diverse argumentation from both sides. First, to investigate whether they can explain the predominance of women in the resistance movements and second, see whether these results fall under the philosophical and political theory of ecofeminism or the theory of structural mobilization. With existing academia, the aim will be to build upon the current information of indigenous women from the Waorani territories who are leaders and influence environmental activism against extractivism and find out what fully explains their resistance. Further learning of the relevance of indigenous women in social movements can contribute to a greater understanding of indigenous resistance and gender-based dynamics.

## **2. Literature review**

In the field of social movements, many scholars have debated the reasons why someone might join and sustain a resistance campaign. More specifically, in environmental resistance, when we focus on Latin America and indigenous communities, the forefront of these movements are dominated by women. However, the reasons why this happens have been heavily debated in academia. For this reason, two main theories will be used to guide this research: mobilization structure and ecofeminism.

### **2.1 Mobilization Structure**

Starting with previous research diverse authors have emphasized different mobilization perspectives. McCarthy & Zald (2003) use traditional resource mobilization theory to identify the characteristics of SMOs. These are the combination of the availability of resources, the prior existence of organization structure (i.e. roles, responsibilities and rules) and entrepreneurial mobilization are emphasized to be characteristic of Social Movements Organizations (SMOs) (McCarthy & Zald, 2003, pp. 195-196). Scholars suggest that the determinant of who joins a movement, why someone participates or even why a movement can grow is addressed by recruitment (Cable, 1992, p. 36; Snow et al., 1980, p. 798). Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson (1980) suggest that the likelihood of getting someone recruited will depend upon having previous interpersonal connections to members of a movement and being structurally available to participate (p. 795).

More specifically, Cable (1992) in her research on environmental mobilizations of working-class women suggests that for participation and mobilization, these characteristics

will depend and vary upon gender (p. 37). The author emphasizes that previous studies have neglected gender as a dimension to observe and proposes that gender can affect recruitment and participation (Cable, 1992, p. 35). Therefore Cable (1992) gives importance to the other three areas, which also overlap with previous research and add on with a focus on gender in the discourse of mobilization. The first one is characterized by environmental grievances, which the author argues two matters: women are more inclined to detect environmental grievances than men, and women initiate active mobilization in the communities to protect their children, also known as the “motherhood effect” (Cable, 1992, p. 37). The second characteristic is structural availability, this term refers to the lack of duties and responsibilities that an individual might have, enabling them to participate (Cable, 1992, pp. 37-38). Third, the author points out that an essential characteristic that facilitates recruitment and participation is due to social networks. Here, Cable (1992) implies that in contemporary times, female networks usually take place through the links between family and friends, and it has been found in previous research that women tend to be more active than men (p. 38). These three characteristics presented by Cable (1992) are specifically reflected in the participation of grassroots communities of working-class women in environmental protests.

## **2.2 Ecofeminism**

Moving to the second theory ecofeminism has been one of the most contested philosophical and political theories and it belongs to one of the branches of feminism. Traditional ecofeminist authors have been mainly concerned with the domination and oppression of nature and women together and it addresses that the degradation of both is a repercussion of the capitalist and patriarchal system (Buckingham, 2015, p. 845; Brisson, 2017, p. 9; Warren, 1990, p. 126). The link between women and nature has been drafted from the idea of essentialism, which entails that women are more bound than men to the natural world biologically (Buckingham, 2015, pp. 845-846). For example, women typically have more nurturing roles compared to men, e.g. giving birth and breastfeeding, making them more sympathetic to the “ethics of care” (Buckingham, 2015, p. 846). However, biology is not enough to explain from an ecofeminist point of view why women will fight for their environment.

Buckingham (2015) also suggests that social construction as the first articulation of ecofeminism is more consistent with the literature (p. 846). Ecofeminism stresses that

women's daily work exposes them to a direct connection to nature, for example, women tend to take care of social reproductive roles such as cooking, supplying, cleaning, watering and others like clothing (Buckingham, 2015, p. 846). At the same time, women are disposed to be maintaining agricultural tasks, therefore any degrading activities towards the environment will be firstly noticed by women (Buckingham, 2015, p. 846). Therefore, the allocation of caring activities and the gendered responsibilities have been linked to the understanding that the exploitation of the environment is connected with the exploitation of women (Buckingham, 2015, p. 846).

As said before, the traditionally patriarchal structure of society has perpetuated a dualist separation between humans and nature (Brisson, 2017, p. 9). Indeed, there is the perception that humans, and in some cases even men, prevail over nature (Brisson, 2017, p. 9). According to ecofeminism, one of the main concerns is based on the idea of hierarchy, where nature remains under humans instead of coexisting at the same level, and usually, the hierarchy has been used to justify humans' control over the environment (Brisson, 2017, p. 9). Therefore, the ecofeminist approach by Brisson (2017) suggests that women should be understood as one existential entity, not better or worse but at the same lense as the planet (Brisson, 2017, p. 9). In this way, the author rejects the idea of hierarchy and duality, by doing so, understanding nature without these two characteristics belongs to a larger problem that comes from anthropocentrism and the patriarchal system (Brisson, 2017, p. 10). An example of this would be when nature is portrayed as admiration, 'sacred' and divine, rather than an object for economic benefits (Brisson, 2017, p. 10). Other authors like Beevi (2018) touch upon this and add a different perspective that considers ecofeminism as a revolutionary movement where a new equation needs to be introduced: man/women=nature (p. 80). This equation implies that nature should be as equal as humans, which entails both man and women.

Di Chiro (2008) adds to the idea of ecofeminism in a more contemporary aspect as it suggests that all environmental problems are also reproductive problems, meaning that the two movements go together and overlap with each other (p. 282). This author also includes that mainstream environmental movements have been white-western-male dominated and this has caused the exclusion of environmental movements from the women's perspective, but also animal rights, colonialism, indigenous people, cultural traditions and many other spheres (Buckingham, 2015, p. 848; Di Chiro, 2008, p. 282). For example, indigenous activists have

come to observe first-hand that their lives and communities are being diminished and affected by environmental degradation, and how this affects the social reproductions of these communities have not been part of the discussion before (Di Chiro, 2008, p. 292). Similarly, Macgregor (2004) adds to Di Chiro's (2008) argument that the power struggle of social reproduction has failed to involve gender equality since it remains an emphasis that women's domestic work is also dependent on class and citizenship (p. 56). Therefore, MacGregor introduced the importance of a more constructive and inclusive ecofeminist analysis.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

For this next section of the thesis there will be a conceptualization of the different terms of the research question: "*Why do indigenous women in Latin America play such an important role in environmental resistance campaigns?*". Therefore, there will be a further clarification of what of the previously mentioned theories will be useful for this research and why.

#### **3.1 Conceptualization**

Starting with the conceptualization, we must define what "play a role" means for this research question. The meaning of play a role refers to when someone takes action in getting involved in a particular matter and that person has an impact on it, especially coming from the perspective that the action is based on an important outcome<sup>1</sup>. The second important concept that needs to be defined is resistance campaigns. According to the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC) (civil) resistance is when people fight for their justice, rights and civil liberties by the use of non-violent tactics such as strikes and mass protest against oppressive governments or systems<sup>2</sup>. Lastly, it is also important to briefly define what the term indigenous women stands for. In the Organization of American States (OAS) indigenous women are defined as the protection and custody of the mother earth, their identity is closely linked to the components of nature such as land and ancestral territories (2017, p. 10). From all the definitions I decided to take these ones because they fit the purpose of the analysis and encompass the main features that this research seeks to analyze.

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<sup>1</sup> (Collins Dictionary, 2022)

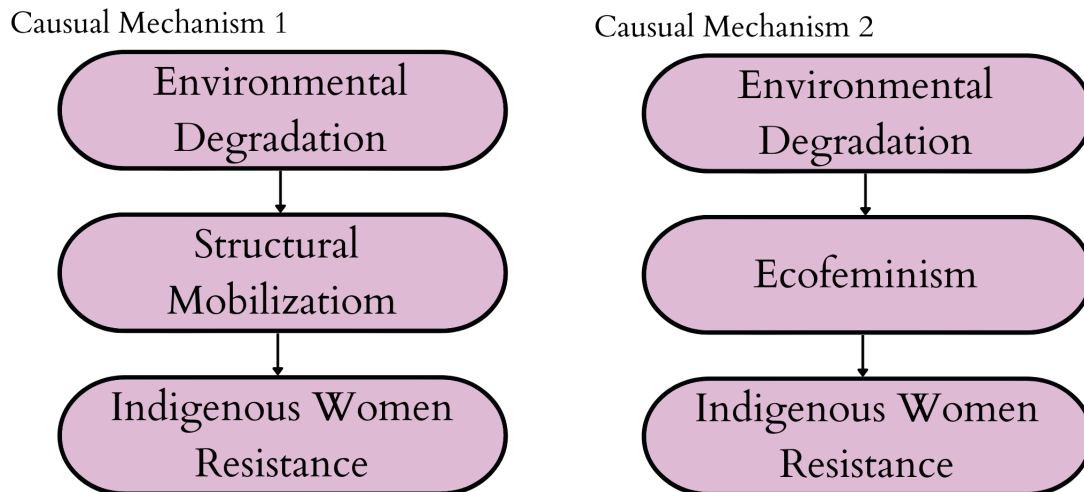
<sup>2</sup> (ICNC, 2019)



### 3.1 Theoretical background

In order to find out what reasons fall under the explanation of why women are more dominant in environmental resistance campaigns, one must look at previous research. As aforementioned, there are two different causal pathways suggested by the literature that this paper will discuss.

**Figure 1 & 2: The Pathways for Indigenous Women resistance**



As you can see from the graphs the first one will be focusing on structural mobilization, which argues that women will tend to be recruited into a social movement due to three main areas: environmental grievances, social networks and structural availability. The second mechanism on ecofeminism also argues three matters, one is that the oppression of nature is connected to the oppression of women. Second, women understand nature as an equal entity, therefore nature is sacred and not an economic benefit. Third, women's historic responsibility to the environment is embedded by their reproductive roles. These two mechanisms would create the expectation that environmental movements actively look for women to strengthen their claims.

Considering the previous findings present in literature, this research expects that one of these pathways explains why indigenous women are so present in environmental resistance campaigns. Consequently, this research will analyze which of these pathways best explains and answers the aforementioned research question.

## **4. Methods**

This thesis will try to investigate: “*Why do indigenous women in Latin America play such an important role in environmental resistance campaigns?*”. Here, different factors will be used to explain why indigenous women are so dominant in resistance movements against extractivism. Several characteristics first need to be accountable for the design of this research.

### **4.1 Research Design**

This research will be carried out through a within-case analysis by the use of process-tracing to assess which factors play a role in indigenous women being more dominant in resistance movements against environmental degradation. The independent variable (IV) of this research is defined by the explanatory factors taken from the literature, these are structural mobilization and ecofeminism. On the other hand, the dependent variable (DV) is the role of indigenous women in environmental campaigns. Taking the overview of the variables into account, process tracing would be the most fitted method to successfully test the hypothesis.

Alongside process-tracing, there are three multiple paths: theory-testing, theory-building and explaining-outcome. These three process tracing analysis vary and are used for qualitative analysis, however, in this case, the best approach of the three for this research would be explaining-outcome. Explaining-outcome aims to make a minimum explanation that can answer an outcome that belongs to a specific case (case-centric) (Beach & Perdensen, 2013, p. 3). As mentioned before, process-tracing considers two more methods: theory-testing and theory-building, however, neither would work in this research for several reasons. To start with, these other two approaches are theory-oriented that aim to build or test a theory at a mid range level, while explaining-outcome is characterized for building a minimal sufficient explanation (Beach & Perdensen, 2013, p. 16). Theory-building process-tracing overlaps with some characteristics of explaining-outcome process tracing since there is a focus on theory building, nevertheless, it is an approach that involves the theory before the outcome, while in our case it is exactly the opposite. Explaining-outcome focuses on the outcome before the theory, in this case, there is a certain that there is a dominance of women in indigenous resistance movements while we are testing which possible theories and arguments explain this outcome. In addition, explaining-outcome process-tracing is the most suited for this research because it closely follows historical understanding of proceedings, is theory guided

and the final ambition is to identify the mechanisms in a specific case (Beach & Perdensen, 2013, p. 16).

#### **4.2 Case Selection**

The Amazon is spread in a total of eight different countries, with a large percentage being mostly spread in the regions of Brazil, Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador. However, this research will only be focused on the Ecuadorian Amazon, in which one indigenous community will be analyzed in-depth in order to answer the main research question. In Ecuador there are a total of 14 distinct indigenous groups, however the particular case study chosen from the indigenous communities is located in the Waorani territory, also known as Huaorani (See Map 1 & Map 2, Appendix).

The reason for the selection of Ecuador over other countries is simply because Ecuador's indigenous rights have not improved even though they have been fighting for them for decades and there is potential progress. This makes up for a strong case for this analysis, because such groups have consistently struggled with their rights and the regional tensions remain high. In addition, the selection of the Waorani women is because this specific community has gained particular attention at the international level through their environmental resistance and Waorani territory interestingly overlaps with the Yasuní National Park, a highly oil-exploited case. Therefore, looking at the different possible cases to choose from, the Waorani women share a strong female representation in their resistance to a highly representative case. The selection of this case study can allow us to understand the different explanations that exist and what key characteristics female resistance has in the Amazon can appropriately answer the main question for this research.

#### **4.3 Data Collection**

Following the aforementioned methodology, this analysis will be using a diverse number of written articles as secondary sources such as journal articles and primary sources such as website articles, speeches and videos. In particular, journal articles can list the different explanatory factors that affect indigenous women regarding extractivist activities, while through primary data such as speeches and videos, direct understanding can be obtained of what concerns them. The combination of both collected data can bridge the different theoretical perspectives with a direct link to the voices of the Amazon in first-hand

experience. In addition, some of the sources are originally in Spanish and they have been autonomously translated, a footnote will highlight which sections have been translated. Thereby, the scope of these various classes of data strengthens the design and analysis of the research, by not only using previous authors and research on the topic but considering the personal and direct knowledge of indigenous women and why is so essential their resistance.

## **5. Analysis**

### **5.1 The beginnings of Chevron-Texaco**

Between 1964 and 1992 the oil extractivist company Chevron-Texaco from the United States operated in the Amazonian region of Ecuador. Hereby, one of the largest environmental disasters in history occurred by the dumping of 84.1 billion liters of toxic waste into the rivers and lakes of the rainforest, polluting a total of 80 thousand hectares in the Amazon<sup>3</sup>. The extractivist company of Chevron-Texaco decided not to re-inject toxic produced water into the ground, but instead directly drain the toxic waste into the rivers, but also groundwater which native inhabitants relied on for drinking water, fishing, bathing and cooking<sup>4</sup>. In addition, the company decided to burn off the gas (flaring), instead of capturing the toxic natural gas and therefore releasing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) into the environment<sup>5</sup>. After these events, multiple health evaluation forms of research were conducted and it was found that cancer rates were up to 30 times higher than normal and similarly to leukemia in infants<sup>6</sup>. Some other direct consequences that the local population experienced more often were chronic diseases, lung infections and in some other cases miscarriages and birth defects<sup>7</sup>.

In 1993, local inhabitants of different communities came together as “Los afectados” [The affected ones] and filed a lawsuit against Chevron-Texaco to take responsibility for their atrocious actions<sup>8</sup>. Shortly after the case was filed, Chevron made a deal with the Ecuadorian Government to treat some fractions of their waste pits by covering them with soil, however, they did not remove the toxins, continuing to contaminate resources until now basic resources

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<sup>3</sup> (European Greens, 2013)

<sup>4</sup> (Amazon Watch, 2012)

<sup>5</sup> (Amazon Watch, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> (Amazon Watch, 2012)

<sup>7</sup> (European Greens, 2013)

<sup>8</sup> (Amazon Watch, 2012)

such as land, water and the Ecuadorian wildlife<sup>9</sup>. After years of negotiations in 2011, the Ecuadorian Court upheld an 18 million dollar decision against the company Chevron-Texaco for the cleaning of the oil and for compensating the families that were most affected in the close communities of the spills<sup>10</sup>. However, Chevron-Texaco has not conducted a significant clean-up of the watercourses or has not acted responsibly for the damages made to the environment and the families<sup>11</sup>.

Up to this day, the struggle continues the same, where more than 880 pits are still uncleaned. The environmental justice movement for the Ecuadorian Amazon is rapidly growing around the world, in 2007 protests of hundreds of farmers (also known as Campesinos) and local indigenous people have marched against the company where leaders, cancer victims, and Ecuadorian celebrities have come together in Quito as one of the biggest mobilizations since the start of the trial<sup>12</sup>.

After two years of the pandemic, more marches have been taking place all around Ecuador and it is noticeable that more often these marches are predominantly led by women. But why is this? Looking at the literature two possible pathways could explain this: mobilizing structures and ecofeminism.

## **5.2 Pathway 1: Structural Mobilization**

First, this analysis will look at mobilization structure and see how this theory helps to understand the process of why women become so dominant in environmental resistance. According to previous authors and literature, there are three main areas of interest that have been repeatedly characteristic for observing why someone might be more prone to join resistance movements. In particular, it has been observed by authors like Cable (1992) that gender can also be a factor to take into account in these three areas, which can explain why women are particularly dominant in environmental campaigns. These are grievances, structural availability and social networks.

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<sup>9</sup> (AmazonWatch, 2012)

<sup>10</sup> (AmazonWatch, 2012)

<sup>11</sup> (AmazonWatch, 2012; European Greens, 2013)

<sup>12</sup> (AmazonWatch, 2007)

The Waoranis have lived for thousands of years in one of the most biodiverse places on earth on the periphery of the Yasuni National Park in the North West of Ecuador. As evident from the map, the Waorani ancestral territory intersects with the rainforest, both harmoniously living and remaining as one (See Appendix, Map 1). However, as aforementioned in the last decades, the threatening effects of extractivist companies such Chevron-Texaco supported by the Ecuadorian government have caused the continuous expansion of oil production. Here it can be pointed out that the first characteristic of structural mobilization is environmental grievances. As previously mentioned in the literature women tend to perceive stronger environmental grievances than men. Concerning the indigenous women, various studies have confirmed that women's bodies are more exposed to and threatened by the damaging effects of toxic wastes and the pollution of extractive companies (Silva Santisteban, 2020, p. 7). For example, studies have shown that women and children are the most vulnerable groups to mining contamination and overexploitation of water due to the degree of exposure and time (Zaragocin, 2018, p. 29). Given the evidence that women are more affected than men, it is also important to take into account that these negative effects can be passed to later generations (Silva Santisteban, 2020, p. 7).

A common concern that directly links to women reflects the motherhood effect, which essentially issues the protection of children in the Waorani communities. Nemonte Nenquimo, one of the most well-known leaders of the Waorani community expresses her worries saying: *"I am not here for myself, rather for the future, of all the children here and the ones that are to come"*<sup>13</sup>. A mother herself, Nemonte Nenquimo emphasizes that *"Everything I do, all this fight, is for my daughter so she can live in a forest freely without extraction (oil), no pollution, no diseases. [...] And I fight for that, for life."*<sup>14</sup>. Her words stress the unjust circumstances which indigenous children have gone through in the 21st century, concerning the future and the negative effects of extractivist companies affecting their biodiversity, their food and their life. In addition, Nenquimo has been extremely active in the indigenous resistance, by going to protests, assemblies and conferences. She emphasized in one of her interviews that she always has her daughter next to her when she mobilizes because she wants her to understand her Waorani culture and her indigenous fight<sup>15</sup> (See Appendix, Picture 1). Similarly, the reflection of fighting for the children has come as

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<sup>13</sup> (AFP News Agency, 2019) Translated by the author

<sup>14</sup> (Blasco, 2020)

<sup>15</sup> (Montaño, 2020)

one of the main reasons for their resistance. An example of this was on the 8th of March 2018, Amazonian women from different communities (including Waorani) came together for women's day. During the protest, various women were interviewed and they significantly expressed that *“this is the most important moment of the fight”* and that they *“...feel that future generations need me”*<sup>16</sup>.

The second characteristic focuses on the structural availability of indigenous women. In theory, as Cable (1992), Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson (1980) claim that someone (in this case indigenous women) will join a movement if they are structurally available to participate, this might depend if there are no other factors such as time or responsibilities that keep them away from joining nor to support a movement. From the findings there is not as much information on how Waorani women spend their time and their availability on a daily basis. However, there is evidence from different videos and journals of the testimonies of Waorani women and some conclusions can be drawn from some of their activities. For example, with the most recent studies of Equator Initiative (2016), Waorani women have spent their time to improve develop a new project called *“La Asociación de Mujeres Waorani de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana (AMWAE)”* which stands for “Association of Waorani Women of the Ecuadorian Amazon” in English (p. 3). The goal of this project has been to develop new alternatives for women to work and increase the quality of life of Waorani families.

Primary data shows that the project started with Waorani women spending their time going on a 2-day trip to learn from other artisans' communities on how to make better their handcrafted baskets, purses, and jewelry<sup>17</sup>. The better they make the handcrafted products, the more money they get to provide more food, education and better health for their kids<sup>18</sup>. Patricia Nenquihui, one of the association members said that *“before only men could work, now we are learning and following what other women have stepped on”*, here Waorani women show their interest to contribute to their families by not only taking care of the children but by providing diversification of work<sup>19</sup>. Among the major efforts made by AMWAE, there are some projects in the natural reserve of Yasuni where 300 Waorani women

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<sup>16</sup> (Ruiz Gavila, 2021)

<sup>17</sup> (IFAD, 2014) Translated by the author

<sup>18</sup> (IFAD, 2014) Translated by the author

<sup>19</sup> (IFAD, 2014) Translated by the author

work to preserve deep biodiverse areas with cocoa plantations and intercropping techniques adding other types of plants such as banana and papaya trees<sup>20</sup>.

The idea behind having these projects was because man will hunt for the families but also for the commercialization of meat (Equator Initiative, 2016, p. 3). However, this was no longer sustainable and there was a necessity to create new alternatives to conserve the biodiversity of Waorani territories (Equator Initiative, 2016, p. 3). For this reason, Waorani women started the initiative to find alternatives through cocoa production and the commerce of handcrafted items with *chambira* (native palm of the Amazon used to produce handcrafted items) (Equator Initiative, 2016, p. 7). The diversification of livelihoods in the Waorani communities has raised up to 25% of more income for the families, but more interestingly it has strengthened women to be more independent economically (Equator Initiative, 2016, p. 9). Both at the household and tribal level, Waorani women have gained space and voice by knowing they could be the same as men and it has led women to increase their political participation on issues that concern them (Equator Initiative, 2016, p. 9). According to the Equator Initiative (2016) before the association, it was found that women were more limited, and now economic independence also gives them leadership to become political actors that can demand their interests and they can practice their influence (p.9). Therefore, one can assume that work, taking care of the children and providing food for the family will make indigenous women less structurally available. However, the opposite can be observed that instead Waorani women's work has become a reason for them to be listened to and to strengthen their voices.

The last point highlighted by the literature suggests that someone is likely to join a movement due to their social networks, in relation to women it was found that they are more likely to join if these networks are friends and family. Looking specifically at the case of the Waorani, the structure of the families is very extensive, what they call the "*nanicabo*" shows the traditional way that Waoranis live which mainly consists of six to ten families that live under the same roof<sup>21</sup>. The concept of *nanicabos* is a space to share food, work and exchange ideas with all the families, in the *nanicabos* everyone is bound to each other and children are brought up by the entire Waorani community (Wierucka, 2013, pp. 143-144). These spaces could be a great example where women share their concerns and ideas with their families and

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<sup>20</sup> (Sorgato, 2017)

<sup>21</sup> (CONAIE, 2016)



friends, promoting their mobilization. No further information is found on this, however, it could be understood that the Waorani women remain very close ties with each other when they share spaces together. An example of this is the recent opening of “The House of Amazonian Women” on the 6th of March 2022, where women from different indigenous communities (including Waorani) can gather to strengthen their unity<sup>22</sup>. Since the first march in 2013 against the oil spills caused by the extractivist companies, women from different indigenous communities saw the necessity to find a space for reunions, healing and for the integration of different indigenous groups<sup>23</sup>. The understanding that these women came together without most of them belonging to the same family or from different friend connections, they still opened a place where every woman could feel at home<sup>24</sup>. Places like this are aimed “*to obtain a unity, where we can strengthen, where we can support each other, to have a space for healing and a place where we feel secure*” said Nina Gualinga during the opening of House of Amazonian Women<sup>25</sup>. The ties where these women feel belonged goes beyond friend and family ties, it is also their shared experiences and common healing.

Summing up the first pathway, some conclusions begin to emerge. Structural availability can reflect some of the reasons why indigenous women are so dominant in environmental resistance. For example, environmental grievances and the worries of environmental degradation affecting their children are something that has been reflected both in the literature and in the findings. Waorani women reflect their worries for their children and for future generations and their resistance is no longer for them, but for having a healthy environment where the generations of Waoranis can safely live in, without pollution and without a destroyed nature. The second point focuses on the structural availability that Waorani women have on a daily basis and observes whether their activities keep them away from joining a movement. In general data on what a Waorani woman does every day is quite limited, however, some useful information was found on what type of work they have been recently doing and their responsibilities. It was found that Waorani women have been working on different projects such as the production of cocoa and the artesian work of chambira for the diversification of the economy of the families. Waorani women realized that the income from men was not enough and working towards their family by doing other activities will increase

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<sup>22</sup> (El Observador, 2022)

<sup>23</sup> (El Observador, 2022)

<sup>24</sup> (El Observador, 2022)

<sup>25</sup> (La Voz de la Confeniae, 2022)

the quality of education and health for their children. These findings also are linked to the previous characteristic suggested by the literature, where women are more willing to start active mobilization due to their motherhood effect. In addition, the research showed that even when women were employed, they still found the time to participate in movements and the economic independence gave them the strength to be more politically active with their ideas and concerns.

### **5.3 Pathaway 2: Ecofeminism**

For the second part of the analysis, the focus lies on the ecofeminist pathway. The philosophical and political theory of ecofeminism has been heavily contested as aforementioned, however, it can be simplified into three principles that look at the main characteristics of the theory. It is important to mention that the emergence of this theory rises from ecological and feminist movements and the three standpoints are founded to establish a connection between women in environmental resistance. Firstly, women and nature share a crucial link among them due to oppression. Secondly, it is important to understand this causal relationship grasps a holistic view that women and nature coexist at the same level and that women understand the environment as an equal entity. And thirdly, women have an environmental responsibility to protect it due to the historical reproductive role of women. These three characteristics can produce the expectations that environmental movements actively look for women to strengthen their claims.

The first standpoint expands that oppression of the environment and the oppression of women are linked. As suggested by the literature ecofeminism says that both nature and women must be respected, and the main causes of this environmental and feminist degradation are coming from capitalism and the patriarchal system according to ecofeminism. In fact, from the data found it is seen that oppressive structures like capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism and racism are connected and these affect negatively indigenous women, however, they have been on the frontlines to fight against these structures throughout their generations<sup>26</sup>. This can be reflected in the words of one of the founders of the AMWAE, Alicia Cahuiya says *“we will fight! I am going to organize with women, gather women, and we will be braver...The advice from our elder women leaders to us is to keep fighting, we cannot let the world drag us down, the big monster that is capitalism, or governments. Because of that, we are going to gather more*

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<sup>26</sup> (International Funders, 2021)

women to fight the big monster.”<sup>27</sup>. As ecofeminism points out, the oppression could be seen from two different perspectives: firstly, where the exploitation of the environment directly affects women, and secondly, how both women and nature are oppressed because they coexist under oppressive structures like capitalism. Taking into account structural mobilization previous protests and mobilization where Waorani and other indigenous women have been present, a great example is the National Assembly of Ecuador that happened in October 2013. Alicia Cahuiya as a Waorani woman during this assembly stressed how seven different oil companies (including Chevron -Texaco) operated in the Waorani region has brought pollution and poverty and no gains to the communities, but instead 900 million pits of crude oil in the Yasuni Park<sup>28</sup>. This recognizes that the depletion of oil in Yasuni is a mere example of capitalism, disregarding indigenous rights and their lands, showing how the connection to the ecofeminist view that Waorani resistance becomes imperative agents that contribute to defense of both humans and nature<sup>29</sup>.

The second standpoint recognizes that women see nature at the same level, therefore, looking from an ecofeminist view, nature is sacred and not an economic benefit. For Waorani women, the *weltanschauung* and ancestral traditions are relevant to their daily lives and we see that from the words of the anthropologist Lourdes Barragan. She says that in Waorani communities “*a point to highlight is the relationship of respect of indigenous peoples towards nature, they consider themselves part of the forest, of the animals, of the plants and there is no separation between nature and culture*”<sup>30</sup>. From Barragan’s words this reflects the second aspect drawn from ecofeminism, however, here it seems that is not dependent on just women but rather on adding men into the equation as Beevi (2018) suggests. Therefore, we can observe that from newer literature on ecofeminism these findings can fit in since it includes that ecofeminism also needs to lie on a discourse that encourages equality.

Another example of women recognising themselves as equal to nature is the elaboration of maps. After the Ecuadorian government dismissed the request and demands of indigenous communities about the current corruption, economic injustice and the continuous oil extraction, they were sent to court by the Waorani people<sup>31</sup>. The government lost the trial

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<sup>27</sup> (International Funders, 2021)

<sup>28</sup> (Yañez, 2014)

<sup>29</sup> (Yañez, 2014)

<sup>30</sup> (Sorgato, 2017)

<sup>31</sup> (Daza Castillo, 2020)

against the Waoranis, thanks to the traced maps created from “Block 22” by the indigenous women to show that it was sacred and belonged to the natives<sup>32</sup>. During the scouting, especially women had some vital roles because they were in charge of leading and actively participating in the mapping expeditions on their ancestral lands<sup>33</sup>. These maps were essential proof against the lawsuit, but also showed how disconnected the maps of the governments were drawn as polygons disregarding completely Amazonian nature and indigenous territories<sup>34</sup> (See Appendix, Map 3). This example clearly shows the connection and the deep understanding of Waorani women with nature, not only by demonstrating who is defending the environment but by understanding nature at the same level as humans.

The third and last standpoint argues that the historical reproductive role of women leads them to the environmental responsibility to protect it. For example, indigenous women have been the most affected by oil extraction due to their daily close contact as mothers and caretakers of their families<sup>35</sup>. The indigenous women in the communities reflect the human history of who gathers water and food, the one who wash their clothes and bathe the kids, women are the definitions of the well being and prosperity of the families<sup>36</sup>. The fact that women are so close to nature and its preservation is because they are the ones that are constantly in contact due to their reproductive roles. The leader Waorani Nemonte Nenquimo in an interview said *“the life as Waorani Women is different every day, if we have food we eat it, if we do not, then we go fishing, we go to look for plants and we show that to our children”*<sup>37</sup>. Here she connects her connection to activities as a mother and caretaker of her family. She also said that *“if we need something, the jungle can give it to us, for example, if we need medicine we get it from our biodiverse nature... that's why we fight for our land and territories”*<sup>38</sup>. Waorani women have been relying on the biodiverse nature of their territories, they have been using natural resources such as food and water, as part of their daily life when they do these activities they see how it affects them and their families.

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<sup>32</sup> (Daza Castillo, 2020)

<sup>33</sup> (Daza Castillo, 2020)

<sup>34</sup> (Daza Castillos, 2020)

<sup>35</sup> (Yañez, 2014)

<sup>36</sup> (Yañez, 2014)

<sup>37</sup> (Rojas Hernandez, 2020)

<sup>38</sup> (Rojas Hernandez, 2020)

It can be concluded that ecofeminism stands out as being a key approach to the preservation of the environment. From the findings, it is observable that Waorani women and the environment are under exactly those oppressive structures such as patriarchy and capitalism, and the fight of women is against the oppression of both, which ecofeminism addresses. It is also found that both men and women should be seen as equal entities to nature. From traditional ecofeminist views, it is seen that women perceive nature at the same level while disregarding other varieties of actors that are also part of the equation. According to what is found in Waorani communities both men and women recognize nature as one, showing in this way that latter ecofeminist literature adds to intersectional approaches where indigenous people also are taken as one rather than by gender. Lastly, Waorani women are embedded in their reproductive roles, they rely on the natural resources for the food they collect, for the medicine they make and for bathing the children. The disruption of the environment directly connects and affects women and their role as mothers and caretakers, and therefore as ecofeminism states women will protect it.

## **6. Discussion**

Observing both pathways to grasp the different understanding why indigenous women are so prominent in environmental movements we can draw some conclusions. Each theory individually has some stronger standpoints than others, but it is important to mention that they have different types of approaches.

Mobilization structure theory has shown specifically in the case of the Waorani women that social movements can also be influenced by just gender and specifically at indigenous women. Ecofeminist theory has shown a connection between ecology and feminism, and it has been reflected how indigenous Waorani women could be possibly connected to their resistance. The main key difference between these two theories is the type of approach it presents to answer the research question. Mobilization structure directly looks at the reasons in which someone, in this case women, will join a movement. For example, when they have time to assist in the protest, or if they have someone they know already involved in a movement or if they will mobilize because of unjust actions that affect women. While this theory shows a pragmatic approach, ecofeminism is greatly distinct due to its holistic approach. The ecofeminist perspective attempts to combine environmentalism and feminism

together, by aligning both movements it brings to the analysis a stronger catalyst for why women are so present in environmental movements.

However, each has its strengths and weaknesses. Structural mobilization has brought interesting outcomes where indigenous women's grievances are directly connected to their role as a mother and this is something that is repeatedly seen from the findings. Structural mobilization also suggested that women will tend to go to a protest if they are more structurally available. However, indigenous women spend their day fully dedicated to their families and in the most recent decade they also work. Therefore, women have a very complete schedule in their everyday life and they are still very present in their resistance, therefore one could say that the reasons are stronger than their availability. This theory is not necessarily worse by not fitting in with the findings but rather understanding that we should be focusing on other characteristics that could explain the reason for women's resistance.

That's where ecofeminism also brings in different perspectives in the analysis by looking at the connection between both women and the environment. Some of the stronger points indicated by the theory is the solid relationship between women and the environment in indigenous communities such as the Waorani. Waorani women have been heavily oppressed by the entering of extractivist companies by limiting their food, destroying their ecosystems, territories and by directly affecting the health of them and their families. Specially it can be seen the effect of capitalism, by the entering of U.S. companies like Chevron-Texaco disregarding the communities living in the areas or even the sharp division of indigenous territories by the Ecuadorian government to sell their land to the extractivist companies. As mentioned before, the role on indigenous women has been characterized as the role of a mother. From the findings on ecofeminism reflected in Nemonte's words during her interview in 2020, she emphasizes that everyday she is devoted to her family and everything they rely on for their existence is coming from the environment.

These two theories share some characteristics that fall under each other, such as the care for children at different levels, the degrading effects of the environment affecting women and oppressive structures affecting both nature and women. As well as the combination of different approaches where they can complement each other. A great example of this is the understanding of social networks in Waorani Women through the creation of the House of Amazonia Women. Therefore, they could instead be integrated as an answer since they

simply share similar outcomes in the case of Waorani women in their environmental resistance.

## **7. Conclusions**

### **7.1 Summary**

This research has brought together different understandings of why Waorani women in the Ecuadorian Amazon are the defense, guardian and front face of environmental movements. By answering the research question “*Why do indigenous women in Latin America play such an important role in environmental resistance campaigns?*”. To sum it up it can be concluded that both theories complement each other on bringing different reasons why this happens. From the theoretical perspective of structural mobilization it was found that Waorani indigenous women will be more likely to join a movement because they can perceive better environmental grievances due to the motherhood role. It was also found that Waorani women tend to be busy in their daily lives due to their roles as mothers but also by working for improving their incomes, therefore structural availability should be seen with an alternative response. Lastly, it was found that a possible channel where women make their social networks come from places like the House of Amazonian Woman. In addition, these networks could possibly come from friend or family ties but not enough evidence has been found to determine it, instead, these connections arise because of two characteristics. One, these places are created by indigenous women for indigenous women, and second, it is a new process of mobilizing, creating art and for healing support and creating a network.

Moving to the second pathway, ecofeminism has also contributed with different findings during this research. First, it has been found that Waorani women have felt identified with the negative effects of oppressive structures such as capitalism, and are identified by them as the “monster” of their problems. In addition it was found that both Waorani indigenous women and indigenous men see nature as sacred and equal to humanity. Hence, it should not be seen as an economic benefit. Lastly, women’s reproductive role has shown that women are more protective to the environment, for this reason it has been seen in the case of Waorani women that they remain close to this argument by the leader Nenquimo by her testimonies on her values of the jungle. With these two pathways we have found that both explanations lack in some aspects and neither can completely explain individually the outcome of resistance led

by Waorani indigenous women. Instead with these findings the most successful outcome would come from an integration of both theories to have a broader explanation of the outcome.

## **7.2 Limitations and further research**

Despite the aforementioned conclusions, it is important to acknowledge that this research has also carried several flaws along with the research and therefore it is important to take into account its limitations and key issues for further research in the future.

First of all, this research is a single case study doing process tracing explaining-outcome. Therefore, this research can not be generalized to other cases since this one has been in depth with a focus on Waorani indigenous women. Therefore for future research it will be useful to use several cases for additional understanding of indigenous women resistance movements inside Ecuador compared with other Ecuadorian communities or even across countries that are in Amazonas. It is also important to mention that Waoranis are divided into 22 different communities, of which 2 of them have never been contacted before and therefore there is no data on them and the data on this thesis falls under the contacted communities.

The next limitation of this research corresponds to the use of Western theories on a Latin American case on indigenous communities. Specifically, from the literature of Cable (1992) the data for the outcomes on mobilization structure theory has been done mostly on women from Kentucky in the United States. Similarly, this is also partly seen in the traditional authors of ecofeminism, while later ones have also involved the addition of intersectionality in these types of research. Therefore, future research should include mobilization structures for women of other classes, color, sexuality and of indigenous communities.

Lastly, early ecofeminism has been criticised by the emergence of other theories such feminist environmentalism or ecological feminism. Most of the criticism has laid that ecofeminism is concentrated too much on women and in some arguments men are also connected to nature, therefore ecofeminism disregards male environmentalists. At the same time this theory has been evolving and changing and it has been heavily discussed on what it should be focused on, therefore the meaning of ecofeminism becomes more blurry and broad. Therefore public research should look for theories that are less focused on women and rather focus on theories



that touch upon gender relations or developmental continuations of ecofeminism such as feminist environmentalism, feminist political ecology or gender environment. In this way, the biases of academia will be better acknowledged and indigenous women fighting for their territory will be portrayed more accurately.

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## 9. Appendix

### 9.1 Maps

**Map 1. Territory Waorani in the Ecuadorian Amazon**

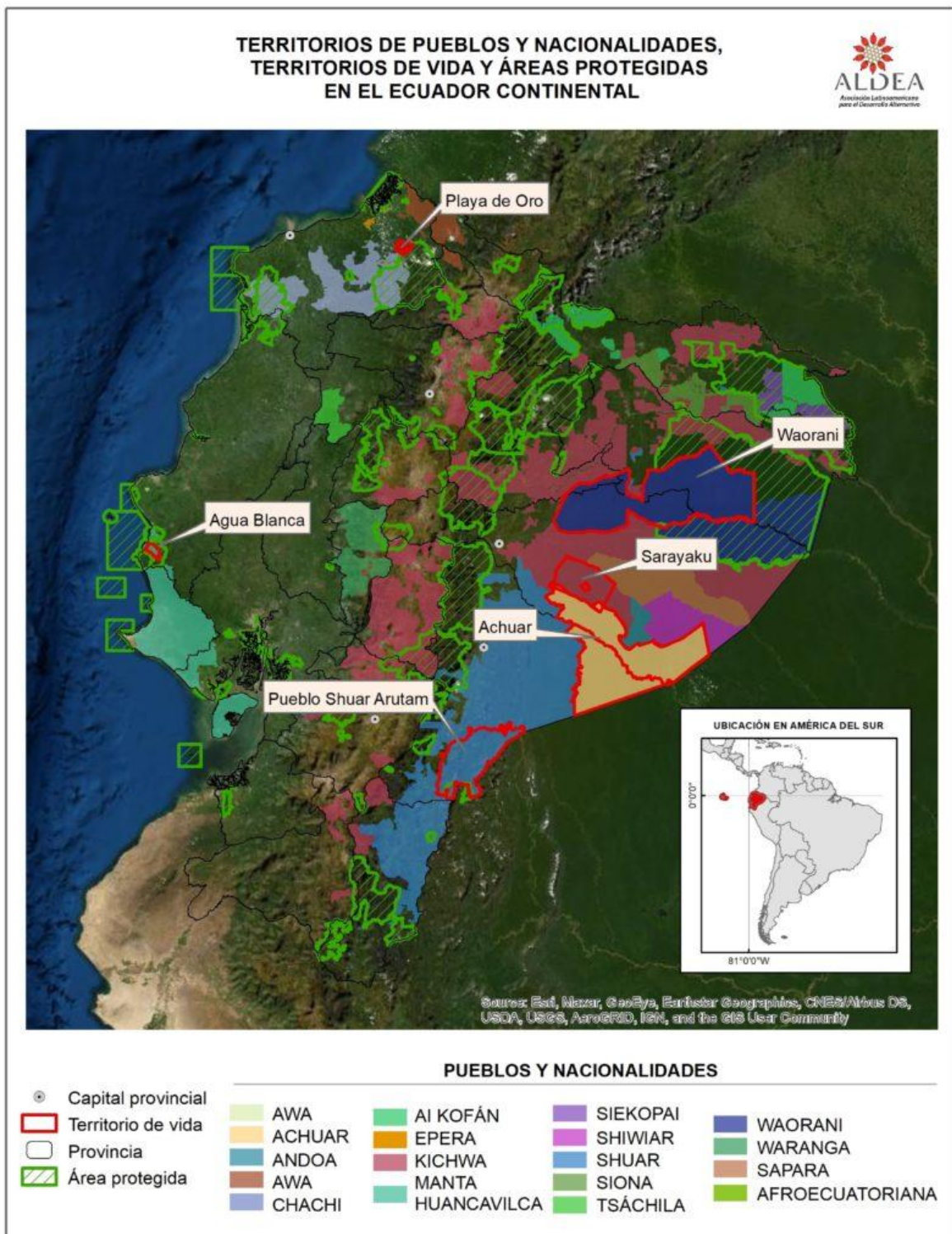


Map 1 shows the map of Ecuador with the territorial representation of the Waorani/Huaorani territory in light green color and the Yasuni National Park in darker green<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> (Wikipedia, 2022)

**Map 2. Territories of different indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon**



Map 3 shows the map of Ecuador with the territorial representation of different indigenous communities colored to differentiate each other. This map is useful for tracing both





## 9.2 Pictures

**Picture 1. Waorani villagers protest against “Oil Block 22”**



This picture shows the Waorani protest in the town of Puyo against the Ecuadorian government. It can be observed that on the front of the protest Nemonte Nenquimo is leading with her daughter<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> (Los Angeles Times, 2021)