

# Women's Resistance Against Extractivism in the Ecuadorian Amazon

A Decolonial Ecofeminist Study of the Collective *Mujeres  
Amazónicas*

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# Abstract

In response to the substantial expansion of the extractive frontier in the Ecuadorian Amazon, indigenous women have positioned themselves at the forefront of the struggle. In this context, the grassroots collective *Mujeres Amazónicas* has become a crucial political actor in the defense of indigenous territories and the multiple forms of life inside the rainforest, using numerous resistance dynamics and practices in private and public spheres. Therefore, this thesis analyzes the principal narratives (in reference to experiences, self-representations, and political consolidation) that have shaped the Amazonian Women's anti-extractive struggle. To this end, a decolonial ecofeminist framework has been created to guide the detailed examination of eighteen sources through thematic analysis. The material was selected from the collective's public declarations, political statements, interviews, and documentaries from 2013 to 2022. By implementing both deductive and inductive approaches, six key themes were identified: 1) systemic violence and domination; 2) cosmovision and knowledge production; 3) resistance and re-existence; 4) reproduction; 5) body-territory; and 6) climate change. These themes demonstrated the interconnection and complexity of Amazonian Women's resistance narratives. In addition, they provided a thorough understanding of how the collective organizes to confront the different forms of oppression and gender-based violence indigenous women suffer on multiple levels.

*Key words:* Amazonian Women, socio-environmental resistance, extractivism, decolonial ecofeminism, territory

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*“The climate crisis, the extractive violence, and violence against women, especially Indigenous women is interconnected”*

*“Any violation of our land is a violation of our bodies and that is also why as Indigenous women, we are more exposed to the violence of extractive industries”*

*Nina Gualinga, 2022*

*Kichwa from Sarayaku, Ecuador*

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# 1 Introduction

In April 2022, the scientists behind the latest installment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) sixth assessment report issued their final warning for governments to take action. It is “now or never” to avert climate disaster; without immediate, deep emissions cuts across all sectors, limiting global warming to 1.5 °C is beyond reach (IPCC, 2022). Unfortunately, human-induced climate change already impacts every corner of earth more severely than expected, and it disproportionately affects the most vulnerable and least responsible for its worsening. According to Silva (2019, pp.7–15), indigenous, peasant, and black women bear an even greater burden due to the persisting repercussions of colonialism, racism, and inequality; but above all, because of their dependency and close relationship to the environment and its resources. In Latin America, indigenous communities have led the fight against interrelated crises of climate change and biodiversity loss for decades, defending their territories from the same extractive industries that exacerbate environmental breakdown.

Despite the urgency for a green transition, the region’s substantial expansion of the extractive frontier has multiplied the socio-ecological conflicts with indigenous peoples. The reasons range from environmental impacts and forced displacement to threats and militarization of ancestral land, meaning that communities suffer from various forms of systemic violence (Gudynas, 2013, pp.165–166). In Ecuador, the government’s continuous neglect of the constitutional rights of indigenous people, collectives, and nature, sustains the contradiction between its international conservation promises and national strategies for development. A clear example occurred in COP 26, where president Lasso delivered a fiery speech on climate change, but back home issued two executive decrees that adjusted the policies on oil and mining. On the one hand, decree no.95 aims to aggressively increase the production from 500 thousand oil barrels to one million per day; whereas decree no.151 enables mining interventions in 72% of the national territory by 2030 (Acero, Espinosa and González, 2021, pp.4–5, 19).

In response to the proliferation of natural resources concessions to national and multinational companies, indigenous women have positioned themselves at the forefront of the Ecuadorian anti-extractive fight. In this context, the grassroots collective *Mujeres Amazónicas* [Amazonian Women] has become a crucial political actor to protect indigenous territories, culture, and different forms of life. The collective comprises more than one hundred women from six nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (Achuar, Kichwa, Shiwiar, Shuar, Waorani, and Sápara). This network provides an interethnic and intergenerational space where leaders build their political agency based on their communities’ realities while defying the

exclusion of women's voices within the indigenous movement (Vallejo and García-Torres, 2017). Through their multiple practices of resistance, Amazonian Women have challenged the government's extractive policies, patriarchal patterns, and dominant discourses that sacrifice the rainforest in the name of national well-being (Sempértegui, 2021b, pp.14–15). Hence, to deeply understand their activism, this study aims to analyze the main narratives that have shaped the collective's anti-extractive struggle through a decolonial ecofeminist approach.

In this regard, it is important to clarify that the term “narratives” has been based on the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2022) definition as: “a way of presenting or understanding a situation or series of events that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values.” From this, the term has been used to encompass Amazonian Women's experiences, self-representations, and political consolidation, going beyond the notion of narratives as stories due to the complexity of this subject.

## 1.1 The Case Study: *Mujeres Amazónicas*

At first, it is vital to contextualize the Amazonian Women's formation and situate them within the broader indigenous movement in order to amplify their proposals and unfold their resistance dynamics.

In October 2013, Ecuador's National Assembly approved exploiting the oil reserves beneath the Yasuní National Park, one of the world's biodiversity hotspots and home to indigenous people in voluntary isolation– the Tagaeri and Taromenane (Gümplová, 2019). Days after the announcement, a group of Indigenous women from the southeastern Ecuadorian Amazon organized and led the 250 km “March for Life” from the Amazonian city of Puyo to the capital. The march candidly demonstrated their discontent with the government's decision on Yasuní and the 11<sup>th</sup> oil licensing round. As Sempértegui (2021, p.33) described, their presence in Quito was a public act of defiance against the politics of fear imposed by the state and reassertion of the indigenous territorial struggle. In addition, their opposition to the extractive projects confronted the stand of several male indigenous authorities that participated in a dubious process of prior consultation and signed agreements in exchange for development funding (Vallejo and García-Torres, 2017).

The march was the beginning of a powerful network of indigenous women who continue to challenge their exclusion in decision-making processes and firmly resist and re-exist extractivism. The collective *Mujeres Amazónicas* illustrates the importance of generating a resilient organization to withstand the state's efforts to divide, intimidate, and repress their fight (Amnesty International, 2019). Since 2013, Amazonian Women have “taken over the space” by mobilizing, addressing the government, and participating in international conferences about climate change. Nonetheless, women have always been a significant part of the indigenous



movement and their *lucha histórica* [historical struggle], contributing to both private and public spheres. Their political actions cannot be detached from the practices that made indigenous resistance possible throughout the years, from ensuring food supplies and taking care of their families during manifestations to managing the logistics of social mobilizations (Sempértegui, 2022, pp.661–663). In fact, various members of the Amazonian Women collective actively participated in the historical uprising of 1992 as young leaders (Sempértegui, 2022, p.258).

## 1.2 Aim and Research Question

The determination of *Mujeres Amazónicas* to consolidate their political agenda and defend life in its multiple forms inspired this thesis. Understanding the different themes that compose their resistance provides an insight into their cosmovision, perceptions, and alternative knowledge to protect human and non-human life inside the rainforest. Therefore, this thesis aims to analyze the principal narratives that have shaped the Amazonian Women’s anti-extractive struggle. As the collective gains relevance on national and international platforms, it is key to examine their numerous practices of resistance, in the form of public declarations, political statements, interviews, and documentaries, from a gendered lens. By adopting a feminist analytical framework and implementing Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step thematic analysis guide, the thesis contribution is threefold.

First, it intends to expand the existing literature on indigenous women within the Ecuadorian movement and *Mujeres Amazónicas* by offering a detailed account of the collective’s resistance dynamics from 2013 to the present. Previous studies have generally focused on certain indigenous nationalities or provinces in Ecuador rather than collectives or female-led organizations. Second, the research explores the Amazonian Women’s resistance narratives through a decolonial ecofeminist approach; for this, an analytical framework has been created based on their main theoretical aspects within the Latin American context. Finally, this thesis wishes to amplify the collective’s voices and demands for structural change as the collected material transmits their efforts to defend life, ancestral territories, their culture, and communities. Out of admiration and respect for their struggle, the following research question guides this thesis:

How do women from the grassroots collective *Mujeres Amazónicas* resist extractivism in the Ecuadorian Amazon?

## 2 Background

This section briefly conceptualizes extractivism and socio-environmental resistance in Latin America. In this regard, the subsections delve into the Ecuadorian Amazon case and reflect on indigenous and female resistance to extractive occupation by considering multiple studies and reviewing key literature.

### 2.1 Extractivism in Latin America

Despite the growing socio-environmental impacts and attempts for alternatives, extractivism prevails at the core of Latin America's development policies and economic structure. Historically, the region has been associated with the exploitation and high dependency on natural resources, an unsustainable model that hinders redistribution, poverty reduction, and diversification. Authors like Acosta (2013, pp.61–62), Echart and Villarreal (2019, pp.307–308) argue that Latin American countries exemplify “the paradox of the plenty” and “theories of dependency”; meaning that their specialization in raw materials has situated them on the first stage of the global production chain, a volatile position since commodity prices erratically fluctuate according to the international market. This not only causes problems with their balance of payments and fiscal deficits but even when nations try to break free from their colonial heritage and diversify their economies, they generally rely on foreign currency from exports to do so, which again increases their dependency on primary products (Coronil, 2016, p.18).

Hence, within this unequal exchange process, extractivism refers to those activities that remove large volumes of unprocessed (or partially processed) natural resources intended for export. Usually, it involves oil and mining but it is also present in agriculture, forestry, and fishing as resources like soil fertility and forests are becoming nonrenewable due to their extraction rate (Acosta, 2013; Gudynas, 2015, pp.9–14). Although extractivism can be traced back to colonial times, it gained a particular strength at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when Latin American economies benefited greatly from high commodity prices and experienced a phase of economic growth. In this context, the region entered a new period that can be understood as a series of ruptures and continuities from the Washington Consensus, which Maristella Svampa (2015; 2019b, pp.12–15) describes as the “Commodities Consensus.” During this new stage, countries focused on large-scale extractive projects for achieving economic growth, leading every country in Latin America to adopt a “predatory extractivism” to some extent (Gudynas, 2013, pp.166–167).

### 2.1.1 Classical extractivism and Neo-extractivism

Moreover, the Commodities Consensus was also characterized by the state's greater flexibility, which enabled the coexistence of two types of extractivism, the traditional and the progressive. On one hand, classical extractivism operated under a conservative neoliberal matrix in countries like Colombia or Perú, retaining policy patterns of transnationalization, deregulation, and privatization (Hofmann and Cabrapan, 2021). On this basis, multinational corporations became the protagonists; as Riascos (2014) emphasizes, the reduction of state power intensified the asymmetrical relationship between governments and corporations, causing Latin American countries to offer advantageous conditions such as decreasing tax burden and fewer regulations in exchange for foreign investment. In response to these measures, left-wing governments in countries like Bolivia and Venezuela established a new model for development known as neo-extractivism. Various scholars have identified its principal features, recognizing the state's active participation and partial nationalization of extractive industries to sustain welfare benefits, capture surpluses, and reduce poverty; all of them fundamental mechanisms to legitimize political control (Gudynas, 2011; Acosta, 2013, pp.71–74; Brand, Dietz and Lang, 2016).

Nevertheless, progressive extractivism did not transform the current structure of accumulation; it maintained the severe illnesses of the traditional model while minimizing and even denying the environmental dimension. Under neo-extractivism, governments justified nature's exploitation to promote national growth and radically redistribute income, but these objectives have not led to concrete results. Instead, countries have reinforced a “rent-seeking mentality,” compensating monetarily for the adverse effects without adequately addressing the root of social and environmental discontent (Gudynas, 2019, p.63). Overall, both types of extractivism have caused irreversible damage to nature and local communities and are closely interlinked to other factors such as corruption, weak institutions, oppression, and violence, which as a result, impede the reduction of poverty and inequality (Echart and Villarreal, 2019; Schild, 2019). Until today Latin American countries are highly dependent on their extractive sectors, specifically, oil, mining, and agroindustry, at a time that requires post-extractive alternatives more than ever.

### 2.1.2 Extractivism in the Ecuadorian Amazon

Since the sixties, the Ecuadorian Amazon has witnessed its gradual destruction, undergoing both traditional and progressive extractive models. The large amounts of crude oil beneath the Amazon basin became the country's main economic engine; only in 2020, it represented 24% of the total exports, excluding its derivative products, as reported by the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC, 2021). It is important to point out that 70% of the Ecuadorian Amazon is indigenous territory, explaining the exponential rise of socio-environmental

conflicts due to state policies (Amazon Frontlines, 2022). Sadly, this ongoing struggle has worsened with the last governments. During the presidential term of Rafael Correa (2007-2017), a series of political contradictions increased the criminalization and delegitimization of socioecological resistance and the indigenous movement (Svampa, 2013, p.132). Even though Ecuador's 2008 constitutional reform was praised internationally for including concepts like *Sumak Kawsay* (living well) and acknowledging nature as a subject of rights, it failed to fulfill its promises as an alternative to conventional development.

In essence, the concept of “living well” refers to the equilibrium between the living forces of nature and the commonwealth of communities in harmonic terms (Prada, 2013, p.146). However, this coexistence continues to be incompatible with the government's economic policies; only one year after the new constitution was released, Correa replaced his post-extractive vision with aggressive neo-extractivism, eagerly promoting large-scale mining. Throughout his presidency, social mobilizations and protests escalated rapidly in opposition to the proliferation of extractive activities, hostility, and militarization of indigenous territories (Latorre, Farrell and Martínez-Alier, 2015; Bernal, 2021). With the end of the commodities boom in 2015, the highly indebted country became more dependent on its natural resources. Additionally, the return of neoliberalism with Moreno (2017-2021) and the current conservative neoliberal policies of Lasso (2021-present) have only fueled social resistance. Thus, environmental discrepancies prevail as a political axis in Ecuador. The most recent example occurred on April 13<sup>th</sup>, when less than two months after being the first country to recognize wild animals' rights constitutionally, Lasso began the exploitation of Yasuni's intangible zone (Yasunidos, 2022).

## 2.2 Socio-environmental Resistance

Furthermore, to complement the previous section, it is essential to reflect on the socio-environmental resistance derived from extractive activities. For Latin America, the link between violence and natural resource exploitation has a historical foundation, which has been deepened by the perception of development as the expansion of the productive forces, economic growth, and modernization without considering the social, environmental, and territorial impacts. Due to this accumulation dynamic, the region is characterized by the confrontation between peasant and indigenous organizations, social movements, and environmental collectives against neoliberal and progressive regimes (Svampa, 2019a, p.12). For decades, the most vulnerable and disproportionately affected (women, indigenous, peasant, afro-descendant) have raised their voices through diverse practices that comprise protests, occupations, artistic manifestations, and blockades (Echart and Villarreal, 2018, p.145). Nonetheless, governments and extractive corporations have unleashed repressive actions to silence and delegitimize socio-environmental

issues; this systematic violation of rights includes threats, physical violence, and even death (Global Witness, 2021).

As stated in the Global Witness report (2021), three-quarters of the lethal attacks recorded against environmental and land activists in 2020 occurred in Latin America; of these assaults, more than one-third targeted indigenous people. In addition, 165 activists were killed regionally for defending their territory. In this regard, a common element in eco-territorial conflicts is “deterritorialization,” where the government favors extractive companies while failing to fulfill its social and economic obligations to local communities (Acosta, 2019, p.28). This is usually followed by land grabbing, dispossession, and contamination, as evidenced in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Therefore, anti-extractive actions by indigenous groups have multiplied as the government continues to expand these measures; some emblematic cases of this fight are the resistance of Shuar (2017), Waorani (2019), and A’i Cofán (2022) people, who defend their rights for autonomy, prior, and informed consent. These cases exemplify the main strategies of resistance adopted by indigenous people, which are a combination of direct actions and public campaigns (Latorre, Farrell and Martínez-Alier, 2015).

In recent years, indigenous grassroots have gained visibility by weaving their fight with rural and urban social movements. Similarly, they have obtained national and international support from non-governmental organizations and environmental networks, demonstrating the interconnectedness of their anti-extractive struggle with global issues like climate change and social justice (Echart and Villarreal, 2018). It is worth noting that in this scenario, women are at the forefront, actively participating in resistance projects and playing a vital role in defending their territory, as analyzed below.

### 2.2.1 Resistance from a gender perspective

Although women have always contributed directly or indirectly to the anti-extractive struggle, their engagement has only been recognized in the last decade. As Perini (2022, p.88) claims, studying resistance from a gendered lens has allowed the deconstruction of women’s portrait as passive actors and victims of extractive processes, uncovering their resilience and active agency to sustain life in public and private spaces. Women, particularly black, indigenous, and peasant, have challenged their exclusion from decision-making processes, denouncing the devastating effects of extractivism on their livelihoods, health, and bodies. Different studies have demonstrated that women are significantly affected by the encroachment of extractive projects. For instance, the masculinization of territories is associated with an increase in gender violence, prostitution, trafficking, and alcoholism (Echart and Villarreal, 2019). As well, these projects offer waged employment mainly to men, which results in the consolidation of traditional gender roles, devaluating women’s autonomy and reproductive work within their communities (Schild, 2019).

To make matters worse, attacks on indigenous and peasant women have substantially increased, a phenomenon described by Bernal (2021, pp.25–27) as the “feminization of repression and violence.” In contrast to their male counterparts, female leaders report incidences of sexual assault, attacks on their homes, intimidation, and death threats to them and their families. This has been dramatically illustrated by the violent acts against Máxima Acuña (Perú), Patricia Gualinga (Ecuador), and the assassination of Berta Cáceres (Honduras) and Emilsen Manyoma (Colombia), courageous women that stood up against economic interests for their land, principles, and dignity (Gudynas, 2019, p.53; Hofmann and Cabrapan, 2021, pp.52–53). Thence, the use of gender-targeted violence has articulated their struggle with the broader feminist movement in Latin America. Throughout the region, women have created networks linking gender claims with indigenous, afro-descendant, and peasant ethnic demands to resist the advance of extractive projects (Echart and Villarreal, 2019).

In this respect, this thesis aims to contribute to the growing body of literature regarding women’s role in socio-environmental conflicts. It sheds light on the case of *Mujeres Amazónicas* by examining their narratives, which have led to the production of alternative knowledge and political agency. The study of this collective demonstrates the interconnectedness of their fight, characterized by their ability to defend their territories as living spaces and universalize their demands through allyships with national and international organizations, such as Acción Ecológica and Amazon Watch. Likewise, they have stood in solidarity with other indigenous networks; for instance, the collective participated in Brasilia’s 2021 indigenous women mobilization (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2021a). This research expects to complement previous works about the collective, like the studies of Vallejo and Duhalde (2019), Coba and Bayón (2020), and Álvarez (2020). By focusing on how the Amazonian Women continue to shape their struggle through the analysis of multiple sources that provide an overview of their anti-extractive dynamics and practices in both public and private spheres.

## 3 Theoretical Framework

The following section introduces the analytical framework that guides this research in order to understand how the Amazonian Women collective has and is challenging the state-centered conceptions of development, consent, and power. Based on decolonial feminism and ecofeminism, the framework draws from their principal aspects and establishes five core themes to allocate and analyze Amazonian Women's narratives. Within this framework, both theoretical approaches unify contemporary environmental, gender, and ethnic contestations, adjusted to the Latin American context. The first two subsections offer an overview of the principal characteristics of decolonial feminism and ecofeminism, highlighting their connection with the case study. The section concludes by presenting the adopted analytical themes that structure the analysis.

### 3.1 Decolonial Feminism

Decolonial feminism is described by Vergés (2021, p.24) as “the continuation of the struggles for the emancipation of women in the Global South,” an open process that entangles numerous ways of thinking to deconstruct racism, sexism, and capitalism in order to re-humanize the world. As the author (2021, p.24) notes, this theoretical approach is not a new wave of feminism but rather a stage in the continuous process of decolonization, which rests on historically grounded social struggles. In this regard, decolonial feminism acknowledges the legacy of afro-descendant and indigenous women in its formation. When the philosopher María Lugones first proposed decoloniality from a feminist lens in 2007, she rooted her ideas in the struggle of Afro-American and Chicana women in discussion with the critical analysis of modernity by Aníbal Quijano (Villaroel, 2018). Lugones' (2010) “coloniality of gender” became a fundamental concept in decolonial feminist studies to examine the oppression of gender, race, class, and sexuality, which originated in colonial times and remains entrenched in the capitalist system of power.

In this view, decolonial feminism strongly criticizes its Western counterparts since acknowledging oppression is insufficient to reverse the current system. In the words of Vergés (2021, p.12), “a feminism that fights only for gender equality and refuses to see how integration leaves racialized women at the mercy of brutality, violence, rape, and murder, is ultimately complicit in it.” In Latin America, scholars like Lugones (2010), Martínez-Cairo and Buscemi (2021), use the term “hegemonic feminism” to denounce eurocentrism, top-down approaches, and neglect of

intersectionality in Western movements. Along these lines, Rodríguez (2021, pp.8–10, 53) rejects the construction of women from the global south as “victims that need saving” or tokenized individuals that have the responsibility to “save us” with their alternative knowledge, two forms of coloniality that operate within the feminist movement. Therefore, decolonial feminism has been adopted by this study as a multidimensional and intersectional tool to analyze the systemic violence against the Amazonian Women while challenging the dominant discourses that diminish women’s role in anti-extractive struggles.

In the Latin American context, decolonial feminism is a heterogenous proposal committed to its multiplicity, a “never-ending process” as there is no single theory nor method to confront oppression. It entails existing concepts and frameworks but offers the space for new practices and alternatives to those imposed by capitalist patriarchy, primarily through horizontal, grassroots, and bottom-up approaches that question the institutionalization of social struggles (Montanaro, 2016, p.336; Martínez-Cairo and Buscemi, 2021). As a result, this framework recognizes ancestral knowledge, proposals, and alternatives beyond the Eurocentric understanding, which enables the analysis of the Amazonian Women’s cosmovision (Kusnierkiewicz, 2019). Similarly, decolonial feminism embraces the concepts of resistance and re-existence to reposition women as agents in their territory. As Hofmann and Cabrapan (2021, p.55) explain, agency can be expressed not only in territorial defense but also in finding ways to sustain life and re-exist occupation. This idea has been previously studied in the Amazonian Women collective by Sempértegui’s (2021b) dissertation. She introduces the concept of “re-existence” to describe the Amazonian women’s practices that connect their everyday life to their political organization.

## 3.2 Ecofeminism

Moreover, to complement the analytical framework, ecofeminism has been placed within the logic of decolonial feminism to avoid its essentialization and oversimplification. This rejects the assumption that “there is a feminine essence that places women closer to nature than men,” and therefore, “women are more likely to protect living beings” (Aguinaga et al., 2013, p.48). Although this theoretical approach rose in the 70s as a counterculture movement in countries like the United States, France, and Germany, it only became of interest to Latin America two decades later (Ress, 2010). This caused different conceptualizations and shifts from its previous understanding; however, it continues to be rooted in the idea that multiple systems of oppression sustain each other. In this context, Zuluaga (2020) and Mellor (1998, p.1) describe ecofeminism as an instrument for action that recognizes the link between the subordination of women and exploitation of nature under the patriarchal capitalist system, two forms of the same violence. Hence, ecofeminism offers a critical perspective to development models, questioning power relations and making visible the socio-environmental conflicts in the region.



At the local scale, this theoretical approach is an effective tool for analyzing the transformations extractivism causes in the organization and reproduction of social life. As mentioned in section 1.2.1, the masculinization of territories with the arrival of extractive companies disrupts the reproduction cycles and labor division within the communities. Men, whom in ancestral economies collaborated with fishing and hunting, become waged workers that no longer contribute to the collective division of tasks (García-Torres et al., 2020, p.35). Thereby, reproductive and caretaking work has been profoundly feminized and undervalued. As Zuluaga (2020) argues, this social division of labor has assigned women a myriad of tasks to sustain the existence of their families and communities, making them responsible for providing and managing the fundamental needs for their survival. In this way, women's exclusion from employment and decision-making processes has affected their autonomy by placing them in a subordinate position regarding their husbands' wages, and has led to an increase in gender-based violence (Zuluaga, 2020).

Due to women's reproductive role, the socio-ecological impact caused by extractivism has a greater burden on them. It is women who face the increasing difficulties of accessing clean water, ensuring food security, or caring for the ill; which is why collectives like *Mujeres Amazónicas* defend their territory (Colectivo Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo, 2014, pp.32–34). In Latin America and the Caribbean, ecofeminism has embraced Lorena Cabnal's concept of *cuerpo-territorio* [body-territory] to reflect on the perpetuation of violence. It is understood as a political category not simply affected by mechanisms of domination, but also a space of emancipatory struggle and resistance where women are agents of social change (Perini, 2022). This epistemic proposal amplifies the voices of indigenous women to recover their first territory, ergo the body, and defend their ancestral land as a space that ensures their survival and dignifies their existence (Cruz, 2016). In this sense, women are part of their territory's complex system between human and non-human life.

In the case of the Amazonian Women, certain ecofeminist discourses have been incorporated into their struggle to create allyships with the broader feminist movement. This partial cooperation has contributed to the collective's visibility and inclusion on different platforms. Even though the relationship between Amazonian Women and environmental organizations is asymmetrical, their encounters have created strategies for resisting extractivism (Sempértegui, 2021a).

### 3.3 Analytical Framework

Based on the principal aspects of both theoretical approaches, this subsection introduces the analytical framework that structures the data analysis. As the table illustrates, five core themes have been identified from the previous subsections (refer to Annex 8.1 for the complete table). These themes are embedded in the Amazonian Women's resistance narratives and guide the thematic analysis, which

has been described in the next section. They examine the material from a systemic and institutional dimension to the everyday practices that influence the Amazonian Women’s anti-extractive fight. As well, the framework comprises additional themes found in the collected data through an inductive approach.

**Table 3.3 Analytical Framework Core Themes**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Data Categories</b>
1. Systemic Violence and Domination	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. State and institutional oppression.</li> <li>2. Masculinization of territories.</li> <li>3. Violation of constitutional rights.</li> </ol>
2. Cosmvision and Knowledge Production	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Alternative knowledge.</li> <li>2. Self-representations and perceptions.</li> </ol>
3. Resistance and Re-existence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Practices that reproduce life.</li> <li>2. Practices that defend life.</li> </ol>
4. Body-territory	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gender-based violence.</li> <li>2. Sexism within the communities.</li> <li>3. Territory occupation by extractive activities.</li> </ol>
5. Reproduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Women’s reproductive role within their communities.</li> <li>2. Health and care work.</li> <li>3. Environmental degradation.</li> </ol>
6. Additional Themes	Other relevant themes that have been coded through an inductive approach.

## 4 Methodology

This section is organized as follows; first, it outlines the research design and its suitability for implementing the analytical framework. Subsequently, the data collection, material sampling, and translation biases are presented. The further subsection discusses Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, and its validity for drawing findings. Finally, the methodology section concludes with the research's ethical considerations and reflexivity.

### 4.1 Research Design

In line with the thesis' qualitative nature, the research has been designed as a single case study of *Mujeres Amazónicas*. This flexible strategy enables a thorough analysis of the narratives that have shaped the collective's anti-extractive struggle and contributes to a holistic approach in light of their context (Robson and McCartan, 2016, pp.152–153). According to Yin (2009, p.2), case studies generate a detailed account using multiple sources of evidence; hence, this research does not intend to generalize findings but to provide an insight into the resistance dynamics that characterize the collective. The deep understanding of Amazonian Women's demands, practices, and knowledge results in high internal validity (Halperin and Heath, 2012, p.208), which aims to contribute to the broader field of socio-environmental conflicts through the analytical framework and its six themes. Even though the principal limitation of this strategy is its lack of external validity, as the De Vaus (2001, p.237) argues, this is out of the thesis scope.

### 4.2 Data Collection

The collected material covers a period from 2013 to 2022 and is representative of significant moments in the development of *Mujeres Amazónicas* on national and international platforms. The eighteen sources encompass important events such as the marches to Quito, mobilizations on women's day, press conferences, and their participation in COP 26. Thus, the data has been gathered from Amazonian Women's political declarations, proposals, public speeches, and interviews that assert their anti-extractive fight through diverse forms of expression (see Annex 8.2). Due to the time and scope of the thesis, it was not possible to conduct fieldwork in the Ecuadorian Amazon. For this reason, two long-term ethnographic studies have been included to complement the information. Sempértegui's (2021b)

and García-Torres' (2017) works have provided a perspective into the private sphere of the collective, involving everyday practices, observations, and transcribed conversations. This decision allowed the research to analyze the collective's narratives in both public and private spaces. Likewise, the use of material collected by external agents increased the number of voices and experiences from the grassroots to avoid focusing solely on the leaders.

In order to facilitate data management, the material has been divided into three categories comprising six sources each: 1) documents produced by *Mujeres Amazónicas*; 2) public declarations from the collective; and 3) in-depth interviews, documentaries, and studies ethically conducted by other researchers. It is crucial to clarify that the sampling process was strongly motivated by years of following the Amazonian Women's struggle. Their media coverage in national broadcasts and social networks shed light on their principal publications and declarations. Their growing presence on online platforms publicized their work; for instance, their website offers a compilation of material. Additionally, web searches on "*Colectivo Mujeres Amazónicas*" and snowballing from the references of the ethnographic studies led to useful sources in several formats. Nevertheless, the availability of certain data changed throughout the research since some videos and documentaries were continuously removed and reuploaded. To avoid possible issues two sources from the original selection were replaced.

#### 4.2.1 Translation

On the grounds that the collected material has been partially translated from Spanish, it is important to recognize the possible biases and interpretation errors. As an Ecuadorian, understanding certain expressions, colloquialisms, and the context where the material has been produced helped during the analysis. However, I recognize that my identity as a white *mestiza* from the capital influences my interpretation. To maintain objectivity (to an extent) my knowledge has been complemented by online-machine translation services and Kichwa-Spanish dictionaries since the different nationalities that comprise the Amazonian Women collective have their own language. In this respect, it is also vital to acknowledge that Amazonian Women members do not use their mother tongue during their public declarations and interviews, meaning that ideas or concepts might get lost in translation. Moreover, to prevent their message from shifting meaning in English, the direct quotes have been slightly modified from the original extracts (see Annex 8.5).

### 4.3 Data Analysis

In order to analyze Amazonian Women's narratives, referring to their experiences, self-representations, political consolidation, and "ways of understanding"; the

selected method has been thematic analysis. This tool provides a rich, detailed, and complex account of data to identify and analyze repeated patterns (themes) of meaning across a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method is characterized by its flexibility, which enables the analysis of sources in multiple formats. It is an appropriate technique since the collected material includes official texts, video recordings, and transcripts. Along these lines, thematic analysis can be applied within a wide range of theoretical and epistemological frameworks and designs, suiting this thesis's decolonial ecofeminist framework (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). As stated in section 3.3, the analysis has been structured by establishing themes through a deductive and inductive approach. Deductive coding involves a "top-down" starting point driven by theory and prior research, highlighting certain aspects of interest from the data (Terry et al., 2017, p.26). For this study, the predetermined themes have been drawn from the theoretical framework and introduced in table 3.3.

On the other hand, inductive coding implicates working "bottom-up" from the data, developing codes, and ultimately themes without a preexisting frame, which Braun and Clarke (2006, p.12) specify as data-driven. In this regard, this thesis analytical framework has identified one inductive theme during the analysis (see section 5.6). Both approaches have followed a thorough and consistent coding protocol. With this in mind, this research has adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step guide to conduct the analysis: 1) familiarizing with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; 6) producing the report. Please refer to Annex 8.3 for a complete description. Therefore, establishing themes is an efficient strategy to examine and unfold the principal narratives that shape Amazonian Women's anti-extractive struggle, especially when these themes are embedded in their resistance dynamics and connect the collective with the broader decolonial feminist and ecofeminist theory.

#### 4.3.1 Limitations

Furthermore, it is vital to consider the potential "pitfalls" of thematic analysis and the measures to prevent them. The flexibility of this method can become a disadvantage if the analytical framework does not properly guide it; for this reason, the findings have been supported by previous literature and exemplary data extracts to align the analysis with the theory and reinforce the claims (Nowell et al., 2017). Another pitfall that has been pondered is the failure to provide an adequate interpretation and instead rely on mere description. Leading to an unconvincing analysis where themes are not evidenced by sufficient data or are unable to make sense of it (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To avoid this risk, the themes analyzed in the fifth section have been rigorously selected to maintain internal consistency and are supported by extracts. Although the data set is not free from contradictions or overlapping ideas, all themes maintain coherence.

## 4.4 Ethical Considerations

As a non-indigenous undergraduate student who aims to amplify the Amazonian Women's voices, it is crucial to acknowledge that my identity has influenced the entire research process, particularly coding, interpretation, and analysis. Thus, reflectivity and reflexivity have been present throughout the study to ensure trustworthiness. As Halperin and Heath (2012, p.328) argue, "the results of a study are valid and reliable to the degree that they are plausible to others." Hence, Annex 8.4 contains the interpretative coding protocol to explain the thought process behind the analysis. Overall, the research aims to engage with the Amazonian Women's struggle in a manner that forefronts their agency and resistance dynamics and, under no circumstances, intend to "speak for them." The material, even when it is secondary, places Amazonian Women's voices and experiences at the center, reflecting their mission as a collective. Their ideas, direct quotes, and work have been correctly referenced. Similarly, the contributions of externally conducted ethnographic studies and interviews have been recognized; in order to select them as data sources their ethical considerations and integrity have also been taken into account.

## 5 Analysis

This section identifies and analyzes the principal themes embedded in the Amazonian Women’s narratives. Each subsection thoroughly examines the relevant aspects of the collective’s resistance dynamics, which have shaped (and continue to shape) their struggle. These themes contribute to understanding how Amazonian Women resist, re-exist, and perceive extractivism from a decolonial ecofeminist approach. Even though the collected material covers a nine-year period, time has not modified their core demands or proposals; instead, it has consolidated their political agency. With the purpose of amplifying their voices, the analysis section illustrates Amazonian Women’s unmeasurable strength and determination to defend life inside the rainforest.

### 5.1 Systemic Violence and Domination

From a systemic dimension, the prevailing oppression by the state, institutions, and corporations has been courageously denounced by the Amazonian Women collective. Throughout the years, they have publicly demonstrated their disagreement with the extractive agenda of the different governments, appealing to their constitutional rights on account of their communities, territories, and nature. Despite their demands, which continue to be ignored, indigenous women have been historically excluded from decision-making spaces (García-Torres, 2017, pp.148–149). According to Patricia Gualinga, “it is easier [for the government] to have a leader or a woman who does not make a big fuss, who does not take many actions because we know that we are in a patriarchal structure” (Sacha Samay, 2020, 8:24). Hence, the collective’s resistance dynamics (i.e., protests, marches, and declarations), assert their political agency in a male hegemonic context where the state does not even recognize them as relevant actors.

*“Our voice will continue to be raised as long as the state continues to fail to fulfill its obligations to us!” (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2021b, p.2) [Annex 8.5.1]*

*“We are once again stressing our demand for our rights, that the mandate of the [Amazonian] women has not been heard, that the government has not given us an answer.” Patricia Gualinga (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2021c, 43:06) [Annex 8.5.2]*

Moreover, Amazonian Women accuse the government of using deceptive mechanisms to justify prior and informed consent inside the communities. They consider these processes entirely corrupted and manipulated since, in most cases,

consultations have been conducted in a short period of time without respecting the internal organizational structures, nor have they been culturally adjusted. As the collective claims, these processes do not comply with the international standards (Vallejo and Duhalde, 2019; Mujeres Amazónicas, 2016). Therefore, on their mandate, indigenous women demand the annulment of contracts, agreements, and concessions granted to mining and oil companies in the south-central Amazon. The grassroots collective rejects any consultation attempts, as they have already decided in their decision-making spaces that they do not want more extractive projects in their territories, employing their right to self-determination (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2018). For Amazonian Women this resolution was a response to the years of empty promises, lies, and corruption by the government and transnational companies.

*“The national government is more corrupt [...] while we take care of the forest they are looking out for their pockets, what authorities do we have?”*  
Zoila Castillo (Amazonian Women, 2021c 30:46) [Annex 8.5.3]

*“We have been denied the Amazon. For that reason, we do not agree for them [government] to manage it [...]. It should not be like that. What have we benefited from? I complain because it is my home, where the oil comes out.”*  
Alicia Cahuilla (National Assembly, 2013a, 14:02) [Annex 8.5.4]

Gender-based violence and the masculinization of territories is another recurrent point the collective emphasizes. The state has not only militarized and dispossessed them from their territories but is responsible for criminalizing, stigmatizing women, and undervaluing their role during mobilizations (Álvarez, 2020). Amazonian Women have been victims of discrimination and harassment within a system that protects the perpetrators and is an accomplice in the violence they suffer. For instance, in 2018, Patricia Gualinga was attacked at night in her home, and death threatened, but this was not an isolated case; Salomé Aranda, Nema Grefa, and other members experienced similar acts of intimidation (Rivadeneira, 2021; TEDx, 2018, 12:04). Unfortunately, like Patricia, these women have not received justice until today. For this reason, Amazonian Women demand an end to the historical impunity in their territories and the state’s neglect of their reality.

*“What happened after that march? [2013 march] These women began to receive threats, they began to be assaulted, persecuted, and publicly humiliated, insulted in the media.”* Nina Gualinga (TEDx, 2018, 11:29) [Annex 8.5.5]

*“Impunity has not stopped; we are imprisoned, companies harass us, and this happens without the state and the judicial system acting adequately. Their response has been a shameful silence.”* (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2021b p.2) [Annex 8.5.6]



## 5.2 Cosmivision and Knowledge Production

The second theme examines the cosmivision and alternatives, in terms of knowledge and proposals, to better understand the socio-environmental conflict and forms of life that Amazonian Women protect. For indigenous women, it is vital that the state recognizes the rainforest as a living space where indigenous communities coexist with nature, challenging the authorities' assumption that the amazon is an "empty space" or an "untouched territory." (Vallejo and Duhalde, 2019, p.12) Amazonian women propose a new relationship with the environment, where the government recognizes that nature exists because "someone works for it and regenerates it" (Patricia Gualinga in Sempértegui, 2021b, p.201). Through their multiple practices the collective speaks for the human and non-human life inside the forest, a vision that clashes with the development models based on extractivism that the different governments have implemented. In response to the state-led environmental degradation and the capitalist and patriarchal systems that threaten indigenous territories, the Amazonian Women collective has created a proposal encompassing their cosmivision, human and nature's rights, conservation, territoriality, among other discourses, under the concept of *Kawsak Sacha* or Living Forest:

*"Our main objective is to ensure the continuity of the life of Amazonian indigenous peoples, preserving and conserving the biological wealth of their territories, nature, biodiversity, and cultural and natural heritage, according to the concept of Sumak Kawsay (Good Living) and Kawsak Sacha (Living Forest) that our peoples have maintained since the beginning of their existence until today." (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2013 p.1) [Annex 8.5.7]*

The Amazonian Women's proposal, which is aimed to be adopted nationally and internationally, is their own framing to share their worldviews and philosophy while making conservation visible. In the words of the collective, *Kawsak Sacha* is a living space with consciousness, constituted by all beings inside the rainforest, "from the most infinitesimal beings to the greatest and supreme ones, including the animal, plant, mineral, cosmic, and human worlds" (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2013 p.6). In this view, indigenous people are part of the forest, which possesses the intrinsic value of collective memory and restores energy, life, and balance. As Coba and Bayón (2020, p.152–153;156) expressed, defending their territories is an act of existence to maintain human and non-human life relations. The Living Forest transmits knowledge to the *yachak* [wise person in the community] to engage and interact with the protective beings of the Amazon in order to maintain harmony and heal people; this knowledge has been methodically passed on to the new generations (Álvarez, 2020, p.323). Hence, defending their territory goes beyond the state's notion of "a plot of land."

*"This space is the scenario where our ways of life and the beings that inhabit it are reproduced. This space keeps the interconnection between humans and their environment, so there is an interdependence where both act in unity as a single body." (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2013 p.4) [Annex 8.5.8]*

Kawsak Sacha has been introduced as an alternative to value the Amazon for “what it is” and not for its resources, evidencing the incompatibility between the government’s discourses and indigenous perceptions (Asamblea Nacional, 2013b 3:40). Two clear examples are the concepts of poverty and development. Whereas the state promises indigenous communities a better life and uses infrastructure, services, education, and employment to justify extractivism, indigenous women have challenged their definition of poverty and “living well.” For the Amazonian Women, a healthy environment, a home, and food are the foundations of a good life; they claim their territory as an autonomous space that allows the reproduction of life independently of money flow (García-Torres, 2017, p.111). According to a member of the collective “To be poor is to have no land to cultivate, to have no nature” (Colectivo Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo, 2014, p.74). In this regard, indigenous women have denounced the government’s paternalistic approach, which creates necessities and uses public services, like education, as a bargaining tool instead of a right.

*“Sumak Kawsay [Good Living] says the government. About Sumak Kawsay I have told them that they do not know anything about Sumak Kawsay. Because [they] think Sumak Kawsay is to have a millennium school, a car. [...] It is not like that. [...] Sumak Kawsay is without oil, without miners, without loggers, [the] air free of pollution, [...] [a] healthy jungle.” Kichwa leader, 2016 interview by (García-Torres, 2017, p.113) [Annex 8.5.9]*

Overall, the collective presents alternative perceptions and proposals that reflect the meaning and significance of defending indigenous territories, shedding light on the need to decommodify nature and adopt a post-extractive model to assure indigenous and environmental justice.

### 5.3 Resistance and Re-existence

Consequently, resistance and re-existence refer to those practices by the Amazonian Women that reproduce life and defend it in both public and private spheres. The collective has merged its everyday actions with its political agency to confront natural resource exploitation. In fact, their strategy has been adopted from the internal to the external. The communities have been the starting point for raising awareness and planning certain activities, followed by cities in the Amazon region as meeting places for the different nationalities and communities. Finally, the big cities and political centers where decisions regarding extractivism are made have been the stage for their resistance dynamics in favor of life and their territories (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2022). As the collective highlights, they resist through a unified voice that reasserts their position within the indigenous movement, generating autonomous spaces inside the organizations and introducing specific demands.

*“Normally, there is always a line of authorities, and the authorities are always men, we have never been visible there. So now, we always form a line of women in the marches, and we do similar things during other public actions. I think this is important, because it shows that women need our own space, to be visible” Katy Betancourt, 2017 interview by (Sempértegui, 2021b, p.53)*

Amazonian Women have clearly expressed that their struggle is not only for their communities and families but also for their culture and the life inside the rainforest, including indigenous people in voluntary isolation, who are threatened by the expansion of the extractive frontier (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2013; 2018). Thus, since 2013, the collective has held several workshops in grassroots communities to empower women, inform indigenous peoples about their rights, and create local strategies to encourage participation in defense of their territories (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2021b 43:38). This internal organization has been combined with territorial and communitarian practices that have reached the public sphere, enabling them to resist and re-exist within the current system. These practices comprise *artesanías* [handicrafts], chants, and face painting. As Sempértegui (2021b, p.156) argues, even though *artesanías* can be exchanged as commodified objects, this does not overdetermine their value or significance; they are important means of transmitting stories, weaving experiences, and sustaining their fight.

*“Sometimes, during the marches, I sell my artesanías. That’s how I sustain my life, how I feed my children. [...]. It is the sustenance of our organization, the sustenance of our struggle. We are the Amazonian Women who fight for our forest, against extractivism, against mining. So we are sustaining with that.” Zoila Castillo, 2018 in (Sempértegui, 2021b, p.182)*

The Amazonian Women’s chants, like their *artesanías*, connect two worlds by reproducing their knowledge in public spaces. During the collective’s mobilizations and events, singing has become part of their political agency, conveying messages that transcend language as chants have the capacity to modify behaviors and awaken emotions (Sacha Samay, 2020 13:02). In addition, *wituk* face-painting is another cultural element present in the public sphere; it is a sign of struggle or celebration and symbolizes strength. As Nina Gualinga explains, all these practices are considered acts of resistance since “we live in a world that is constantly trying to eradicate, eliminate, and undo who we are, and to destroy our culture, language, [...] and traditions through extractivism and racism,” (cited in Morales de la Cruz, 2022). For this reason, Amazonian women have established numerous mechanisms to strengthen their voices and reinforce their position, integrating allyships with external actors (NGOs, feminist movements, civil society) to their territorial and communitarian practices.

## 5.4 Reproduction

In regard to Amazonian Women's reproductive practices this section emphasizes how extractivism directly affects women's role inside the communities. As discussed in section 3.2, indigenous women are responsible for social reproduction and care work, which involves *chakras* [cultivated land] production and family subsistence. Hence, environmental degradation, water pollution, and the enclosure of commons by extractive projects pose a greater impact on women and children. The effect on their livelihoods impairs their ability to feed their families as their crops lose productivity and wildlife displaces; extractive activities also deteriorate family health, which translates into a greater workload for women since they care for the sick within the communities (Vallejo and Duhalde, 2019). This is why Amazonian Women have organized themselves to protect their territories and have persistently rejected any negotiations; in the words of Zoila Castillo, "we are not here to be convinced, nor to sell, nor to be bought" (Derks, 2013 5:46). The relationship to their territories and the life that inhabits them is priceless.

*"The men have said that we are going to negotiate, but women's voices totally reject this. Why? Because we are the women [who] harvest and take care of our wawas [children] every time." Alicia Cahuilla, 2016 in (García-Torres, 2017, p.126) [Annex 8.5.10]*

On several occasions, Amazonian Women's reproductive practices reflect their close connection to the earth, where their labor demonstrates affective connotations. Indigenous women refer to earth as their mother, who nurtures them by providing food, medicine, and the necessary material to build their communities. The love for their land is a significant aspect that drives their struggle:

*"For us, as indigenous women, it is like a mother who gives us life, who gives us food, who gives us everything we have, and wisdom. And that is why she we defend it." Kichwa leader, 2016 interview by (García-Torres, 2017, p.128) [Annex 8.5.11]*

The collective's close relationship and appreciation for mother earth have been evident during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of the state's absence in the Amazon region and its failure to supply sanitary equipment and medicines, indigenous communities strengthened their solidarity and relied on medicinal plants to cure themselves. The collective highlighted the relevance of the forest, indigenous knowledge, and ancestral remedies to survive in a country that neglects them (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2021c 9:02, 25:42).

## 5.5 Body-Territory

This subsection explores how the concept of body-territory, used in ecofeminism and decolonial feminism, is evidenced in the Amazonian Women's context.

Undeniably, the expansion of extractive projects has intensified the multiple types of violence indigenous women suffer. Referring to subsection 2.2.1, the arrival of male workers and the insertion of alcohol and prostitution into indigenous territories have exponentially increased domestic violence, rape, and sexual assaults (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2020b). In several cases, Amazonian Women's members recounted the experiences of women who visited extractive camps to exchange food or cook and were raped by workers, often in complicity with their husbands (García-Torres, 2017, pp.131–132; Álvarez, 2020). Due to the increment and impunity of physical and sexual assaults inside the communities and attacks against the collective, Amazonian Women have demanded an in-depth, historical, and statistical research on gender-related violence, in order to prevent, sanction, and guarantee that it is not repeated (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2018 p.4).

At the community level, extractivism has fragmented the population while generating *machismo* and domestic violence. From the beginning, the collective has defied stigmatization and criticism from their communities and partners to make their voices heard. For indigenous women, participating publicly and assuming positions of power has been a challenge, especially since they are responsible for taking care of their home, *chakra*, and children (García-Torres, 2017, pp.137–140). These women have been constantly accused of abandoning their families and have been undermined by male authorities for leaving the communities. Despite all these barriers, the Amazonian Women have consolidated as an influential organization, transforming the dominant discourses inside the indigenous movement.

*“For male leaders it's easy. They can go, travel to communities, [...] to other countries, but for a woman leader it is so difficult, so difficult! To go somewhere you have to worry about your children, your husband, who is going to feed them, who is going to stay at home. It is a great suffering as a woman to be a leader” Kichwa leader, 2016 interview by (García-Torres, 2017, p.137) [Annex 8.5.12]*

*“So there has been a lot of failure on the part of male leaders. Today, for example, they tell me, ‘Let's see if you can do it as a woman! Show us you are capable!’[...] But that gives me strength, when they tell me that I need to show that I'm capable as a woman.” Nancy Santi, 2018 interview by (Sempértegui, 2021b, p.255)*

Furthermore, the dialectical conception of body-territory equates the violence and abuse women's bodies experienced to the pollution and aggressions against their territories, both caused by extractive activities. As Nina Gualinga stressed in an interview, “as Indigenous women we're protecting our territories. We're protecting the mountains, the forest, the water, the air, and our bodies are part of the land” (Morales de la Cruz, 2022). In this sense, their territories are an interconnected whole, where occupation produces a symbolic rupture as it is a complex living system of which Amazonian Women are part.

*“The government has built two big roads. [...] two arrows have entered the heart of the Amazon in Yasuní. So we are with two arrows in our hearts.”  
Alicia Cahuilla, 2015 in (García-Torres, 2017, p.130) [Annex 8.5.13]*

## 5.6 Climate Change

The last theme, which has been inductively identified, represents the connection between the Amazonian Women’s anti-extractive struggle and climate change. The explicit use of this thematic has been widely incorporated into their discourse in recent years, demonstrating the interconnection between extractivism in the Amazon and the broader issue. The collective has expressed the interdependence of indigenous and non-indigenous ways of living to make their audience connect to their fight and recognize the multiple challenges they continuously face. The collective firmly claim that their resistance and political stand to protect the rainforest is for the benefit of humanity; as Maricela Gualinga (cited in Chouliaraki, 2021) asserts, “we want to continue existing, and for the forest to continue living for the sake of the entire world”. Indigenous women perceive climate change as an imbalance of the earth caused by human intervention; it is a consequence of a system that does not respect nature, spiritual beings, or other forms of life (Morales de la Cruz, 2022).

Therefore, Amazonian Women confront the expansion of extractive activities in their territories, demanding national and international authorities to listen to their voices and acknowledge their solutions. Proposals like Kawsak Sacha provide an alternative perception of nature and a new category for conservation to safeguard life on the planet for future generations. The collective demands for indigenous territories to be declared free of all extractive activities to mitigate climate change and ensure life, focusing on real solutions that respect their rights (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2020a). The Amazonian Women recognize that the path is not going to be simple nor quick; that there is no easy solution to this complex problem, but a drastic change is needed because we are running out of time (Chouliaraki, 2021).

*“[T]he real climate movement is out there with those frontline communities where people are literally putting their bodies on the line to protect biodiversity, to keep fossil fuels in the ground, to protect forests and water.”  
Nina Gualinga, 2021 in (Chouliaraki, 2021)*

## 6 Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the principal narratives that have shaped the anti-extractive struggle of the collective *Mujeres Amazónicas*. The term narratives has been used throughout this thesis to encompass the experiences, self-representations, and political consolidation of the collective. Therefore, to examine them, an analytical framework based on decolonial feminism and ecofeminism adjusted to the Latin American context was created. This led to five deductive themes (systemic violence and domination; cosmovision and knowledge production; resistance and re-existence; reproduction; and body-territory), which structured the data analysis. In addition, one inductive theme (climate change) was established during the coding process. These central themes are embedded in Amazonian Women's resistance narratives; hence, their detailed examination by implementing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis offers a thorough understanding of the concepts, dynamics, knowledge, and practices that compose and characterize these narratives.

In order to provide a comprehensive account of the elements aforementioned, the eighteen sources for this study were carefully selected and categorized into three groups: 1) documents produced by *Mujeres Amazónicas*; 2) public declarations from the collective; and 3) in-depth interviews, documentaries, and ethnographic studies ethically conducted by other researchers. This material centered on the Amazonian Women's political agency and communitarian activities with the purpose of amplifying their voices and demands. Its analysis covered a nine-year period, illustrating significant moments in the collective's development on public and private platforms. Nonetheless, time was not a fundamental aspect of the analysis since their core demands and challenges have remained the same. Unfortunately, after nine years of struggle, Ecuador's reliance on its extractive model and systemic oppression against indigenous communities has not changed. As Zoila Castillo claimed, "If we did not take care of the rainforest, the world would have ended long ago [...] for the forest that we defend, we do not want oil companies, [...] we do not want mining, we Amazonian Women, have said!" (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2021c 31:14)

Thus, their struggle continues as actively as ever. This leads back to the research question: *How do women from the grassroots collective Mujeres Amazónicas resist extractivism in the Ecuadorian Amazon?* In short, the collective resists through their experiences, ways of thinking, political organization, self-representations (narratives) that continuously shape and reinforce their struggle. The six themes established to analyze and unfold their narratives have demonstrated the collective's numerous practices and alternative views to confront the different forms of oppression and gender-based violence indigenous women undergo. The

Amazonian Women have firmly demanded the state to declare their territory free from extractive activities, denouncing the corrupted processes of prior and informed consent (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2018). These women have defied their exclusion from decision-making spaces at the national and local levels by organizing their political agency from the internal (communities) to the external (political centers). As a result, the collective has adopted various practices and dynamics that reproduce knowledge and make their struggle visible in the public sphere, i.e., chants, *artesanías*, mobilizations, and marches.

Along these lines, Amazonian Women have presented the Kawsak Sacha proposal to share their views, ways of life, and approaches to nature. Their closeness to their territories and reproductive roles inside the communities drive their efforts to defend life (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2013). The analysis has evidenced that the effects of extractivism have a greater impact on women, especially due to the increase in domestic, physical, and sexual violence within the communities. The masculinization of the territories, criminalization, and prevalent sexism that stigmatizes their struggle are some of the difficulties that the collective faces. Hence, their organization is a mere act of resistance; they have established a powerful network that links their struggle with rural and urban movements and allyships, at the same time, is intertwined with global issues like climate change. Overall, the six themes are highly interconnected, which limits their clear distinction but indicates the complexity of the Amazonian Women's struggle.

This research has become my foundation for understating and examining the principal narratives within the collective *Mujeres Amazónicas* and their role in the Ecuadorian indigenous movement. Nevertheless, an ethnographic study is suggested for expanding these findings. Semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and being in contact with the communities are valuable methods to conduct an in-depth analysis of how the collective perceives their struggle, creates allyships, and organizes internally. As well, exploring the (power) relations with national and international partners, NGOs, and indigenous organizations is another area for further research. More than ever, we need to listen to indigenous voices, recognize their work, and support their mission to protect the Amazon and defend life in its multiple forms.



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# 8 Appendix

## 8.1 Annex I Analytical Framework

Themes	Data Categories	Main Sources
1. Systemic Violence and Domination	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. State and institutional oppression.</li> <li>2. Masculinization of territories.</li> <li>3. Violation of constitutional rights.</li> </ol>	Deductive Approach: (Montanaro, 2016; Martínez-Cairo and Buscemi, 2021)
2. Cosmivision and Knowledge Production	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Alternative knowledge.</li> <li>2. Worldviews.</li> <li>3. Self-representations and perceptions.</li> </ol>	Deductive Approach: (Kusnierkiewicz, 2019; Rodríguez, 2021)
3. Resistance and Re-existence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Practices that reproduce life (chants, <i>artesanías</i> [handicrafts]).</li> <li>2. Practices that defend life (public acts).</li> </ol>	Deductive Approach: (Hofmann and Cabrapan, 2021; Sempértegui, 2021b)
4. Reproduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Women's reproductive role within their communities.</li> <li>2. Health and care work.</li> <li>3. Environmental degradation.</li> </ol>	Deductive Approach: (García-Torres et al., 2020; Zuluaga, 2020)
5. Body-territory	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gender-based violence.</li> <li>2. Sexism within the communities.</li> <li>3. Territory occupation by extractive activities.</li> </ol>	Deductive Approach: (Cruz, 2016; 2020; Perini, 2022)
6. Additional Theme: Climate Change	Other relevant theme that has been coded through an inductive approach.	Inductive Approach



## 8.2 Annex II Collected Material

Selected Sources				
No.	Title	Year	Type	Additional Information
Documents produced by the collective <i>Mujeres Amazónicas</i>				
1.	Kawsak Sacha - Living Forest - Selva viviente	2013	Proposal	Spanish
2.	Statement of Amazonian Indigenous Women in defense of Life, Territory, and 'Good Living' (Buen Vivir)	2016	Statement	Translated to English by Amazon Watch
3.	Mandate from Amazonian Women Grassroots Defenders of the Rainforest Against the Extractive Economic Model	2018	Mandate	Translated to English by Amazon Watch
4.	Somos mujeres de paz que exigimos derechos a oídos [We are women of peace who demand rights to ears]	2020	Manifest	Website - Spanish
5.	Mujeres Amazónicas del Ecuador [Amazonian Women of Ecuador]	2021	Press release	Instagram page - Spanish
6.	Pronunciamento de la delegación de Mujeres Sarayaku en la COP26 [Statement by the Sarayaku Women's delegation at COP26]	2021	Statement	Website - Spanish
Public declarations by members of the collective <i>Mujeres Amazónicas</i>				
7.	Asamblea nacional del Ecuador sesión 254 [National Assembly of Ecuador session 254 Patricia Gualinga]	2013	Recorded Speech	YouTube - Spanish
8.	Asamblea nacional del Ecuador sesión 256 [National Assembly of Ecuador session 256 Alicia Cahuilla]	2013	Recorded Speech	YouTube - Spanish
9.	Voces de mujeres indígenas que defienden su Amazonía [Voices of indigenous women defending their Amazon]	2013	Recorded Interviews	YouTube - Spanish
10.	Intentan desalojar sin éxito a Mujeres Amazónicas [Unsuccessful attempt to evict Mujeres Amazónicas]	2018	Recorded Declarations	YouTube TV news national broadcast- Spanish
11.	Mujeres Guardianas de la Selva Nina Siren Gualinga [Women Guardians of the Rain Forest]	2018	Recorded Talk	YouTube - Tedx Talks- Spanish
12.	Rueda de Prensa Mujeres Amazónicas [Amazonian Women Press Conference]	2021	Recorded Conference	Instagram page - Spanish
Interviews, ethnographic studies, and documentaries conducted by external agents				
13.	La vida en el centro y el crudo bajo tierra [Life in the center and oil underground]	2014	Transcribed Interviews	Report by Colectivo Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo - Spanish

14.	Petróleo, ecología política y feminismo [Oil, political ecology and feminism]	2017	Transcribed Interviews	Master thesis by Miriam García-Torres - Spanish
15.	Capítulo seis: “La justicia de las mujeres” [Chapter Six: “Women's Justice”]	2020	Documentary	YouTube- Sacha Samay - Spanish
16.	Weaving Resistance: The Amazonian Women's Struggle against Extractivism in Ecuador	2021	Transcribed Interviews	PhD thesis by Andrea Sempértégui - English
17.	Nina Gualinga: 'Indigenous Voices Are Still Not Heard'	2021	Transcribed Interview	Atmos Magazine - article by Daphne Chouliarakim - English
18.	In the Ecuadorian Amazon, Wituk Face-Painting is an act of resistance	2022	Transcribed Interviews	Vogue Magazine – by Atenea Morales de la Cruz – English

### 8.3 Annex III Braun and Clarke’s (2006) Thematic Analysis Guide

Steps	Description
1. Familiarizing with the data	Read (repeatedly) and transcribe data to familiarize in-depth with the content and document thoughts about potential codes. Triangulate different collection modes to increase reliability of the findings.
2. Generating initial codes	Code interesting features of the data systematically across the entire set and gather relevant data for each code.
3. Searching for themes	Group codes into potential themes, collating all relevant data to each narrative. This can be done through the use of tables, templates, or mind maps.
4. Reviewing themes	Themes need to follow a coherent pattern to reflect the meanings evident in the data set accurately. Themes can be combined, broken down, or created during this step to ensure their distinction.
5. Defining and naming themes	Refine each theme to determine what aspects of the data it captures. Provide clear definitions and names.
6. Producing the report	Include compelling extracts to illustrate the complex story of the data. As well, relate the findings to the analytical process, previous literature, and research question.

## 8.4 Annex IV Coding Protocol

Narratives	Sub-themes	Labels
1. Systemic Violence and Domination	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. State, companies, and institutional oppression.</li> <li>2. Autonomy</li> <li>3. Masculinization of territories.</li> <li>4. Violation of constitutional rights.</li> </ol>	Consultation, participation, transnational, extractive activities, government, aggressions, autonomy, violence, rights, racism, militarization, corruption, demands, attacks, concessions, damages, nature, support.
2. Cosmivision and Knowledge Production	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sumak Kawsay, Kawsak Sacha.</li> <li>2. Worldviews.</li> <li>3. Self-representations and perceptions (development, poverty).</li> </ol>	Kawsak Sacha, guardians, Sumak Kawsay, development, poverty, rainforest, life, cultural, natural resources, nature, non-human life, cosmivision, nature, Yachak, work, land, harmony, model, space, territory, regenerate, coexist, balance.
3. Resistance and Re-existence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Practices that reproduce life.</li> <li>2. Practices that defend life.</li> <li>3. Private and Public spheres.</li> </ol>	Practices, protests, marches, organization, strategy, rights, artesanías, chants, face paint, wituk, artesanías, struggle, workshops, sustain, international organizations, allyship, networks.
4. Reproduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reproductive practices</li> <li>2. Health</li> </ol>	Food, pollution, autonomy, violence, mother, soil, rivers, care, cycle, cultivate, free, harvest, wawas, struggle, products, organic
5. Body-Territory	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Violence inside communities.</li> <li>2. Sexism, division of communities.</li> <li>3. Territory occupation and pollution.</li> </ol>	Domestic violence, rape, pollution, extractive activities, organizations, workers, alcohol, prostitution, aggression, corporations.
6. Climate Change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contribution</li> <li>2. Conservation</li> </ol>	Global issue, voices, international platforms, interconnection, discourse, protection, frontlines, significance

## 8.5 Annex V Original Extracts in Spanish

8.5.1 *“¡nuestra voz se seguirá levantando mientras el Estado siga incumpliendo sus obligaciones con nosotras!” (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2021b, p.2)*

8.5.2 *“un día en que volvemos a recalcar la exigencia de nuestros derechos, de que el mandato de las mujeres [amazónicas] no ha sido escuchada que el gobierno no nos ha dado una respuesta.” (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2021c, 43:06)*

8.5.3 *“El gobierno nacional es más corrupto [...] mientras que nosotros cuidamos la selva ellos están mirando por los bolsillos ¿qué autoridades tenemos?” Zoila Castillo (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2021c 30:46)*

8.5.4 *“Nos han negado en la Amazonía. [...] Por ese motivo no estamos de acuerdo para que ellos lo manejen. No debe ser así. [...] ¿En qué nos hemos beneficiado? Yo reclamo porque es mi casa, donde sale el petróleo.” Alicia Cahuilla (Asamblea Nacional, 2013a, 14:02)*

8.5.5 *“¿Qué pasó después de esa marcha? Estas mujeres empezaron a recibir amenazas, empezaron a ser agredidas, perseguidas, y públicamente humilladas, insultadas en medios de comunicación.” Nina Gualinga (Tedx, 2018, 11:29)*

8.5.6 *“La impunidad no ha dejado de ser; nos apresan, las empresas nos hostigan y esto se da sin que el estado y el sistema judicial actúen de forma adecuada. Su respuesta ha sido un silencio vergonzoso.” (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2021b p.2)*

8.5.7 *“Nuestro objetivo principal es asegurar la continuidad de la vida de los pueblos originarios amazónicos, preservando y conservando la riqueza biológica de sus territorios, la naturaleza, la biodiversidad y el patrimonio cultural y natural, de acuerdo al concepto del Sumak Kawsay (Buen Vivir) y el de Kawsak Sacha (Selva Viviente) que mantienen nuestros pueblos desde el comienzo de su existencia hasta la actualidad.” (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2013 p.1)*

8.5.8 *“Este espacio es el escenario donde se reproducen nuestras formas de vida y la de los seres que en ella habitan. Este espacio guarda la interconexión entre el ser humano y su ambiente, por lo que existe una interdependencia donde ambos actúan en unidad como un solo cuerpo.” (Mujeres Amazónicas, 2013 p.4)*

8.5.9 *“Sumak Kawsay dice el Gobierno. De Sumak Kawsay yo le he dicho que no sabe nada lo que es Sumak Kawsay. Porque Sumak Kawsay piensa que es tener una escuela del milenio, un carro. [...] No es así. [...] Sumak Kawsay es sin petróleo, sin mineros, sin madereros, [el] aire libre de contaminación, [el] río bueno, [la] selva sana.” Kichwa leader, 2016 interview by (García-Torres, 2017, p.113)*

8.5.10 *“Los hombres han dicho que vamos a negociar, pero las voces de las mujeres rechazamos totalmente. ¿Por qué? Porque somos las mujeres [las] que cosechamos y cuidamos cada vez a nuestros wawas.” Alicia Cahuilla, 2016 in (García-Torres, 2017, p.126)*

8.5.11 *“Para nosotras, como mujeres indígenas, es como una madre que nos da vida, que nos da comida, que nos da todo lo que tenemos, y sabiduría. Y por eso es la defensa de nosotras.” Kichwa leader, 2016 interview by (García-Torres, 2017, p.128)*

8.5.12 *“Para los dirigentes hombres es fácil. Pueden ir, coger, viajar a comunidades, afuera, dentro, a otros países. ¡Pero una mujer dirigente es tan difícil! ¡Tan difícil! Para ir a algún lugar hay que estar preocupada de los hijos, del marido, de quién va a dar de comer, quién va a quedar en la casa. Es un sufrimiento muy grande como mujer para ser dirigente” Kichwa leader, 2016 interview by (García-Torres, 2017, p.137)*

8.5.13 *“El gobierno nos ha hecho entrar dos carreteras grandes. [...] Entraron dos flechas en el corazón de la Amazonía en el Yasuní. Entonces nosotros estamos con dos flechas en nuestros corazones.” Alicia Cahuilla, 2015 in (García-Torres, 2017, p.130)*