

Extractivism and Resistance: Gendered Perspectives on the Global Resource Economy

Written by Brianna Nicole Hernandez

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Extractive economies are deeply gendered, disproportionately harming women and Indigenous communities (mining, land dispossession, violence, health effects) while benefiting multinational corporations and financial markets (Altamirano-Jiménez, 2021). Women are often the first to experience land loss, pollution, and social upheaval, yet they are often sidelined in decision-making. The relationship between people and the planet is undeniably complex. Historically, it has been marred by narratives of domination and exploitation. As the realities of the climate crisis come into sharper focus in the realm of global governance, it is essential for academics and practitioners to challenge dominant constructions and seek alternative frameworks (Gasseau, 2023). Frameworks that respect the interconnectedness of all life and take power imbalances, reciprocity, ethics, and justice seriously (Harcourt, 2023). Ecologies, cosmologies, and economies often relegated to the background are crucial foundations for activist movements and critical scholarship across various geographies and identities.

Ecologies, cosmologies, and economies often relegated to the background are crucial foundations for activist movements and critical scholarship across various geographies and identities. Making sense of the climate crisis from positions of marginalization – and of care – requires emphasizing and addressing power distribution, narratives of the land, place-based identity, and experiences of climate change consequences. Indigenous cosmologies, feminist political ecology, and examples of women's activism provide the space to do so (Circefire, 2019). The role of women as environmental defenders and advocates. This is clear, for example, in the work of the Women's Earth and Climate Action Network.

This article briefly discusses the nexus of gender and extractivism and the global extractivist financial model. It then turns to practices of resistance and hope where examples of alternative frameworks and strategies of Indigenous women organizers are explored.

Globally, women's basic rights continue to be denied in varying forms and intensities... and we cannot discuss gender inequality without addressing its inextricable relationship to racism and the additional disproportionate impacts of extractive industries and socio-ecological harms to Indigenous, Black, and Brown women (Lake, 2024, 5).

Mining, deforestation, and oil extraction cause deforestation, water pollution, and biodiversity loss as well as socio-cultural consequences. For example, oil spills in the Amazon have impacted the health of Indigenous women and their livelihoods (Amnesty, 2020). There is also evidence of links between extractivist industries and gender-based violence. This is clear in the existence of mining boomtowns and sexual violence committed by corporate security forces (Morin, 2020). The displacement of communities to make way for extractive projects puts women at greater risk of gender-based violence and social marginalization. Land grabbing and resource extraction force women out of traditional agricultural or subsistence roles (Bowman, 2020). The dispossession of land through extractive projects thus threatens their identity, social structures, and traditional knowledge systems. For many women, their connection to the land is not only economic but also spiritual and cultural.

Multinational corporations, banks, and financial institutions perpetuate extractivist economies. At the core of the global extractivist model is global financial capital – this sustains resource extraction and exacerbates the inequality

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between the Global North and Global South. Many large corporations have a history of exploiting weak environmental and labor laws in the Global South.

Global supply chains, stock markets, and financial institutions (such as international banks and investment firms) play a central role in promoting and financing extractive projects (Salim, 2022). These institutions often prioritize profit maximization over social and environmental impacts, with little regard for the rights of local communities, particularly women and Indigenous groups. Often trade agreements and investment treaties protect corporate interests over Indigenous and environmental rights. For example, investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) cases where corporations sue governments over environmental protections.

Extractivism is also upheld by neoliberal policies facilitated by global financial institutions, such as the World Bank or the IMF, which promote market-driven economic reforms that prioritize resource extraction over sustainable development or social equity. These policies tend to reinforce the economic dependence of resource-rich countries on the export of raw materials, ensuring that women and Indigenous peoples are not included in the decision-making processes. When sustainable development is said to be a priority we may see the greenwashing of financial initiatives – “sustainable” finance that often reinforces existing extractivist paradigms (ClientEarth, 2020).

Despite the formidable challenges posed by extractivist economies, women and Indigenous groups have been at the forefront of resistance movements against resource exploitation. Indigenous women have played a pivotal role in safeguarding their lands, water, and communities from the destructive impacts of mining, deforestation, hydroelectric projects, and oil extraction. These resistance efforts manifest in grassroots mobilization, direct action, and legal challenges designed to mitigate or halt extractive projects that threaten their ways of life. For example, the women of the Lenca community in Honduras have been central to the resistance against the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam, which would have devastated their water sources (Friends of the Earth International). Similarly, Indigenous women in Ecuador have been key in opposing oil extraction in the Yasuni National Park, a region considered to be one of the most biodiverse in the world (Barzallo, 2024).

Beyond local struggles, global anti-extractivism networks are forming, connecting Indigenous and feminist movements across borders. These coalitions recognize the interconnectedness of extractivism, gender oppression, and environmental destruction. The Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN), founded by Osprey Orielle Lake, is one such organization that amplifies women’s voices in environmental decision-making and fosters transnational solidarity. Through educational programs, policy advocacy, and direct action campaigns, WECAN empowers women to challenge extractivist policies and propose alternative frameworks for climate justice.

Resistance to extractivism is not only about stopping harmful projects; it is also about envisioning and implementing alternative economic models that reject resource exploitation in favor of sustainability and collective well-being such as *Buen Vivir* (Living Well), a concept originating from Andean Indigenous traditions. *Buen Vivir* envisions a life in balance with nature, where economic growth is not the end but is considered alongside to the well-being of communities and ecosystems. This model prioritizes social justice, environmental sustainability, and the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty over lands and resources. It challenges neoliberal economic paradigms that prioritize profit over people and the planet (Acosta, 2018).

Indigenous and feminist perspectives provide powerful critiques of dominant economic narratives and propose alternatives that center care, community, and ecological balance. Feminist political economy perspectives challenge dominant narratives of development and economic growth, advocating for a shift toward sustainability and justice. Policy frameworks should integrate gendered perspectives into environmental governance, recognizing the leadership of women in climate action and resource management. Initiatives like the Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN) exemplify how organizations can push for these shifts through climate justice advocacy, educational programs, direct action, and global networking. Feminist and Indigenous movements, like this, offer alternative models that center on care, reciprocity, well-being, environmental sustainability, and gender justice (United Nations, 2020). A care ethics framework can reshape environmental activism by prioritizing relationships and responsibilities to one another and the Earth (Prugl, 2020). This perspective aligns with Indigenous worldviews that emphasize interconnectedness and collective responsibility.

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Alongside *Buen Vivir*, feminist and Indigenous movements advocate for commons-based economies that resist the privatization of land, water, and forests. Commons-based economies emphasize collective stewardship of natural resources rather than their commodification for corporate profit. Similarly, care economies recognize the unpaid and undervalued labor of women in sustaining both social and ecological systems. By centering care work, environmental stewardship, and social reproduction, care economies offer a transformative vision for rethinking economic value beyond extractivism.

Resistance to the global extractivist model is also deeply rooted in storytelling and cultural narratives that shape our relationship with nature. In her book *The Story is in Our Bones: How Worldviews and Climate Justice Can Remake a World in Crisis*, Osprey Orielle Lake explores how Indigenous knowledge and feminist perspectives offer alternative ways of engaging with the Earth (Lake, 2024). She argues that shifting worldviews is fundamental to addressing environmental challenges, as dominant economic paradigms are often underpinned by exploitative narratives about nature and development. She emphasizes interconnectedness, cultural narratives, and climate justice. True to her feminist and Indigenous roots, the book is a testament to the fact local stories and cultural identities are vital for understanding environmental issues and mobilizing action. Indigenous resistance movements often draw upon ancestral knowledge and cultural traditions to articulate their opposition to extractivism. These narratives not only highlight the injustices of resource exploitation but also offer visions of a different world—one where economic systems are rooted in respect for the Earth and community solidarity.

The struggle against extractivism is inseparable from broader fights for gender justice, Indigenous sovereignty, and ecological sustainability. The global resource economy is extractive, exploitative, and gendered—but resistance movements provide lessons and hope for alternative futures. Governments, international organizations, and activists must work together to implement legally binding agreements that hold corporations accountable and protect Indigenous land rights. Different identities influence environmental activism, so we need context-specific approaches. Women and Indigenous communities have long been at the forefront of these movements, resisting corporate exploitation while advancing alternative economic and governance models that challenge dominant paradigms of development. Organizations like WECAN, along with frameworks such as *Buen Vivir* and care economics, provide valuable insights into how we can move beyond extractivism toward a better existence for people and the planet. Recognizing and supporting these alternatives is essential for transforming the way societies interact with the environment and ensuring that economic development does not come at the cost of human rights and ecological integrity.

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