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Defending Land, Sustaining Community:

Care as a Framework for Anti-Extractivist Resistance in Covas do Barroso

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MSc Sociology

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Desces of degraus, a transição
energética ocupou as divisões
todas, deixas de caber
na tua própria casa.

A manhã ainda indecisa
entre as lavarias e o avanço
da lavra, atravessas o pátio, chegas
à rua, escolhes o que poderá sobreviver
à futura caliça
dos escombros: o odor do pão
tirado do forno, o lume
da lareira, a luz de junho
nos vidros das janelas,
o riso das crianças
a anunciar o Verão.

E é só isso que levas, o
que não podes levar: rodando
a cabeça por instantes,
olhando a casa
pela última vez.

José Carlos Barros,
'Pela Última Vez'
in *Lítio*.

Acknowledgements

Resumo

Esta dissertação explora o movimento de resistência contra a mineração de lítio em Covas do Barroso, Portugal, como um estudo de caso dentro do contexto mais amplo dos conflitos ambientais globais. Com base na Ecologia Política Feminista, o estudo examina como o cuidado funciona como um marco político e ético que sustenta e fortalece os esforços de resistência contra modelos de desenvolvimento extrativistas. Os resultados revelam que o cuidado tem um papel chave na resistência do Barroso, moldando tanto as práticas de gestão ambiental da comunidade quanto a sua crítica à economia verde. Ao posicionar o cuidado como um ato político e comunitário, o movimento oferece uma visão alternativa de sustentabilidade baseada na reciprocidade e apoio mútuo, desafiando as lógicas capitalistas que priorizam o lucro em detrimento do bem-estar ecológico e social. A dissertação contribui para a justiça ambiental e ecologia política ao destacar o papel transformador do cuidado na resistência ao extrativismo e no fortalecimento de redes de solidariedade. Sugere que abordagens centradas no cuidado poderiam inspirar um ativismo ambiental mais abrangente e influenciar políticas, oferecendo caminhos para modelos de desenvolvimento mais inclusivos e sustentáveis. As limitações incluem a especificidade do contexto rural e a dependência de perspectivas predominantemente do movimento de resistência, que podem não capturar totalmente a diversidade de opiniões dentro da comunidade. Essas limitações têm implicações para futuras pesquisas comparativas em diversos contextos sociopolíticos.

Palavras-chave: Mineração de Lítio; Movimento Anti-Extrativista; Ecologia Política Feminista; Cuidado como Práxis Política; Economia Verde; Justiça Ambiental.

Abstract

This thesis explores the anti-lithium mining resistance movement in Covas do Barroso, Portugal, as a case study within the broader context of global environmental conflicts. Grounded in Feminist Political Ecology, the study examines how care functions as a political and ethical framework that sustains and strengthens resistance efforts against extractivist development models. The findings suggest that care plays a key role to the anti-mining resistance in Barroso, shaping both the community's environmental stewardship practices and its critique of the green economy. By positioning care as a communal, political act, the movement provides an alternative vision of sustainability based on reciprocity and mutual aid, challenging capitalist logics that prioritize profit over ecological and social well-being. The thesis contributes to environmental justice and political ecology by highlighting the transformative role of care in resisting extractivism and fostering solidarity. It suggests that care-centered approaches could inform broader environmental activism and policy, offering pathways to more inclusive and transformative sustainable development models. Limitations include the specificity of the rural context and a reliance on perspectives primarily from the resistance movement, which may not fully capture the diversity of views within the community. These limitations have implications for future comparative research in diverse socio-political settings.

Keywords: Lithium Mining; Anti-Extravist Movement; Feminist Political Ecology; Care as Political Praxis; Green Economy; Environmental Justice.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

In recent years, the global push for renewable energy and decarbonization has led to a significant increase in the demand for lithium, a critical resource to produce batteries used in electric vehicles and energy storage technologies (Dunlap & Riquito, 2023). As the world transitions to a low-carbon economy, lithium mining has been framed as a crucial component of the so-called global green economy. However, its extraction raises critical concerns about the very idea of green development and environmental degradation, social justice issues, and the unequal distribution of economic benefits that come with it (Silva & Sareen, 2023; van Meer & Zografos, 2024; Pusceddu & Zerili, 2024). This tension is particularly evident in regions where local communities, often politically and economically marginalized, resist the encroachment of mining projects on their land and livelihoods (Saleth & Varov, 2023). One such example is Covas do Barroso, a rural village in northern Portugal, where the proposed extraction of lithium has sparked a fierce anti-mining resistance movement.

Covas do Barroso, a region recognized by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS), has been shaped by centuries of small-scale farming, pastoralism communal land use, and a rich, biodiverse ecosystem, which serve as the foundation of their socio-economic structure (Canelas & Carvalho, 2023; Dorn, 2021). However, in recent years, the area has attracted the attention of multinational mining companies, particularly Savannah Resources, which aims to establish one of Europe's largest lithium mining projects. The project, supported by the Portuguese government, is presented as an essential part of both Portugal's economic development strategy and Europe's transition to renewable energy (Dunlap & Riquito, 2023). While the project is framed as beneficial, the local community in Covas do Barroso views the lithium mining project with profound concern. The proposed open-pit mine threatens to disrupt the region's fragile ecosystem, pollute water sources, and displace agricultural activities that have sustained the community for centuries, thereby representing a fundamental threat to the environment, as well as locals' way of life and cultural heritage (Dorn, 2021). As such, the conflict has sparked a robust anti-mining resistance movement grounded in concerns over environmental justice and local right to self-determination, mirroring a broader global trend in which communities, often marginalized, resist extractive projects presented as part of green development's agenda (Giglio, 2021; Janubóva, 2021; Djukanovic, 2022; Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2022; Lazarević, 2024).

While there is substantial scholarly work on anti-mining resistance movements, particularly in the context of environmental justice, much less attention has been given to the role of care work as a structural

element of these struggles. The concept of care—whether in relation to the environment, community well-being, or social reproduction—remains underexplored as a critical factor shaping the organization and ethical frameworks of resistance movements. This research aims to address this gap by examining how care work, both as a practical necessity and a political stance, sustains and strengthens resistance efforts. Understanding the centrality of care in such movements can offer fresh perspectives on how local communities articulate alternative models of sustainability and challenge extractivist development paradigms.

This thesis aims to explore the anti-mining resistance movement in Covas do Barroso as a case study within this broader context of global environmental conflicts. By examining the local opposition to lithium mining in Portugal through the lens of Feminist Political Ecology (FPE), this research seeks to understand how the resistance movement challenges extractivist narratives and envisions alternative models of sustainability based on an ethic of care. Specifically, this thesis will investigate the two following questions: *How does the anti-mining movement in Covas do Barroso critique the green economy, and what role does care, as a political and ethical framework, play as a structural element in this resistance?*

This thesis has three primary objectives. *First*, it aims to critically examine the socio-political dynamics of the lithium mining conflict in Covas do Barroso, situating the local resistance movement within broader global trends of anti-mining struggles and green extractivism. *Second*, it seeks to analyze the role of care as a practical and ethical framework within the anti-mining movement, drawing on insights from FPE. By focusing on care as a central element of resistance, this research will highlight how local communities prioritize the well-being of people and ecosystems over profit in their opposition to mining. *Third*, this thesis will explore why including the praxis of care is essential in any transformative alternative to the prevailing industrial-scale, extractive model of green development.

This thesis is organized into six chapters. Following this introduction, **Chapter 2** offers a comprehensive literature review, providing a critical analysis of existing scholarship on green extractivism, environmental justice, and the role of care in resistance movements. **Chapter 3** outlines the methodology employed in this research, detailing the ethnographic methods, interviews, and participant observation conducted to investigate this case study. **Chapter 4** offers a thematic analysis of the key findings, focusing on how care work informs both the organization and motivation of the resistance. **Chapter 5** presents a discussion of these findings, linking them to broader theoretical frameworks and exploring their implications for environmental justice and FPE. Finally, **Chapter 6** concludes the thesis by summarizing the key insights and discussing the broader implications for sustainability and resistance against extractivism, while offering directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2.1. Covas do Barroso: A Case Study on Green Development & Environmental Conflict

Covas do Barroso, recognized for its cultural and natural heritage, has become a focal point in debates about the socio-ecological impacts of green extractivism (van Meer & Zografos, 2024). While the European Green Deal (EGD) presents lithium extraction as essential for the "green transition," local communities perceive these projects as a threat to their livelihoods and environmental stewardship (Dorn, 2021; Dunlap & Riquito, 2023). This case is emblematic of the broader clash between localized ecological practices and global capitalist pressures, exemplifies the growing tensions between global green transition efforts and local communities defending their traditional lifestyles.

2.1.1. The European Green Deal, Green Extractivism & Commodification of Nature

Lithium is central to Europe's green energy transition, and Portugal's reserves are portrayed playing a key role (Canelas & Carvalho, 2023). The framing of lithium extraction as environmentally necessary, however, often overlooks its local environmental and social costs. While lithium is touted as a key enabler of decarbonization, the processes of extracting and refining this critical mineral often perpetuate the same environmental and social harms that the green agenda seeks to mitigate (Tornel, 2023). While proponents argue that the environmental costs of lithium mining are outweighed by the global benefits of decarbonization, scholars in the fields of Political Ecology & Environmental Justice argue this perspective obscures the localized environmental impact communities endure (Fairhead, Leach and Scoones, 2012; Shiva, 2015; Acosta, 2013; Escobar, 2008; Dunlap, 2024). They critique this form of extractivism, which is often referred to as "green extractivism," which justifies the exploitation and extraction of natural resources under the guise of environmental sustainability, often leading to ecological harm to more rural or less economically developed regions, particularly in the Global South or peripheries of Europe, like rural Portugal (Dunlap & Riquito, 2023; Zografos & Robbins, 2020). These interventions mirror traditional patterns of resource exploitation, where the environmental and social costs are borne by marginalized communities while the benefits are accrued by urban centers and global markets (Adams, 2008; Cavanagh & Benjaminsen, 2017). This approach is argued to fail at challenging the uneven geography of environmental degradation and wealth accumulation, and the underlying global power structures that allow this imbalance, putting regions like Barroso at risk of becoming "green sacrifice zones" for Europe's development ambitions (Dunlap & Riquito, 2023, p.2). It defies the notion of environmental degradation as a purely technical phenomenon, showing instead how socio-political structures, power relations and economic interests influence the ecological apparatus (Adams, 2008; Robbins, 2019).

A key issue in green extractivism is its reliance on the commodification of nature, where natural resources—including land, water, forests, and minerals—are reduced into commodities for global markets (Dengler & Lang, 2021; Shiva, 2015). This process often leads to "green grabbing," a form of land dispossession wherein local communities lose access to their traditional lands, as corporations and governments privatize resources for green development projects (Fairhead, Leach & Scoones, 2012; Astuti & McGregor, 2017; Dunlap & Riquito, 2023). In Covas do Barroso, the proposed lithium mining project exemplifies this trend, threatening to expropriate communal land and displace residents. The literature highlights that the commodification of nature is especially problematic for rural and indigenous communities, whose livelihoods depend on sustainable land management but face restricted access due to new climate mitigation regimes (Acosta, 2013; Shiva, 2016: Andreucci et al., 2023; Tornel, 2023; Ruelas, Dunlap & Søyland 2023). By simplifying human-ecosystem relationships into quantifiable resources or economic inputs, green grabbing devalues the ecological and cultural significance of ecosystems and disrupts traditional ways of life or alternative ways of relating to land (Collard & Dempsey, 2013). This approach often excludes local communities from environmental policymaking, reproducing colonial patterns that impose top-down solutions from the Global North on the Global South, or centralized governments onto rural regions, without considering local contexts (Tzouvala, 2019). The proposed lithium mining in Covas do Barroso exemplifies this paradigm, as the local population claims to be excluded from decision-making processes, despite their knowledge on its sustainable management (Dorn, 2021).

Accordingly, critics argue that green developement, rather than transforming economic systems, deepens the market-driven, profit-oriented models that perpetuate ecological destruction (Dunlap, Verweijen & Tornel, 2024). The development agenda legitimizes violent degradation and elimination of ecosystems, reinforcing exploitative logics fundamentally incompatible with ecological health (Plumwood, 1986; Blaser, 2016). Lithium mining in Barroso is not merely a case of extracting a mineral; it is part of a broader global onto-epistemological paradigm of nature commodification, which treats the environment as an economic input to be controlled and extracted, rather than a living system to be nurtured and sustained (Dengler & Lang, 2021). Accordingly, green extractivism is considered not only a strategy and practice, but also a complex web of conditioned mentalities, worldviews, knowledges, that justify dominion over nature and its exploitation (Shapiro & McNeish, 2021; Dunlap, 2024; Dunlap, Verweijen & Tornel, 2024).

2.1.2. The Communal Agricultural System, Local Resistance & the Fight for an Alternative

At the heart of the resistance movement is the community's desire to protect their sustainable agricultural practices, communal land management, and biodiversity conservation (Dunlap & Riquito, 2023). The local agricultural practices are based on communal management of land (referred to as "*baldios*"), fosters not

only economic self-sufficiency but also a strong sense of cultural identity. Residents rely on a combination of agriculture, pastoralism, and tourism for their livelihoods, the basis of a balanced relationship with their land that has been nurtured for generations (Esteves, 2019; Canelas & Carvalho, 2023). However, the proposed lithium mining project threatens to disrupt this system, as much of the land targeted for extraction includes the community's communal holdings. The environmental degradation and displacement caused by the project has galvanized the community to resist, viewing the project as an existential threat (Dorn, 2021).

The anti-mining resistance, organized under the association "Unidos em Defesa do Barroso" ("*United in Defense of Barroso*"), has drawn broad support from local villagers, environmental organizations, and political groups. The movement's slogan, "Minas Não!" (No to Mines!), reflects its opposition to the incursions of extractive industries. The resistance is not only driven by environmental concerns but also stems from a broader mistrust of the central government, which the community perceives as prioritizing corporate interests over their dignity and well-being (Dorn, 2021). This resistance echoes global movements where marginalized communities, from Latin America to rural Europe, are pushing back against extractive industries that prioritize national or corporate gains at the expense of local ecologies and livelihoods (Andreucci, Garcia-López & Valdivia, 2023; Tornel, 2023; Almeida et al., 2023).

In their resistance, the community of Covas do Barroso also champions alternative models of sustainability, countering the EGD push for green capitalism, which critics argue prioritizes economic growth over ecological balance (Dunlap & Riquito, 2023). While the EGD frames technological innovations, such as renewable energy and electric vehicles, as solutions to climate change, it overlooks the systemic over-consumption of resources that lies at the root of environmental degradation (Ossewaarde & Ossewaarde-Lowtoo, 2020). In contrast, the community's traditional land management systems align with degrowth principles, emphasizing reduced consumption, local autonomy, and biodiversity conservation (Dengler & Lang, 2021; Dunlap, 2024). Covas do Barroso's resistance, therefore, goes beyond merely opposing the lithium mine. It calls for a recognition of their contributions to sustainability and demands meaningful participation in decision-making processes that have so far been absent, despite the significant implications of the mining project for the community's future (Carvalho & Canelas, 2023).

2.2. Feminist Political Ecology: Intersecting Care with Environmental Justice

FPE provides a critical framework for understanding the intersection of care work, social reproduction, and environmental justice. By integrating these elements into the analysis of environmental conflicts, FPE highlights how unequal power dynamics, global capitalism, and colonial legacies shape resource extraction and its consequences for both human and ecological systems (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015). Central to this framework is the recognition that care—historically regarded as a domestic and gendered activity—is a

collective and political practice crucial for sustaining life in both human and ecological contexts (Federici, 2010; Harcourt, 2013). Tronto (2013, p.19) defines care as "a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our "world" so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web." FPE critiques capitalist models of development, particularly those driven by "white technomasculine perspectives" (Bell, Daggett & Labuski, 2020, *cited in* Dunlap & Riquito, 2023), for neglecting the essential role of care in sustaining communities and ecosystems. Instead of economic growth, FPE emphasizes care as central to long-term health and sustainability (Rose, 2013; Bauhardt & Harcourt, 2018). This approach redefines care work as vital to resisting exploitation, emphasizing that caring for people, land, and communities should take precedence over profit-driven practices, especially when these threaten both ecosystems and community well-being, notably in the context of green extractivism (Montes & Paris Pombo, 2019; Mies & Shiva, 2014).

A key concept in FPE is social reproduction—the activities and relationships that sustain life across generations, such as caregiving, sustenance work, and emotional support (Tronto, 1993; Fraser, 2016; Federici, 2004). Traditionally devalued, care work is reconceptualized as a public and political practice essential for community resilience (Harcourt, 2013; Reese & Johnson, 2022). In addition to sustaining human life, care is also fundamental to maintaining the resilience of ecosystems (Wichterich, 2015). Environmental stewardship—through practices like sustainable land use, water management, and biodiversity conservation—is seen as integral to social reproduction and human economies (Acosta, 2013; Berkes, 2008). This is especially evident in rural and indigenous communities, where resource management practices balance human needs with long-term environmental sustainability (Rocheleau, 2015; Berkes, Colding & Folke, 2000). These stewardship practices often reflect cultural relationships with nature, viewing the environment as a living, interdependent system that requires care, akin to nurturing any other life form (Kimmerer, 2013; Shiva, 2016). Scholars like Berkes (2008) and Shiva (2016) emphasize that such practices challenge extractivist paradigms by proposing a relationship with nature rooted in respect and sustainability, rather than dominance and exploitation. This shift calls for rethinking the invisibility of care labor, emphasizing its central role in sustaining both human and ecological life (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013).

Accordingly, FPE extends the concept of care by framing it as a civic responsibility that permeates all levels of society—individual, community, and government (Herd & Meyer, 2002; Trogal, 2017). It redefines care as a commons, to be collectively managed like land, water, or forests, challenging neoliberal approaches of privatization and commodification (Harcourt, 2013; Brownhill & Turner, 2020; Dengler & Lang, 2021). This perspective ensures that care work, essential for sustaining life, is valued and organized

collectively, redistributing its burden away from marginalized groups (Caffentzis & Federici, 2014). FPE mirrors ecofeminist critiques of capitalist exploitation, where both care labor and natural resources are systematically undervalued and freely exploited. Federici (2018) notes that capitalist accumulation relies on the free appropriation of labor and resources, especially unpaid care work traditionally carried out by women. This parallels the exploitation of the commons, such as land and forests, where local communities—often led by women—manage resources but are rarely recognized for their contributions (Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2001; Salleh, 2017). By positioning care as a commons, FPE addresses the crisis of social reproduction and integrates care with resource management, recognizing that these challenges are interconnected. Subsequently, FPE advocates for economies grounded in reciprocity, mutual aid, and sustainability (Wichterich, 2015).

2.3. Care Work as a Framework for Environmental Justice Movements

In anti-extractivist movements, care work has become a deliberate political act of resistance. As extractive industries encroach on communities, caring for families, land, and ecosystems transforms into a strategy of collective defense and community cohesion (Harcourt & Bauhardt, 2018; Venes et al., 2023; Montes & Paris Pombo, 2019). A key example of this dynamic is the global study on women's leadership in anti-mining activism by Venes et al. (2023), which examines how care work underpins resistance in 151 mining conflicts across the world. It shows how mining disproportionately impacts women and local communities—through, for example, the loss of traditional livelihoods, pollution and resource scarcity, and erosion of social structures which tend to increase unpaid labor burdens—while simultaneously transforming their caregiving roles into organized resistance, including direct protests, legal advocacy, and sustainable livelihood initiatives. This resistance also challenges traditional gender norms, as women in countries like Ecuador and Colombia integrate ancestral knowledge and environmental strategies, blending cultural practices with modern activism. The study underscores that women's activism extends beyond private or supportive roles; it mobilizes entire communities, addressing both environmental preservation and broader structural challenges such as patriarchy and social marginalization. By bringing care work into public, collective action, women are not only resisting extractivism but also redefining the nature of activism itself, uniting social and environmental resilience against industrial exploitation (Venes et al., 2023).

Similarly, Montes & Paris Pombo (2019) examines *Las Patronas* in Mexico, where women's charitable care work for migrants evolved into collective resistance against state neglect, demonstrating how acts of nurturing can build solidarity and resilience. Indigenous women in Guatemala also use caregiving as a foundation for environmental justice, linking family care with the defense of land and

cultural heritage. These examples show that care work is not only about individual well-being but about sustaining whole communities facing industrial exploitation.

Care work also strengthens resistance movements by addressing the emotional and physical needs of activists. Extinction Rebellion (XR), for instance, integrates a praxis of "regenerative culture" that emphasizes self-care, people care, and planet care as core principles, sustaining the physical and emotional well-being of activists to support long-term resistance (Westwell & Bunting, 2020). Through self-care practices such as emotional check-ins and climate grief workshops, spaces are created wherein activists can process their feelings of despair, anxiety, and frustration in response to the escalating climate crisis. This provision of emotional support aims to prevent burnout thereby promoting the longevity of both individual activists and maintaining the resilience of the movement. "People care" includes affinity groups and well-being officers who provide support during high-risk actions, fostering solidarity and mutual aid within the movement. "Planet care" reflects XR's commitment to working towards a sustainable future. It involves envisioning and striving for environmental practices that protect ecosystems and promote long-term ecological balance. By combining emotional, ecological, and collective care, XR provides a model for environmental movements to support activists' social and ecological goals, making care work central to effective and sustainable resistance strategies. XR's approach aligns with FPE frameworks, which emphasize the role of care in sustaining life, building resilient communities and social movements, as well as resisting the alienating impacts of modern extractivist capitalism.

In this way, care work within social movements builds solidarity and mobilizes individuals by addressing practical and emotional needs, transforming individual grievances into shared struggles (Santos, 2020; Reese & Johnson, 2022). Santos (2020) illustrates this with a case study on the Platform of Those Affected by Mortgages (PAH) in Spain. In PAH, care work operated on multiple levels: "emotional care" helped members overcome the shame and isolation associated with financial hardship; "identity care" restored their sense of agency; "participatory care" facilitated their involvement in direct actions like eviction blockades by offering logistical and legal support. This collective care fostered resilience, uniting members around a common purpose, which eventually culminated in PAH's successful organization of its first eviction blockade, showcasing care work's role in laying the groundwork for successful collective action. Foster (2021) further emphasizes that care work, including emotional labor, strengthens solidarity by creating emotional connections to place and community, uniting members around shared environmental values. This solidarity extends beyond human communities, encompassing ecosystems as well. In urban environmental stewardship movements, collective care for people and the environment strengthens community bonds, reinforcing resistance against environmental injustices by linking human and ecological well-being (Foster, 2021).

2.4. Care as a Transformative Political Praxis

In conclusion, FPE reframes care work as a transformative political praxis vital for sustaining communities and ecosystems under capitalist exploitation and envormental degradation (Bauhardt, 2014). By redefining care as an ethical and political practice, FPE critiques profit-driven development paradigms, advocating for models based on reciprocity, stewardship, and mutual aid. In communities impacted by extractivism, care work transcends traditional roles, becoming a strategy for survival and resistance. Studies, like those by Venes et al. (2023), reveal how care work strengthens anti-extractivist movements, forming resilient networks that extend beyond gender roles to encompass whole communities. Collective care not only counters external threats but also fosters internal cohesion, building alliances that expand beyond local struggles. As Santos (2020) and Westwell and Bunting (2020) show, care work sustains social cohesion and long-term participation, offering alternative development models that prioritize collective well-being and environmental justice. By expanding the scope of care, FPE highlights its central role in fostering solidarity and enabling resistance to powerful external forces, ultimately paving pathways toward sustainable and just futures (Elmhirst, 2011; Coulthard, 2014).

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

3.1. Research Approach & Research Questions

This thesis employs a qualitative research approach grounded in ethnographic methods to explore the anti-mining resistance movement in Covas do Barroso, Portugal. Ethnography is particularly well-suited for capturing the lived experiences of the local community and non-local supporters, providing a deep understanding of the social, cultural, and political dynamics at play. The theoretical framework guiding this study is Feminist Political Ecology (FPE), which offers a critical lens on the intersections of gender, care, and environmental justice. FPE critiques capitalist extractivism and situates care as a central ethical and political practice within socio-environmental resistance. Although this research applies a feminist lens to examine care work within the resistance, it does not conduct a gender analysis, as this goes beyond the scope of the thesis. Instead, the feminist framework serves as a conceptual tool to understand care work's significance in resisting extractivism.

The study is structured around these two central research questions: *How does the anti-mining movement in Covas do Barroso critique the green economy, and what role does care, as a political and ethical framework, play as a structural element in this resistance?* To answer these, the research will, firstly, explore the specific motivations driving the anti-mining resistance, and the critiques local residents offer regarding the green economy and its extractive practices. Secondly, it will analyze the ways in which care,

both as an ethical framework and as an embodied practice, influence the organization and motivations of the resistance movement. Finally, it will briefly investigate how does the praxis of care provide a tangible alternative to the industrial model of green extractivism, and how are these alternatives reflected in the movement's strategies and actions.

3.2. Data Collection Methods & Data Analysis

This research employed a combination of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to gather a holistic understanding of the movement and the role of care work within it.

Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted with fifteen participants, including seven local residents who oppose the mining project; seven non-local supporters and activists living in Barroso or otherwise heavily involved in the struggle; and one government official involved in discussions about the mining project. You can find a table with a overview of the participant sample in Annex 1, and the interview guide, which outlines the key questions and themes explored during these interviews, can be found in Annex 2. All interviews were conducted in Portuguese and later translated, except for one, which was carried out in a mix of Portuguese and Castellano. The interviews with local residents were all conducted in presence in either Covas do Barroso or Romaínho, two of the villages in the Barroso region. Six of the interviews with non-local supporters were conducted online and recorded on a phone, with only one done face-to-face. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling participants to share their perspectives freely while ensuring key themes—such as care work, resistance, and critiques of extractivism—were covered. These interviews provided rich, qualitative data on both individual and collective motivations for the resistance, as well as how care shapes its organization.

Participant observation was equally crucial to understanding how care is embodied in everyday practices within the movement. I attended two "Acampamento em Defesa do Barroso" camps in August 2023 and 2024. These five-day camps brought together hundreds of individuals in solidarity with the community's fight and were structured around assemblies, discussions, and cultural activities. Through my involvement, I observed how care—for both the environment and each other— acted as an organizing principle within the movement, both implicitly and explicitly. In addition to these events, I participated in a machine blockade organized by the resistance, during which I had a direct encounter with a spokesperson for Savannah Resources. This experience provided firsthand insights into the confrontational dynamics between the community and the corporation, reinforcing an understanding of residents' narratives about their experiences with the private company. I also attended the 9th National Meeting for Climate Justice (ENJC) in April 2024, which contextualized the Barroso resistance within broader national climate justice movements. Participation in the April 25th March in Lisbon, a national day celebrating liberty, offered

further insights into how the Barroso resistance frames its struggle within Portugal's historical narratives of freedom and social justice. Additionally, I conducted two more informal visits to Covas do Barroso, during which I accompanied residents in their daily activities such as caretaking and pastoral work, providing deeper insight into communal and cultural dynamics.

To supplement these methods, document analysis was conducted. I examined pamphlets distributed by the resistance, publications from local associations, and media coverage of the conflict. This provided a broader context to the narratives shared during interviews and observations, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how the movement is framed both internally and externally.

The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved transcribing and coding interviews to identify recurring themes. Field notes from participant observations were also coded, allowing me to integrate lived experiences with personal and collective narratives. The documents I analyzed helped frame the resistance movement within broader socio-political discourses, enriching the contextual understanding of the data.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

Given the politically sensitive nature of the anti-mining resistance, ethical considerations were paramount. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Participants who requested anonymity were guaranteed that their identities would be protected. My dual role as both a researcher and an active supporter of the struggle required continuous reflexivity. As a member of the art collective "Coro dos Anjos," I was embedded in the movement in ways that inherently influenced my interactions. This necessitated ongoing reflection on how my involvement shaped both the research and the community's perception of my role.

Conducting research on care work within this context presents inherent contradictions, as care demands proximity, empathy, and involvement—qualities often at odds with the academic framework that emphasizes detachment and objectivity. The slow, attentive rhythm required to cultivate trust and build reciprocal relationships in care work is at odds with the pace of academic research, which often prioritizes efficiency over depth. Moreover, the subjective nature of care—rooted in emotions, relationships, and ethical commitments—complicates the traditional methodological detachment expected in academic inquiry. These tensions challenge the conventional structures of knowledge production and compel a more reflexive approach. As a researcher embedded in the community and actively participating in the resistance, I was constantly negotiating my dual role as both an observer and a participant. This duality required critical reflection on the ethics of representation, particularly in contexts where academic knowledge production can inadvertently mirror the extractive practices it seeks to critique. Navigating these complexities

demanded a balance between maintaining the rigor of academic analysis and honoring the principles of care that underpin the resistance movement.

3.4. Limitations

Several factors affected the scope and depth of this research. One key limitation was the time constraints, which limited the number of interviews and the extent to which I could immerse myself in the community. Establishing deeper relationships with community members would have allowed for a richer, more nuanced understanding of their daily practices and resistance strategies. Additionally, my dual role as a researcher and activist, while providing unique insights into the movement, introduced potential biases. Recognizing this, I remained committed to reflexive practices, regularly reflecting on my positionality and how it influenced my research. Cross-checking findings and interpretations with participants helped mitigate these biases, ensuring that the community's voice remained central to the analysis. Active engagement, combined with extensive dialogue with participants, helped minimize potential biases and reinforced the integrity of the research.

CHAPTER 4: Thematic Analysis

4.1. THEME 1: Motivations for Resistance

At the core of the resistance in Covas do Barroso are the deeply personal and collective motivations of the local community. To understand their opposition to the proposed lithium mining project, it is essential to explore the emotional, cultural, and livelihood-based reasons driving their struggle. Starting the analysis with these motivations provides a human-centered entry point into the conflict, highlighting the lived realities of those most affected. These motivations are rooted in their profound connection to the land, their pride in their sustainable way of life, and their determination to protect their cultural and social fabric. Resistance is driven by a shared understanding that the proposed lithium mining project threatens not just their livelihoods but their identity, heritage, and the values they hold dear.

4.1.1. Motivations for Resistance: Pride in Culture, Connection to Land & Land-Based Lifestyles

A recurring theme in the data is the deep connection that residents of Covas do Barroso have to their land and independent lifestyle. Many interviewees expressed a sense of pride in their way of life, which revolves around agriculture, local food production, and living in harmony with the natural environment. Their relationship with the land goes beyond economic survival; it is tied to their identity, heritage, sense of place and belonging. This pride fuels their resistance against the lithium mining project, as they see the land as integral to their well-being. Many residents express a strong connection to their agricultural roots,

emphasizing the importance of producing their own food and maintaining control over their land. Maria's narrative is particularly telling in this respect:

> *"I have always lived off agriculture, and I still do. It's a profession that, well, isn't valued... but it's something I love. (...) I was raised in this, and I love it. It's healthy; we are out in the fields. Not like the people in the city who are under all that stress. Here, no. We have days like that, but it's easier. We live on our own. And we have a sustainable life. (...) We're not rich, but we harvest everything we eat from our garden."* (Maria)

Here, Maria's words reflect both a love for her work and a critique of the lack of recognition that agricultural labor receives in wider society. Her pride stems from her knowledge that her community is, in great part, self-reliant, producing their own food and maintaining their health through what they grow and consume. This self-sufficiency gives them not only a sense of independence but also of serenity, contrasting sharply with the stress and dependency they associate with urban life. Local residents spoke of how their lifestyle represented true sustainability, through living in harmony and relationship with the landscape around them. However, they believe the proposed lithium project will fundamentally disrupt their way of life. The community relies on the land not only for food but also for a sense of peace, serenity, and sustainability. As Ana Maria explains:

> *"We have a peace here that you can't find anywhere else. But now they want to destroy everything and leave us with nothing. The noise, the dust... even the children won't be able to play in the streets in peace anymore."* (Ana Maria)

The peace and tranquility that the community cherishes are seen as key aspects of their identity. Connection to the land, in their view, is about more than just working the fields; it's about maintaining a lifestyle that provides balance and satisfaction. This contrasts sharply with the promises made by the mining companies, who have been offering them economic opportunities in exchange for environmental disruption. The community is skeptical, knowing that the short-term economic gains could never compensate for the long-term damage to their land and culture: *"They come here offering jobs, but it's a lie. Just look at previous mining projects to see what happens. They only live off lies... At the end of it, lithium is not going to save the planet."* (Maria)

A major concern for the residents is the protection of their water sources, which they view as one of their greatest treasures. The pristine water in Covas do Barroso is a central part of their sustainable lifestyle and their agricultural practices. This sensitivity toward water ties directly to their sense of

environmental care and stewardship, making it a core part of their resistance. Paulo explains the centrality of water to their lives:

> *"We have water, which is one of the greatest riches we have. It's pure water. We depend on it for everything—our food, our life in the fields, everything. If the mine goes ahead, they will take all our water and ruin everything for us."* (Paulo)

This preocupation with water demonstrates not only awareness of their dependence on natural resources, but also a profound sensitivity to how mining could disrupt the delicate ecological balance they have maintained for generations. In this context, care for the land is inseparable from care for the water—the two are intertwined, and the preservation of water sources is essential to sustaining their way of life. Moreover, water is not spoken of as just a resource for farming; it represents health and community survival, as well as the continuity of tradition, given their ancient communal systems of water management. The semi-self-sufficient lifestyle of the Barroso community is not merely an economic choice but a cultural and emotional practice. They take pride in living in a way that sustains both themselves and the land, offering an alternative to modern, industrialized life. As Elisabete notes:

> *"First comes health. Then comes our daily bread. We work hard, but we live our lives without harming anyone. We have this spirit of mutual help and community, which is beautiful. We don't need much to make a celebration. Just a few people get together, share some food, and suddenly we're having a party."* (Elisabete)

This sense of community and belonging is a core reason why the residents are so determined to protect their land. The prospect of losing this to the mining project not only threatens their livelihoods but also the fabric of their social lives, which are tied to their closeknit relationship with the land and each other. The struggle is, in essence, a fight to protect their sense of place—their cultural identity and the interdependent relationships that sustain them. In this way, the threat posed by the lithium mine has galvanized the resistance in Barroso not only because of potential economic and environmental damage but because it threatens to destroy the very foundation of their cultural and emotional world. Their pride in their sustainable lifestyle and their determination to protect their land and water are at the heart of their fight against external forces that seek to impose a different way of life on them. In this context, the community's resistance is an act of care—a defense driven by concern and emotional attachment to their land, water, community and way of life. It is this combination of pride, connection, and care that makes their resistance both deeply personal and profoundly political.

4.1.2. Outrage and Betrayal: Disillusionment with Government and Corporate Interests

A prominent theme in the resistance to the lithium mining project is the profound sense of outrage and betrayal that residents feel toward both government officials and corporate entities involved. Many interviewees express disillusionment with the institutions that they believe are meant to protect their interests but instead seem to prioritize economic gain over the well-being of local populations. The broken promises and lack of respect from these external actors fuel an intense emotional response, driving the community's sustained resistance. Aida's frustration reflects the indignation and disbelief felt by many in the community:

> *"It was for love of the land and indignation. Because it wasn't fair. How could something like this be done just like that, without us having a say in it? And it isn't fair for someone to come and take it from us just because they want to, without us having any voice at all."* (Aida)

This quote encapsulates the residents' perception that they have been excluded from the decision-making process, treated as if they had no rights or authority over their own land. The lithium project is seen as not only a physical disruption but a symbolic attack on their dignity, autonomy, and their ability to control their future. Aida, like many others, feels that the community's connection to the land, the generations of developed relationship with it is being completely ignored. They feel the community, as well as the natural landscape they value so deeply is being commodified and exploited by external forces, leaving them feeling disrespected and abandoned. Moreover, Aida criticizes the false narratives employed by mining companies and government officials to justify the project:

> *"And then it's not just about protecting, it's about pretending. 'We are here to save.' Save what? Who are we trying to fool? For me, it's so frustrating, this talk of revitalizing. Are we joking? I even think, fine, use that tactic on us, the backward people, the ones behind the mountains, okay. But to the general public? And the worst thing is, that propaganda is accepted. It makes no sense. It really makes no sense, especially at the level of government—how do they fall for such nonsense and do nothing?"* (Aida)

Aida's words highlight the frustration with the false promises of economic revitalization and environmental protection that the project's proponents claim to offer. The manipulation of public opinion, especially through propaganda, is seen as an insult to the community's intelligence and an exploitation of their rural context, which is often stereotyped as backward or uneducated. Aida is not just angry about the project itself, but about how easily these false narratives are accepted by government officials and the wider public, leaving the community to feel isolated, discriminated against, and misunderstood. For residents like

Aida, the promises of jobs and economic benefits are seen as hollow and deceitful. They have witnessed similar projects in other regions and realize that any economic gains are short-lived, benefiting corporations while leaving communities to deal with the long-term environmental and social consequences. The sense of betrayal is compounded by the lack of transparency and the perception that decisions are being made without genuinely considering the impact on the local community. As such, this deep-rooted mistrust toward both government representatives and corporations act as fuel to their resistance.

Adding to this sense of violation is the militarized intimidation that the community experiences. Several interviewees describe patrols by security forces through their villages, further escalating the tension and fear. Ana Maria recalls these incursions: *"They pass by three or four times a day... If we're not watching, they enter the fields without permission."* These actions amplify the feeling of being under constant surveillance and control, reinforcing the community's belief that they are being treated as obstacles rather than as stakeholders in their own future. The emotional toll of living under this surveillance cannot be overstated—it adds to the community's sense of vulnerability and heightens their outrage. The presence of security forces feels like a physical manifestation of the broader systems of power that are ignoring their voices and devaluing their rights. This sense of betrayal, both emotional and physical, strengthens the resolve of the community to stop the mining project, despite the growing pressure. The outrage and disillusionment the residents feel are not simply reactive emotions; they are deeply tied to a broader distrust of systemic power structures. The community perceives that these systems, designed to protect them, have been co-opted by industrial interests, leaving rural populations like theirs vulnerable.

4.1.3. Care as Fuel to Protect Community and Environment

The theme of care emerges as a powerful, unifying force in the resistance to the lithium mining project. For the residents of Covas do Barroso, care for the land is not an abstract concept; it is central to their daily lives, their identity, and the continuity of their community. This care manifests in their environmental stewardship—how they manage the land, water, and resources sustainably—as well as in their commitment to each other's well-being. Elisabete captures the emotional weight of this struggle: *"Yes, sadness... anguish... It would have a huge impact on everything—on the environment, on nature, on the water... It will have a huge impact... on our lives too."* Elisabete's words speak to the emotional burden that the threat of the mine places on the community. The notion of care, therefore, is deeply embedded in their resistance—not just care for the environment, but care for their social fabric, collective identity and future generations. The community sees themselves as the stewards of the land, and this stewardship is built on generations of local knowledge and sustainable practices. Daniel's reflection on their agricultural practices reveals the intimate knowledge they have of the environment:

"Here, we don't have large fires because everything is cultivated... Perhaps there are more areas where people don't live off agriculture... We live off agriculture here, we use everything. And because we use everything, when a fire comes, all of this is already cultivated." (Daniel)

Daniel's explanation illustrates the practical wisdom the community has developed in managing their landscape. Their tending to the land not only sustain their livelihoods but also serve to protect the environment, preventing destructive events like wildfires. This relationship with the land is something that cannot be replicated by outsiders, and it underscores the community's role as caretakers.

Care also extends beyond the environment to the interpersonal relationships within the community. Residents express a strong sense of mutual aid and solidarity, which has historically allowed them to survive and thrive in a rural setting. Even though some relationships have been distorted by the company's introduction of new tensions and conflicts, residents still express profound cohesion. Nevertheless, they fear that they will lose the support systems that have kept their community resilient for generations. In this context, resisting the mine is also an act of protecting care itself—the care they have for the land, for each other, and for future generations. The resistance is a way of safeguarding the values of collectivity, reflecting their belief that what is at stake is their affective and relational realities, which they perceive should be central to any decision-making process about their future.

4.1.4. Non-Local Activists: Finding a Sense of Purpose & Belonging

Many of the non-local activists I interviewed who came to support the resistance in Covas do Barroso were driven by a profound sense of disconnection from urban life and a desire to reconnect with nature, community, and a more meaningful way of life. For these supporters, the land and people of Barroso filled a void, offering a space where they could engage with authentic community values, the natural environment, and a purposeful struggle that resonates with their concerns about sustainability, social justice, and resistance to capitalist forces. Their involvement transcends solidarity; it is a personal journey toward belonging, as they embrace the ethos of care and collectivity embodied by Barroso's residents. Paula, one of these activists, describes her experience as a revelation:

"I had been looking to live in the countryside (...). At the time, I was in a Parisian bubble. I didn't have a connection to any countryside (...). I think unconsciously I was looking for a home, a place where I would feel good and that I would want to take care of... Covas isn't only countryside but also a territory in a struggle." (Paula)

For Paula, Barroso offered the home she had been searching for—a place where she could form a cultural and emotional attachment to a way of life centered on community, mutual care, and environmental stewardship. The land, and the people inhabiting it, provided a sense of fulfillment that urban life could not offer. For many activists, Barroso is not only an escape from urban alienation but also a return to a lifestyle rooted in connection and belonging. Alberto shares a similar sentiment:

> *"I had the brilliant idea of moving to the countryside. A classic: find a piece of land, permaculture, self-sufficiency, communities that go in a different direction... I loved the villages and I had really good contact with the locals."* (Alberto)

Alberto's experience reflects the pull of the land, where activists not only find a physical space to cultivate their values of sustainability and self-sufficiency but also feel embraced by the local community. In Barroso, he found more than just a place to experiment with land-based practices; he encountered a community that welcomed him, shared resources, and offered support. This spirit of mutual aid and generosity inspired his decision to move to Barroso, not just to support the resistance but to find a sense of personal fulfillment.

For some, Barroso represents a meeting point where their various social, ecological, and political concerns converge and reinforce each other. Here, activists see the fight against capitalism, environmental degradation, and community disintegration intersect: *"I was looking for this: a meeting point between all my preoccupations, all of my islands of thought... Covas is a place where all of these fights come together."* Barroso is seen as more than a village under threat from lithium mining; it represents a microcosm of global struggles against industrialization, extractivism, and the commodification of nature. Supporting the resistance here enables activists to engage with multiple layers of activism—from local environmental protection to broader movements for social and environmental justice. For Chei, her involvement in Barroso allowed her to reconnect with issues she previously engaged with, particularly indigenous movements:

> *"I used to be very involved with the Indigenous Forum in Lisbon (...). And what I felt at that moment was, I don't need to cross the ocean to fight for this, I have it right here, exactly where I am... In my roots, my blood, in the place where I'm from (...). Not in so-called 'Portugal,' but in the territory I'm on, my language, my culture... And looking at the practices, at the customs in Barroso, I could see ancient things, almost pagan (...). If being indigenous is being connected to the land where you're from, then I saw many elements that made me feel I was among such a people."* (Chei)

For Chei, the resistance in Barroso echoes the cosmovision and land-based practices she observed in indigenous movements elsewhere. Her involvement in Barroso becomes a way to fight locally for the same

values of land-based connection and resistance that she had previously supported globally. This realization—that the same principles of indigeneity, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship were present in Barroso—deepened her commitment to the struggle, allowing her to see Barroso not just as a local issue but as part of a global fight for justice.

Another recurring theme for non-local activists is the sense that Barroso fills a void in their lives. Many come from urban settings where they feel disconnected from community and nature. In Barroso, they find not only a sense of belonging but also the chance to engage with a way of life under threat yet rich in meaning and connection. Alberto recounts how his interaction with locals, like Afonso, who invited him into his home and shared food and stories, left a lasting impression:

> *"One of the most striking moments was with Afonso... He invited me to his house because I was trying to buy homemade eggs. And when I found him at the café, he invited me over... He ended up offering me potatoes, onions, and even gave me a fishing rod."* (Alberto)

This generosity embodies the communitarian values that activists have come to cherish in Barroso. This sense of being welcomed into a culture of care and mutual aid, ended up reinforcing their motivation to support the resistance. For them, Barroso represents an alternative to the alienation they experience in urban settings—a place where relationships to people, land, and community were interpreted as more authentic and fulfiling.Ultimately, their motivations stem from the belief that the way of life in Covas do Barroso is worth defending not only for the local community's sake but for the broader values it represents. The connection to the land, the strong sense of community, and the commitment to environmental care symbolize a lifestyle increasingly rare in a world dominated by industrialization and capitalist expansion. As Paula notes, the fight in Barroso is not just about lithium mining; it's about preserving a way of life that offers a model for sustainable, meaningful living in harmony with nature: *"There is a way of life here... a way of being, a way of doing things... that is already in struggle. It's not just the lithium—it's everything. This way of life is under threat."* For these non-local supporters, defending Barroso is also defending a worldview that recognizes the importance of connection, care, and community over profit and consumption. In Barroso, they find not only a place to belong but also a cause that aligns with their deepest values—the defense of a life that is whole, meaningful, and sustainable.

4.2. THEME 2: Collective Responsibility as the Foundation of the Movement

At the heart of the resistance in Covas do Barroso lies a profound sense of collective responsibility—a key manifestation of care within the movement. Both local residents and non-local activists were seen to embrace the principles of mutual support, care, and shared responsibility, transforming the resistance into

a unified struggle. This collective ethos is deeply rooted in Barroso's communal culture, shaping not only the community's daily life but also their organized response to the threat posed by the lithium mining project. Through this shared sense of responsibility, the movement draws resilience, unity, and strength in the face of powerful external pressures.

4.2.1. Resilience Through the Local Community's Collectivist Nature

In Barroso, collective responsibility has long been woven into the fabric of daily life, particularly in Romaínho, the village closest to the projected mining site. For generations, mutual support has been a way of life, expressed through cooperative farming, caregiving, and communal tasks. Within this context, the anti-mining resistance feels like an organic extension of the community's cultural practices, where villagers naturally rally to defend their land and way of life. As Susana describes it, *"Here, people are impeccable. I love the people. We are not many, but we always show up for each other. When it's time to sow potatoes or harvest them, we always help each other out. We are very united"* (Susana). Similarly, Elisabete highlights this strong sense of solidarity: *"Here in Romaínho, we have always been united. There's always help when someone needs it. When one of us can't manage, someone is always ready to step in."*

These sentiments demonstrate that solidarity is integral to the community's social fabric, shaping both their daily interactions and fueling their resistance. The transition from everyday support to organized collective resistance has been seamless, rooted in a shared understanding of mutual responsibility and a determination to protect each other and their land. From attending protests to organizing blockades, residents have taken direct action against the mining company, unified by a commitment to the future of their community and environment. As Ana Maria explains, *"If we weren't united, they would have already done more than they have. People are doing everything they can to make sure this doesn't happen."*

The community's solidarity becomes especially evident during times of heightened tension, such as when villagers had to activate a seven-month blockade to protect their common lands from the encroachment of mining machinery. To sustain the blockade, residents took turns keeping watch over the site, organizing themselves into shifts while also balancing caretaking, pastoral, and agricultural duties—critical to their rural economy. This community-led blockade was further challenged by what residents described as a deliberate strategy by Savannah Resources to wear them down. As Luna, a non-local supporter, reflects, *"It was a conscious move from the private company to try to exhaust the people even before the mining begins. It's part of their extractivist tactics."*

Despite these tactics, the community's determination remained unwavering. The willingness to endure discomfort and fatigue over an extended period reflects their commitment to the cause. Supporters

from a national network of allies were also mobilized to join the blockade, traveling to Covas do Barroso to help ease the community's burden by participating in shifts. This collective effort allowed the residents to maintain the blockade while awaiting court decisions. As Paula describes, *"[The] blockade was a heavy experience for the people (...) but it created a very interesting meeting space, of intimacy, reflection, and mutual aid."* This experience of unity under pressure underscored the strength of the community's shared values, revealing that their unity could withstand even the most exhausting and protracted challenges posed by corporate forces. These principles of solidarity and collective responsibility continue to sustain their fight against both physical and psychological pressures.

Savannah Resources has also attempted to undermine the resistance by offering financial incentives certain individuals, aiming to divide the village. However, the majority of villagers have remained firm in their opposition, understanding that the promises of economic gain cannot compansate the long-term consequences of environmental degradation. Alberto reflects on the company's attempts to fracture the community:

> *There's a sense of collective responsibility—whether consciously or unconsciously, it's constant. The company has tried, through the usual tactics, to divide the people by offering economic benefits and necessary services to some individuals (...). But the community shows good firmness in not letting those things penetrate."* (Alberto)

Maria, confirms the observation: *"They come here with talk of offering jobs. But if we wanted jobs, we wouldn't be living here. (...) We want to preserve what was left to us by our grandparents, our parents, so that tomorrow our children can also find it the way it was."* (Maria). These reflections highlight how collective responsibility acts as a protective force, ensuring that fleeting financial incentives do not fracture the community. This shared commitment to preserving the land for future generations reinforces the community's resilience against corporate interests and strengthens their collective identity.

4.2.2. The Importance of Assemblies and Information-Sharing

A key part of the community's collective participation in the resistance involves information-sharing and decision-making through formal and informal assemblies. The *Assembleia de Compartes*, which is responsible for managing the communal lands, plays a central role in this process, alongside the *Unidos em Defesa do Barroso* association. These assemblies are crucial for maintaining transparency and ensuring that

all community members are informed and involved in the fight against the mining project. Every significant decision, from blockades to legal action, is discussed and agreed upon through these assemblies. Aida, who serves as President of the *Baldio* (the common lands) describes the importance of these gatherings in the decision-making process:

> *"There are always group meetings, internal meetings, and when there are bigger problems or issues, there are meetings with the whole community. (...) All decisions we make—whether it's about the blockade or going to court—everything has to be discussed in the Assembleia de Compartes. Everything is explained and talked through with the community."* (Aida)

These assemblies are not just spaces for information-sharing but are also the foundation of the collective governance that has long been a part of the community's culture. The structure of these assemblies mirrors the long-standing collectivist traditions in Barroso, where shared governance have been central to managing communal resources for generations. Aida further emphasizes how, despite the company's efforts to reduce the resistance to a small group, the whole community is involved:

> *"The company always tries to say it's just a group—it's Nelson, it's Aida, and a group. Yes, it's Aida and Nelson, but it's also the whole community. When we have a meeting and 80 people show up, and not one of them says yes to the mine, even company workers who have been present don't raise their hand to accept the company's proposals."* (Aida)

This quote highlights how the community stands as one in its resistance to the mine, reinforcing that the fight is not led by a few individuals but represents the collective will of the people. The Assembleia de Compartes serves as a formal mechanism for ensuring unity and gives every member of the community a voice in the decisions that shape the resistance.

4.2.3. Non-Local Activists: Responsibility as Healthy Distance

While the local community remains the heart of the movement, non-local activists have played a key role in supporting the resistance. Through research work, showing up for media coverage, filmmaking, photography, and so on, non-local supporters participate in trying to unload some of the burdens of the labor of resistance from local residents. However, these activists bring their own understanding of collective responsibility, remaining conscious of the need to respect local leadership and avoid imposing external worldviews. Some of the supporters are acutely aware of the potential for what one described as *"activist colonization"*—where external supporters inadvertently take control of a movement. When asked about the reasons behind this approach, Alberto explains:

"Because of my life story, it's quite different from most of the people who are there (...) I understand that this can contribute in some ways on certain occasions, but in others, it can be quite inappropriate. It's important to understand the local realities and complexities on the matter." (Alberto)

The importance of this approach is further explained by Paula: *"When I said I'm not part of the community, what I meant is that I can leave whenever I want. I'm concerned on a political and social level, and also because of the love I have for the people, but I'm not risking my entire life. So, I think it's important to always be willing to listen to the people and to express your concerns. In that sense, even just our presence is a form of care—showing them they're not alone."* (Paula)

Paula reflection highlights the complex position of non-local activists: while they are deeply committed to the cause and offer valuable support, they are aware that they are not as directly affected by the consequences as the local community. This awareness reinforces the importance of humility and careful listening in their involvement, ensuring that their participation strengthens, rather than disrupts, the collective resistance. By recognizing the need for some kind of healthy distance, they contribute to the resistance in ways that align with Barroso's values of collective care.

However, its important to note this thoughtful approach is not universal among all non-local supporters. The non-local activists I interviewed were individuals who had built strong connections with the local community—some even lived in the village for extended periods. These people demonstrated, without a exception, this concern. But less considerate attitudes have surfaced in broader contexts, such as the annual resistance camps, where people from diverse social, cultural, and political backgrounds come to show solidarity. In these environments, I observed more challenges regarding the dynamic between locals and outsiders emerge. While a more in-depth analysis of this plurality goes beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge the complexity. Despite these challenges, the local villagers I had the opportunity to speak with expressed positive feelings about their relationship with non-local supporters, appreciating their help and friendship. As Maria shared:

"Yes, we have had many people helping us, and we have met good people, good folk, who have come to us and provided information. (...) People have come and have been helpful in every situation, even in personal matters. It has been good having them visit and help us... They have been our friends." (Maria)

Lúcia also emphasized the positive relationships formed: *"Here, the relationship with the people who came from outside has been very good. They are well-received, and they have become like our own. I think they would say the same. (...) They are well-accepted and well-treated."*

In conclusion, while the dynamic between non-local activists and the local community can be complex, the overall sentiment from those I spoke with was one of gratitude and appreciation for the support and solidarity provided by outsiders. This suggests that, despite occasional challenges, the presence of non-locals and their particular type of collective responsibility, has generally been a positive force in the resistance effort.

4.3. THEME 3: Building Bridges as a Manifestation of Resistance

In addition to direct actions and local mobilization, the anti-mining resistance in Covas do Barroso has developed through "building bridges," which represents a more expansive and relational dimension of the movement. These bridges, forged through solidarity networks, spaces of gathering, and artistic expressions, serve to strengthen the community, expand its reach, and nurture a shared identity.

4.3.1. Building Bridges through National and International Solidarity Networks

The national and international networks of solidarity that support the resistance in Covas do Barroso are essential not only in amplifying their voice but also in strengthening their movement by connecting them with broader struggles against extractivism. These networks serve as a platform for sharing strategies, lessons learned, and constructing narratives that challenge and dismantle the dominant rhetoric of mining corporations and state actors globally.

One of the most significant ways these networks manifest is through the comparison of experiences and strategies across different contexts of anti-extractivism. When asked about how this works, Chei explains: *"Well, in part, through a method of comparison. Comparing how extractivism is acting in each of our countries, what looks the same, what is different. We learn from each other about the processes."* For example, in Serbia, the conflict was framed as one large corporation against the entire country, while in Portugal, there are multiple companies working on various projects in isolated, often depopulated, territories. Despite these differences, certain elements, such as the speculative marketing tactics used to justify lithium mining projects, remain consistent across borders. Chei continues, *"In Serbia, they said it was going to be the 'largest underground mine in Europe,' while here they claimed it would be the 'largest open-pit mine in Europe.' Pure marketing and speculation."* By echoing each other's stories, movements collectively challenge what are considered as 'misleading' narratives and expose the underlying economic and political agendas.

Moreover, international solidarity networks provide moral, logistical, and strategic support, which strengthens local movements. Locals involved in the Barroso resistance note the importance of feeling connected to a larger global movement. As Aida reflects: *"(...) we are a team. The [local] Association counts on people from different parts of the world that help us (...) Thanks to these people, our voice reaches farther.*" Their resistance is amplified through the efforts of people across the world who are part of their extended *"team,"* whether they are in Lisbon, Germany, or Argentina. This solidarity creates visibility for Covas and reinforces their position as a site of resistance. Aida highlights how their inclusion in European Commission reports as a reference point for resistance is a direct result of the support and recognition gained through these international connections. One particularly impactful example of international solidarity was the Gira Zapatista**,** where a group of Zapatistas—indigenous revolutionaries from Mexico—visited Barroso and shared their own experiences of resistance. This encounter had a profound effect on the local community. As Chei recalls, *"The exchange was beautiful (...) After the tour ended, several Barroso men began using Zapatista slogans like 'the people command, and the government obeys' in their own speeches."* This cross-cultural exchange not only introduced new forms of resistance but also solidified a shared identity between the rural, marginalized communities of Barroso and the Zapatistas, highlighting the universality of their struggles, thereby empowering them.

International connections also help deconstruct corporate and state narratives. The comparison of tactics used by extractive industries in different countries enables people to identify common strategies employed to weaken resistance movements. As Chei points out, they learned to recognize and resist corporate marketing strategies and governmental attempts to frame their opposition as merely *"not in my backyard"* activism. Instead, the people of Barroso, like many others in international movements, argue that they oppose extractivism not only in their local context but anywhere it threatens communities and ecosystems. *"A reparation does not mean making damage in another place. Stop the harm means stop the harm everywhere,"* Chei says. This global perspective reinforces their stance that *"we have the right to say no"*—a message that resonates across movements and strengthens their resolve. However, these networks are not without challenges. The "*syndrome of the tired activist*," as Chei describes it, is a significant issue in these movements. People often find themselves stretched across multiple fronts, with few resources and little institutional support, waiting for a larger mobilization to bring in fresh energy. This fatigue threatens the sustainability of movements, making it essential for solidarity networks to offer both practical support and moments of renewal and collective care.

At the national level, solidarity networks also play a crucial role in bridging movements across different regions of Portugal. Movements against mining in other parts of the country, such as the Serra de Arga, Montalegre, and Argemela, have been inspired and mobilized by the example set by Barroso. As

Aida recalls, local resistance from Serra de Arga credited the Covas movement with opening their eyes to the threats posed by mining, helping them to organize and ultimately prevent exploratory drilling in their region. These networks are built on the sharing of information, resources, and tactics, which create a broader, more cohesive national movement against extractivism. Ultimately, solidarity networks, both national and international, are crucial to the survival and success of the Covas do Barroso movement. They provide a platform for shared learning, amplify voices, as well as to offer moral, emotional, and logistical support. As Chei eloquently puts it, these networks survive *"from action to action, from protest to protest, from camp to camp,"* offering moments of oxygen that sustain the fight against extractivism.

4.3.2. Forging Connections Through Gathering Spaces and Community Engagement

The creation and transformation of physical spaces in Barroso, along with organizing gatherings, have played a pivotal role in building and nurturing the anti-mining resistance. These spaces serve not only as logistical hubs but as sites of cultural regeneration and social engagement, allowing the local community and external supporters to come together, exchange ideas, and strengthen their bonds. Through this process, Covas has become a focal point for activists across Portugal and beyond, providing an essential environment for fostering solidarity and resistance.

One of the key examples of this strategy is the transformation of the *Sachola*, an abandoned village school, into a cultural and community space. As Luna describes, the Sachola serves as a "*bridge between the village and outsiders*" by offering a place where both locals and visitors can meet, share meals, organize, and collaborate on creative projects. It also provides accommodation for passers-by and non-local supporters, offering a place where people who do not live in the area can stay for free. This feature makes it accessible for those who come but lack the means for regular lodging, reinforcing solidarity. Sachola has hosted a variety of events, from film screenings and artistic residencies to activist meetings and workshops, thereby offering a dynamic space that brings life and culture to Covas. The transformation of this space is emblematic of the community's resistance to the extractivist model that seeks to hollow out rural areas. By repurposing a neglected building, the activists and local residents are not only resisting mining but also actively putting effort into creating a new, regenerative model for rural life. As Paula notes, the Sachola provides "*a space where we can propose moments of conviviality, to escape a bit from the constant worries of the fight."* This function is essential for the well-being of the people and the resilience of the movement, also reflecting a care ethic by creating spaces where people feel welcomed and supported.

In addition to permanent spaces like the Sachola, temporary spaces such as the annual *Acampada* (resistance camp) are key to strengthening the movement. Held in Covas in August for four consecutive years, the Acampada has grown into an essential event for bringing together supporters of the resistance

from across Portugal and beyond. This gathering serves as a site of exchange, reflection, and solidarity, reinforcing local, national, and international networks of resistance. The Acampada provides a crucial opportunity for people from different parts of the country—and even other nations—to converge in Covas and share experiences, strategies, and support. Moreover, the Acampada has been instrumental in raising awareness about extractivism and the ills of the green economy, offering a space for people to learn about the impacts of mining and connect with the broader issues at stake. Many of the people involved in the movement, including those who eventually decided to live in the village, first connected with Covas and the resistance through the Acampadas. This process of coming together in person, sharing meals, and camping out in the village fosters a deeper sense of connection and enhances their commitment to the cause. As Luna highlights, the camp has also helped build a *"national solidarity network"* by connecting different environmental justice movements. Furthermore, the Acampada plays a symbolic role in highlighting Covas as a site of national importance in the fight against extractivism. The event draws media attention and demonstrates to both local residents and external entities that the resistance is growing, organized, and supported by a broad coalition of people. In this sense, the Acampada is both a practical space for organizing and a performative act of resistance that strengthens the movement, amplifying its visibility.

4.3.4. The Role of the Arts in Building Bridges and Nurturing New Imaginaries

The arts have been a fundamental aspect of the resistance in Barroso, serving not only as a form of protest but to nurture collective identity and create alternative imaginaries. Through performances, music, and visual arts, the community and its allies have found creative ways to express their opposition to extractivism while simultaneously imagining new ways of thinking about their realities.

A particularly powerful example of this artistic bridge-building is the film "Savannah & a Montanha" directed by Paulo Carneiro, which was premiered at Cannes in 2024. Initially conceived as a documentary, the film evolved into a fictionalized representation of the community's struggle against mining, based on Carneiro's collaboration with the locals. Carneiro originally intended to document the ongoing fight, but he soon realized, along with members of the community, that it felt more meaningful to create a film in which the fight was already won. The idea behind this shift was to give the people of Covas an opportunity to imagine a victorious outcome—a reality where their resistance had succeeded in keeping the mining companies at bay. This decision to move away from documenting their current state of uncertainty and instead imagine a triumphant future underscores the importance of nurturing alternative imaginaries, allowing the community to see itself as victorious and powerful, rather than as victims of a looming corporate threat.

This creative approach highlights the power of art in constructing new realities—artistic expression allows the people of Covas to not only reflect on their current situation but also to dream of a different future. By engaging in this fictional narrative, the community is empowered to see beyond the immediate pressures of extractivism and to imagine a world where their values and way of life are preserved. This process is a key aspect of resistance, as it nurtures hope and possibility, essential components for sustaining long-term opposition against powerful forces. Sobral highlights this dynamic, explaining that the arts help give the movement charisma and create an *"affective community"* rather than just a political one. As Sobral notes, *"what draws people in is not just the political discourse but also the creation of a community that feels alive and connected, a struggle that is charismatic, aesthetic, and emblematic."* This aesthetic dimension, whether through films like "Savannah & a Montanha" or local musical performances, adds layers of meaning to the movement, attracting both locals and outsiders to become more deeply involved.

The role of art in fostering new imaginaries is further echoed in the musical traditions of Barroso, which play a critical role in both the resistance and cultural identity of the community. Music, particularly interventionist songs such as local resident Carlos Libo's protest compositions and the choral performances of the Coro dos Anjos from Lisbon who support the movement through music, serve as emotional anchors for the movement. Songs like "Barroso" by Libo, "Labuta" ("Struggle") from the choir and the traditional song "Hino dos Mineiros" ("Miners' Hymn") create powerful emotional connections between individuals, building a shared sense of purpose and solidarity. As Edgar, the choir's founder notes, music *"serves the community and brings people together in an emotional resonance,"* helping to align people on a deep, visceral level. Edgar emphasizes that many traditional songs reflect the realities of agricultural life, a deep interaction with the natural world, and the sense of community and belonging that is associated to rural life. He describes how these songs evoke *"ancestral images and memories"* of people working the land, living in harmony with nature, and engaging in close-knit, supportive relationships within the community. These themes, which resonate strongly with the reality is Barroso, help reinforce the community's connection to their way of life, further nurturing their collective identity.

By touching the emotional core of the resistance, music and other forms of art become tools not only for protest but for healing and renewal. They create spaces that help dissolve personal and political differences, uniting people in a shared moment of expression and allowing them to envision a collective future. The ability of music to connect people on this emotional level underscores its role in reinforcing the bonds within the community and between the community and its supporters. As Chei emphasizes, *"Singing together, dancing together, and eating together—that's when the real network, the real bonds happen,"* highlighting how these artistic expressions help create lasting connections among participants.

4.4. THEME 4: The Complex Layers of Care

This theme explores the nuances of care within the movement, both in personal and collective dimensions. People often face the dual challenge of caring for others and for themselves, while grappling with the strain of resistance efforts. This theme highlights the complexities, struggles, and evolving strategies for sustaining care within the resistance.

4.4.1. Balancing Individualism, Internal Extractivism & Self-Care

In this context, I refer to "Internal extractivism" as the unsustainable practice where activists, driven by a sense of duty or urgency, deplete their own emotional and physical resources without adequate replenishment. This concept mirrors the exploitative dynamics of the systems they resist—systems that extract resources from land and communities until depletion (Harcourt, 2013). Within this resistance movement, internal extractivism manifested as burnout and blurred boundaries, where self-care was often sidelined for the cause. Many interviewees acknowledged that resistance work can lead people to push past their mental, emotional, and physical limits, mirroring the extractive cycles they aim to dismantle. However, there was a growing awareness of the need to transform this dynamic. As Aida pointedly expressed, *"Losing your mental health is also a loss."* Chei recounted the suicide of a fellow activist involved in another environmental movement, underscoring the devastating consequences of this imbalance: *"When the responsibility is too great, and isolation is too much, this can happen to any of us."* This experience reinforced Chei's awareness of the urgent need to confront burnout and system neglect, transforming these exploitative dynamics from within the movement.

Paula offers a striking example of how the culture of sacrifice can create a dangerous pattern where people feel valued only through their suffering or output. She says, *"There's a connection between sacrifice and gaining power in the struggle… the person who sacrifices is seen as more valuable in the fight."* This reveals how people, conditioned by societal norms, can derive a sense of worth from their self-sacrifice. Yet, this dynamic traps them in a loop where their value is tied to how much they endure or contribute, rather than their inherent worth as individuals. This underscores the need to redefine value systems within resistance movements, working on giving well-being and mental health a greater focus.

Sobral emphasizes the need to challenge the "productivist, utilitarian logic" that often dominates social movements, where people, relationships, and the movements themselves are seen merely as tools for specific goals, reduced to "means" rather than valued as ends. He distinguishes between *productivist* and *productive* movements, explaining that while productivity and tangible accomplishments are important, productivism—a relentless focus on output—can undermine the movement's core values. Sobral advocates

for a balance between productivity and care, cautioning that focusing solely on care can risk making a movement *"ineffective."* In the context of the anti-mining movement in Portugal, Sobral observes a trend toward individualistic tendencies, with an emphasis on *"ineffective care"*—what he views as overly self-centered forms of care that may stall the movement's capacity to organize, create, and accumulate achievements. He supports a more holistic perspective that values mental health, well-being, justice, inclusivity, and emotional stability, without discarding the role of action, anger and protest, as care without a grounding in energy and determination can hinder collective action. For him, if people aim to build a world free from extractive, capitalist, or purely utilitarian values, they must practice these ideals by finding equilibrium in how they organize, produce, and care for one another. However, there are tensions around the fine line between self-care and individualist *"de-responsabilization."* While self-care is essential, Sobral and other interviewees caution that care is complex and nuanced, requiring a balance that avoids both burnout and disengagement.

Expanding on this sentiment, Sobral emphasizes that slogans of self-care are insufficient without the structures to support it. For him, activism must transform both the individual and the collective, making care a shared responsibility rather than a personal endeavor. This approach highlights a tension between those who feel overburdened by responsibility and advocate for greater efficiency, and those who prefer a slower, more organic approach. Those carrying the weight of the movement often feel stressed and overwhelmed, leading them to push for faster processes to avoid burnout. Yet, this can sometimes result in micro-authoritarianism or impatience, as they seek to avoid wasting time or energy on extensive discussions. On the other side, there are those who call for more calm, more explanation, and less rigid pre-planning, preferring a more spontaneous, organic approach to organizing. Instead of recognizing and empathizing with the underlying causes of each one of these behaviors—whether it's the need for efficiency or the desire for a more flexible process—there is often a tendency to create a false dichotomy between these two groups. As Sobral notes, the more efficient, task-oriented individuals may be labeled as *"not respecting care",* while those who advocate for slower processes are sometimes seen as disengaged or less committed. This binary framework—"the productive ones" versus "the caring ones"—is oversimplified and detracts from the complexity of the situation. To bridge this divide, in Sobral's perspective, there must be a mutual recognition of needs: the efficient organizers must acknowledge the value of care and calm, while the more spontaneous members need to understand and recognize the anxiety and pressure felt by those shouldering responsabilities. Only through empathy and a more nuanced understanding of each other's challenges can these tensions be resolved. Activism, then, must move beyond these simplified labels and work towards building structures that accommodate both care and efficiency, ensuring the movement can sustain itself in the long term.

4.4.2. People Care: Manifestations of Comradery

Throughout the months of data collection, through participation in certain events and relationships developed over time, it was clear to me how care within the resistance movement also manifests in the form of comradery and mutual support among people, local and non-local. One way this sense of solidarity was clearly expressed , was through everyday gestures that protect and sustain those at the heart of the struggle. Particularly, I noticed how non-local supporters work to protect local residents from burnout, sharing responsibilities and supporting their comrades when they notice exhaustion creeping in. Luna expresses this concern, explaining how important it is to be mindful of the local community: *"There is a concern among us, especially with certain people, to avoid contributing to their exhaustion and fatigue."*

I experienced first hand this concern to activists demonstrated with those who tend to bear the brunt of attention from journalists and researchers. When I began my research and data collection, the non-local activists who were deeply embedded in the struggle and had stronger relationships with the local residents, were quick to caution me about approaching my research with care to avoid further overwhelming the residents, advising me to, for example, rely more on participation-observation. People were keenly aware of how uncareful external actors—such as journalists and researchers—could inadvertently perpetuate extractivist mentalities by demanding the villagers' time and attention without investing in the relationship or considering the community's well-being. This insight led to a collective emphasis on decentralizing voices, giving platforms to other residents beyond those who were already overstretched, and raising awareness about the extractive tendencies present in both academia and media. The goal was to ensure that any interaction with the community respected the reciprocal nature of care and did not simply replicate the dynamics of exploitation they were resisting.

4.4.3. Building Cultures of Care: Learning as One Goes

One of the most significant challenges faced by the movement is the ongoing process of building a culture of care. Activists often find themselves navigating uncharted territory, learning what it means to create caring, supportive environments while dealing with the pressure of sustained resistance. This learning process is not always linear, and there are many struggles involved in balancing logistical needs with emotional care.

Luna's reflections about the Acampada shed light on the difficulties of balancing care and organization. At the beginning, there was no dedicated care team, and the logistical pressures overshadowed the ability to provide emotional support. By the third year, a care team was formed, but the same people tasked with care were also responsible for logistics, which again diminished their capacity to offer support.

Luna expresses how important it is to have *"a team that is fully focused on care, not divided between logistics and emotional work,"* acknowledging that emotional availability requires focused attention. In the last Acampada, a care team solely focused on this work was still not attained, as the load of responsibilities within the organizing team was still heavy. However, the tendency seems to be of accumulative learning and an increasingly more available care team. An example of that was the creation of the 'Silent Space.' According to Mafalda, one of the care team members, this space was created through the awareness that a gathering like the *"Acampada can be a space with a very strong emotional charge. People have felt overwhelmed in the past, and not really had any place where they could shelter, so to say."* Increasing the sense of safety in these transformative, political spaces and within the larger movement seems to be on the people's agenda.

Interviewees are also conscious of the need for coexistence and balance. As Alberto reflects, while building a culture of care is essential, it's equally important to avoid slipping into victimization or using care as a form of control. This delicate balance requires people to navigate between maintaining care and allowing room for individual freedom and experimentation. Activists must find ways to create caring environments without imposing rigid structures that could stifle spontaneity and growth. This comes to show that while the movement is committed to the idea of care, there is still much to learn about how to put it into practice effectively. This ongoing process is marked by experimentation, reflection, and the recognition that mistakes will be made along the way.

Chei's reflections emphasize the importance of camaraderie and sticking together, even when things go bad or disagreements arise. Drawing from her experiences with the Zapatistas, Chei learned the value of *"choosing to stay together"*, even in the face of internal conflicts or challenges. She emphasizes that part of care is about remaining committed to one another, even when tensions emerge, and working through conflicts without allowing them to fracture the collective. As she explains, *"We must believe that it's still possible to fight together, even when it gets hard."* This insight underscores that building a culture of care also involves resilience and a commitment to repair relationships within the movement. Nonetheless, movements seem to struggle with conflict resolution, as there seems to be no clear strategy for addressing internal disagreements. Conflicts can arise, but they are not always effectively dealt with, which can lead to fragmentation and frustration within the movement. However, this lack of conflict resolution strategies contrasts with the experience of the local community. According to Lúcia, the President of the Parish Board of Covas do Barroso observes: *"We don't have conflicts... Almost all decisions are unanimous, and even when they're not, they are decided by the majority."* Lúcia's perspective highlights a different approach to community decision-making and conflict resolution in the local context, where there is a greater sense of

cohesion and collective agreement, suggesting that the local culture may offer valuable insights into how the larger movement could approach conflict resolution more effectively.

Ultimately, this subtheme demonstrates that care within the movement is a work in progress—one that requires continuous reflection, adjustment, and learning from mistakes. Building cultures of care involves learning how to balance individual needs with collective responsibilities, navigating emotional and logistical demands, and finding ways to support each other without reproducing the extractivist dynamics the movement is fighting against. It also means learning how to stay together through challenges, drawing from the solidarity and resilience seen in both the Zapatista model and the local community's cohesive decision-making practices and collectivist approach.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study investigates the anti-mining resistance in Covas do Barroso through the lens of FPE and the praxis of care, with a focus on critiquing the green economy and exploring care as a structural framework for resistance. By examining the interplay between local values, relational dynamics, and global solidarity, this section connects the findings with the central research questions and situates the resistance within broader discourses on extractivism, sustainability, and care. Specifically, this chapter responds to how the resistance critiques the green economy, the role of care as an ethical and political framework, and the alternatives it envisions to extractivist development.

5.1. Critiquing the Green Economy: Resistance to Green Extractivist Narratives

The resistance in Covas do Barroso challenges the green economy by exposing its inherent contradictions. While lithium mining is framed as essential for Europe's renewable energy transition, local perspectives highlight the human and ecological costs of these extractivist practices, including environmental degradation, cultural disruption, and social injustices. Central to this critique is the community's emphasis on wholeness, contentment, and relationality, which is prioritized over wealth accumulation, seen in the way local residents refuse economic incentives or job proposals by Savannah Resources, prioritzing instead their social and cultural integrity, as well as the serenity their ways of life and social fabric provide.

For the residents of Barroso, wholeness is understood as living in harmony with the environment, cultivating relationships, and sustaining a way of life grounded in reciprocity and care. This sense of fulfillment, derived from rich ecological and social bonds, directly opposes the logic of green extractivism, which prioritizes resource commodification and economic growth as pathways to development. The

contentment found in Barroso exemplifies an alternative vision of wealth, one rooted in ecological stewardship, social cohesion, and degrowth principles, by rejecting extractivism, prioritizing ecological integrity and relational wealth, and embracing a model of well-being based on simplicity and sustainability (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo, 2020). Clean water, fertile soil, and biodiversity represent their true wealth, offering a sustainable and fulfilling life that resists capitalist narratives of scarcity and overconsumption (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter & Wangari, 1996; Salleh, 2017). This prioritization of wholeness and contentment also serves as a form of active defiance. By valuing their their quality of life, the community explicitly rejects the capitalist ideology underpinning green extractivism. Their resistance embodies an ethical stance that affirms the value of non-material forms of wealth—health, ecological integrity, and social relationships—over the exploitative tendencies of capitalist growth. In defending their way of life, the people of Barroso are asserting that true development must be rooted in the well-being of both human and ecological systems.

Non-local activists further amplify this critique by drawing attention to Barroso's global significance as a site of resistance. Many of these supporters, disillusioned by the alienation of urban life, are drawn to Barroso's portrayal of an "authentic community," where relationships and purpose take precedence over material wealth. They see Barroso as a sanctuary—a place where "the true life," rooted in care and interdependence, is lived. This sentiment reinforces the idea that Barroso's resistance transcends a local struggle, representing a global defense of cultural and ecological wholeness against the homogenizing forces of extractivism (Escobar, 2008; Sampson & Goodrich, 2009).. By offering an alternative model of fulfillment—one that prioritizes relationality and ecological abundance over consumption—Barroso's resistance contributes to a larger critique of the green economy as a system that perpetuates alienation and ecological harm.

In this way, the community's sense of wholeness and contentment becomes both a personal and political act of resistance. It challenges the exploitative tendencies of green capitalism while advocating for a future grounded in care, reciprocity, and ecological integrity. Their rejection of extractivist development models underscores the need to envision sustainability not as an economic imperative but as a way of living that honors the interdependence of human and non-human systems.

5.2. Care as a Structural Element of the Resistance

Across the findings, care emerges as a foundational element of the resistance in Covas do Barroso, shaping its ethos, organization, and critique of extractivism. The community's resistance demonstrates how care for land, community, and identity intertwines with ecological and social values, embodying a transformative

alternative to extractivist logics. Viewed through the lens of FPE, care is revealed not as passive or individualistic but as deeply relational, collective, and political, sustaining both the movement and the people involved. This section explores the dimensions of care that underpin Barroso's resistance—ecological stewardship, relational bonds, and cultural continuity—while highlighting its broader implications for sustainability and justice.

5.2.1. Ecological Care

One of the ways care was seen as structurally embedded in the resistance, was in local residents' inclination for ecological stewardship values and practices. In Barroso, care for the land is inseparable from the community's identity and way of life. Residents seem to understand the land as an extension of themselves, a living entity requiring stewardship and protection. This kind of care, which the FPE literature names as "ecological care" or "planet care", is visibly enacted through sustainable practices like small-scale agriculture and communal land management, which have been maintained for generations (Harcourt, 2018; Westwell & Bunting, 2020). These practices not only sustain the community but also actively resist the commodification of land that underpins green extractivism (Dengler & Lang, 2021). The community's opposition to lithium mining reflects a commitment to environmental stewardship, aimed at preserving the land's health for future generations. This perspective aligns with FPE's view that nature has inherent value and deserves care beyond its potential for extraction (Harcourt, 2013; Shiva, 2015). Ecological care, therefore, represents the community's commitment to ecological integrity against industrial degradation, advocating for a model of sustainability that respects nature as something more than a resource.

5.2.2. Participatory Care

Moreover, care as a guiding ethical framework was visible in the way mutual aid and shared responsibility seemed to stand as core values in Barroso, shaping both daily life and organized resistance. For generations, mutual support seems to have been integral to Barroso's community's way of life, expressed through cooperative farming, shared care labour, and communal sustenance tasks. Within this context, the anti-mining resistance feels like an organic extension of the community's deeply embedded cultural practices. Their involvement is seen as their shared duty to the community, which leads to most villagers naturally rallying together to defend their land and way of life. In context of resistance, this collectivist ethos manifests through concrete practices such as organizing blockades to defend communal lands, participating in assemblies to ensure transparency and information-sharing, and establishing care structures within organizing spaces, such as resistance camps. Non-local supporters also play a critical role, providing

emotional and logistical support to overburdened residents, further reinforcing the movement's resilience. This form of "participatory care" seems to strengthen the movement by enabling every participant—local or non-local—to contribute to the defense of the land and the sustainability of collective action (Santos, 2020; Westwell & Bunting, 2020).

5.2.3. Relational & Embodied Care

Another key manifestation of care in the resistance of Covas do Barroso lies in its deeply relational and embodied nature, where care is enacted both physically and emotionally in defense of the land. The community's relational worldview, which emphasizes interdependence between people, the land, and non-human entities, reflects what FPE scholars call "embodied care" (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015). As we saw, in Barroso the land is not perceived as a resource to be exploited but as a living entity central to the community's existence. Protecting it is thus an extension of self-care and mutual care, reinforcing FPE's understanding that environmental well-being is inseparable from social and relational well-being (Harcourt, 2013). Furthermore, emotions such as outrage, betrayal, and empathy are central to this embodied resistance, countering the disembodied, technocratic rationality of green capitalism (Shiva, 2015). These emotions fuel a "caring ontology" that transforms resistance into a political practice of protecting land, family, and culture (Salleh, 2017). Relational care also strengthens the movement's resilience, as non-local supporters engage in solidarity by respecting local leadership and contributing resources while avoiding the pitfalls of "activist colonization," ensuring their contributions amplify rather than overshadow the community's voice (Westwell & Bunting, 2020). This relational and embodied ethic of care not only sustains long-term collective action but also serves as a powerful critique of the depersonalized, extractive models of sustainability that dominate global development narratives. By integrating care into their everyday practices and resistance efforts, the people of Barroso demonstrate the transformative potential of a relational approach to environmental justice and autonomy.

5.2.4. Cultural Care

Cultural care emerges as a vital dimension of resistance in Covas do Barroso, where defending the land also shows up as being inseparable from preserving the community's cultural identity and heritage. Deeply tied to traditional agricultural practices, communal land management, and generational bonds to the region, the Barroso community's way of life represents a living connection to the land they seek to protect. This

cultural identity is expressed and preserved through storytelling, music, arts, and communal gatherings, which serve as powerful tools to both strengthen internal solidarity and share their struggle with external supporters (Escobar, 2008; Sampson & Goodrich, 2009). Festivals, public meetings, and artistic expressions create shared spaces where local residents, non-local allies, and activists come together to exchange ideas, build emotional connections, and celebrate their values. These gatherings are not merely strategic but deeply affective, fostering a sense of belonging and emotional connection that reinforces the community's resolve. By nurturing these traditions, residents resist not only the environmental destruction of extractivism but also the cultural erasure that often accompanies it, enabling the community to assert their right to self-determination and cultural continuity in the face of extractive pressures. By maintaining and celebrating their traditions, the people of Barroso actively resist land grabbing and cultural dispossession, ensuring that their values, history, and identity endure alongside their physical landscape. Events and symbolic acts of resistance that bring people together to share experiences and celebrate achievements sustain the movement and reaffirm Covas as a vibrant, living community with a strong, actively revitalized culture and identity.

5.2.4. Solidarity Networks as Structures Built on Care

The resistance movement in Covas do Barroso exemplifies how networks of solidarity extend beyond local communities, connecting grassroots efforts with broader national and global struggles against extractivism. Santos (2020) describes how care practices within social movements create these networks, forming alliances among people who share similar values and goals. The solidarity supporting Covas do Barroso operates in this way, reinforcing the understanding that the fight against green extractivism is part of a larger struggle for environmental justice. Within this framework, non-local supporters play a crucial role, offering material and logistical support that broadens collective responsibility across boundaries (Westwell & Bunting, 2020). These networks enable the sharing of strategies, lessons, and moral support, connecting communities worldwide that face similar threats from extractivist forces. This form of collaborative care underscores the importance of epistemic justice, by amplifying the voices, knowledge systems, and lived experiences of marginalized communities that are often excluded from mainstream environmental decision-making and narratives of development. The co-production of knowledge within these networks ensures that strategies for resistance are informed by both local expertise and external insights, creating a more inclusive and effective framework for environmental justice. In this way, they collectively reinforce each other by challenging dominant narratives of green development that often marginalize rural and indigenous perspectives (Fricker, 2017; Whyte, 2017).

The cultural expressions within Barroso's resistance—storytelling, festivals, and artistic practices—play a crucial role in sustaining the movement by communicating the community's values, identity, and heritage to wider audiences. These practices affirm that knowledge is not limited to technical or scientific domains but also encompasses emotional, cultural, and relational dimensions. Spaces like the Acampada and Sachola serve as vital hubs for care and renewal, offering not only respite from the demands of sustained activism but also opportunities for connection and solidarity among activists, residents, and non-local supporters. Through these shared spaces, cross-cultural exchanges bridge geographical divides, fostering collaboration and ensuring the movement's resilience.

Solidarity networks amplify the community's diverse knowledge, creating platforms where local expertise, lived experiences, and cultural narratives are valued across boundaries. This fosters a transnational sense of purpose, emphasizing that local struggles are inseparable from global movements for environmental justice. By highlighting the importance of epistemic justice, the Barroso resistance challenges dominant narratives that marginalize rural voices and reaffirms the critical role of local knowledge in envisioning alternatives to extractivist development. In expanding the reach of their struggle, the people of Barroso transcend their local roots to advocate for a transformative model of community grounded in care, reciprocity, and mutual aid. By doing so, they reject extractivist logics and affirm the centrality of relationality and solidarity as foundational to a sustainable and just future. Through these efforts, the Barroso resistance not only protects their land and cultural identity but also contributes to a broader reimagining of development based on ecological integrity and social justice.

5.2.5. Limitations of Care

In the context of Covas do Barroso's resistance, care emerges as both a sustaining force and a source of challenges, providing a nuanced perspective on its role within social resistance movements. Drawing from FPE, care is recognized as foundational to the movement, fostering relational bonds and collective resilience. However, this same centrality of care also exposes its limitations, particularly when support structures are inadequate. As the thematic analysis reveals, care within the movement is not merely a supportive practice but one deeply entwined with the complexities of sustaining long-term resistance against extractive projects.

One key challenge is the disproportionate burden of care responsibilities placed on certain individuals or groups, which risks exhaustion and burnout. Luna's experience during the Acampadas—where "care needs its own dedicated team"—illustrates the logistical and emotional demands involved in maintaining community morale. Sustained care work often requires activists to balance personal resilience

with collective needs, creating intense pressures in the absence of formal support structures. This echoes broader critiques in FPE, which highlight how the undervaluation of care work can result in emotional and physical strain (Clement et al., 2019). Moreover, as de la Bellacasa (2017) warns, care can become instrumentalized, addressing immediate issues like dissent or morale without tackling the systemic inequities that necessitate care in the first place. In Barroso, such instrumentalization risks reinforcing the hierarchies the movement seeks to dismantle, making it crucial to intentionally structure care practices in ways that sustain members rather than deplete them.

Another critical challenge identified is the phenomenon of "internal extractivism," a term reflecting the parallels between the community's external struggle against resource exploitation and the internal depletion of activists' emotional and physical resources. As highlighted by Hanaček et al. (2024), this dynamic often arises when urgency or duty leads individuals to sacrifice self-care for collective aims. This mirrors the capitalist logic critiqued by FPE, where productivity is prioritized over sustainability (Harcourt, 2013). In Barroso, participants like Aida, Paula, and Chei observed how this self-sacrificing culture can lead to unsustainable practices, ironically echoing the extractive and depleting tendencies the movement resists. Their insights underscore the importance of reframing care as integral to activism, ensuring that self-care is not treated as secondary but as essential to the long-term resilience of the movement.

The analysis also highlights the emergence of a culture of self-sacrifice and a productivist mindset within the movement. Paula's observation that "the person who sacrifices is seen as more valuable" demonstrates how societal expectations around care as responsability can foster a martyrdom mentality within activism. This dynamic risks creating hierarchies where worth is tied to visible contributions or endurance, further straining individuals. Sobral's critique of this "productivist, utilitarian logic" aligns with FPE's condemnation of capitalist valuation systems that reduce individuals to their outputs (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Bauhardt, 2014). Sobral calls for a broader perspective on care that incorporates mental health, emotional stability, and inclusivity alongside strategic action. By redefining value systems within the movement, activists can resist internalizing extractive logics and foster a culture that values well-being as much as tangible achievements. However, Sobral also warns against excessive focus on care that could dilute the movement's effectiveness, emphasizing the need to balance care and action in ways that maintain momentum while sustaining members.

Addressing these challenges requires the intentional distribution of care responsibilities and the cultivation of reciprocity among participants. Sobral's recommendations to develop structures that support both collective and individual well-being underscore the importance of participatory care practices that distribute burdens equitably and foster resilience. Rather than treating care as a personal obligation, FPE

perspectives advocate for care as a reflexive and collective process—one that strengthens solidarity, balances productivity, and ensures accountability (Harcourt, 2018). By embedding shared practices of care within the movement, Covas do Barroso can transform the potential limitations of care into sources of strength, enabling it to sustain its goals without compromising the well-being of its members or losing momentum.

In conclusion, the complexities and contradictions of care within the resistance in Covas do Barroso highlight the necessity of a reflexive, adaptive approach to care work in anti-extractivist movements. While care is fundamental to building solidarity and sustaining resistance, it also demands continuous negotiation to avoid burnout, instrumentalization, and diminished effectiveness. A movement that values both care and action—while consistently revisiting how care work is distributed and valued—is better equipped to resist extractive logics and sustain itself as a force for meaningful change.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that the anti-mining resistance in Covas do Barroso seems to represent a vital, care-centered approach to environmental activism that critiques and offers alternatives to extractivist economic models. Grounded in the framework of FPE, the study positions care as a transformative political praxis that transcends domestic or gendered confines, permeating communal, environmental, and resistance-oriented activities. The Barroso community's deep connection to the land, their commitment to mutual aid, and their ecological stewardship highlight care as a dynamic force capable of resisting powerful, profit-driven external pressures. These practices, embedded in local customs and collective land management, provide an alternative vision of sustainability rooted in reciprocity, environmental justice, and local autonomy.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of literature in environmental and political ecology by foregrounding care as a central organizing principle in resistance movements. It expands the application of care beyond private or gendered spheres, framing it instead as a communal and inclusive strategy for sustaining socio-ecological systems. By illustrating how care can fortify resilience within local communities while fostering solidarity networks that extend across geographic and cultural boundaries, this research broadens our understanding of care as a subversive force against extractivist paradigms. Barroso's resistance demonstrates that care is not merely a supportive or ancillary element but a political tool that challenges dominant development models, positioning sustainability as deeply relational and collective.

Practically, this thesis offers valuable insights for activists, policymakers, and environmental justice advocates. It shows how integrating care into activism can mobilize diverse groups, sustain collective efforts over time, and build alliances that protect both human and ecological well-being. The findings suggest that care-centered frameworks can inspire alternative approaches to environmental governance and development that prioritize well-being, respect local knowledge, and foster self-determined, sustainable futures. In doing so, this thesis offers a compelling vision of activism rooted in care, reciprocity, and solidarity that is adaptable, inclusive, and transformative.

While the findings are significant, it is essential to recognize the limitations of this research. First, the rural and localized context of Covas do Barroso may limit the applicability of its insights to urban or other rural settings with differing socio-political dynamics. The unique characteristics of Barroso, such as its long-standing traditions of communal land management and deeply ingrained resistance practices, may not be directly replicable elsewhere. Second, the study primarily reflects perspectives from the resistance movement, which was an intentional focus. However, this may have resulted in a partial understanding of the community's views, as it does not fully account for individuals who may support mining due to economic incentives or those who are less actively engaged in resistance. Additionally, the study does not explore gender-based differences in care practices or the role of traditional forms of care, which could provide important insights into the dynamics of care within the movement.

Building on this thesis, future research could explore care-centered resistance in diverse socio-political and geographic contexts to assess how care operates in different environmental justice movements. Comparative studies between rural and urban movements could further illuminate the adaptability and limitations of care as a resistance framework. Additionally, examining the intersection of care with frameworks like degrowth and post-development could provide deeper insights into how care-centered approaches challenge dominant economic paradigms while fostering alternatives rooted in justice and sustainability. Research on the long-term policy impacts of care-centered resistance movements would also be valuable, particularly regarding their influence on local governance, environmental policies, and global discourses on sustainability. Investigating the gendered dimensions of care within resistance movements could enrich our understanding of how care work is distributed and valued, revealing potential inequalities or hierarchies that may emerge within activist contexts.

Ultimately, the resistance in Covas do Barroso reveals that care is not merely an adjunct to activism but a powerful organizing principle capable of sustaining resistance, fostering solidarity, and inspiring alternative futures. By centering care, this movement embodies a vision of environmental justice that challenges extractivist narratives and redefines sustainability as a deeply relational and collective pursuit.

As one of the participants, Chei, poignantly remarked, *"We must believe that it's still possible to fight together, even when it gets hard."* This sentiment reflects the essence of the resistance in Covas do Barroso—a community bound by care and concern for the land and one another, fighting not only for survival but for a future rooted in justice and sustainability. In conclusion, this study highlights the transformative potential of care-centered activism to reimagine development and sustainability through frameworks grounded in care, reciprocity, and communal resilience. It underscores the urgency of integrating care into environmental justice movements as a means to confront extractivism, foster socio-ecological transformation, and envision futures where well-being and justice take precedence over profit.

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Annex 1: Participant Sample Table

Participant	Role	Gender	Affiliation to the Movement	Method of Engagement
Aida	Local Resident (Covas do Barroso)	F	President of the Baldio & Farmer	Interview & Participant-Observat.
Paulo	Local Resident (Romaínho)	M	Farmer	Interview & Participant-Observat.
Ana Maria	Local Resident (Romaínho)	F	Farmer	Interview & Participant-Observat.
Maria	Local Resident (Romaínho)	F	Farmer	Interview & Participant-Observat.
Susana	Local Resident (Romaínho)	F	Employee in Boticas	Interview & Participant-Observat.
Daniel	Local Resident (Romaínho)	M	Farmer in Barroso	Interview & Participant-Observat.
Elisabete	Local Resident (Romaínho)	F	Employee in Boticas	Interview & Participant-Observat.
Chei	Non-local Activist	F	Active supporter of the movement & bridge to international solidarity network	Interview & Participant-Observat.
Sobral	Non-local Activist	M	Active supporter of the movement, researcher & current resident in Barroso	Interview & Participant-Observat.
Luna	Non-local Activist	F	Active supporter of the movement, researcher & former resident in Barroso	Interview & Participant-Observat.
Alberto	Non-local Activist	M	Active supporter of the movement & former resident in Barroso	Interview & Participant-Observat.
Paula	Non-local Activist	F	Active supporter of the movement & current resident in Barroso	Interview & Participant-Observat.
Edgar	Founder of the art collective "Coro dos Anjos"	M	Founder of the art collective "Coro dos Anjos" & Activist	Informal convers. & Participant-Observat.
Mafalda	Non-local Activist	F	Community Care Team at the Resistace Camp	Informal convers. & Participant-Observat.
Lúcia	Government Official	F	President of the Junta de Freguesia	Interview & Participant-Observat.

Annex 2: Interview Guide

Section 1: Introduction Questions

- How long have you lived in Covas do Barroso? What is your relationship with these lands like?
- Can you tell me a little about the land / its inhabitants and community / your culture?
- What is your opinion on the lithium mining project?

Section 2: Mining Project Impact

- How has the mining project impacted your life?
- What impact has it had on the lives of the people of Barroso?
- What impact has it had on community relationships among the people of Barroso?
- What impact has it had on your relationship with the land and the surrounding environment?
- What are the biggest challenges or difficulties that have arisen for you and the community because of the proposed mining project?

Section 3: Involvement in the Resistance Movement

- How are you involved in the resistance movement against the mines?
- What motivates the resistance?
- Who are the most active people in the movement against the mines? How have they practiced resistance?
- How has the community been organizing the resistance? (Strategies, tools, practices, events…)
- On what values, objectives, and visions do you base your individual / collective struggle?
- What have you been learning about yourself through the movement against mining?
- What have you been learning about the community in this experience?
- What are the biggest challenges you face?
- Have you taken anything positive from this experience and struggle?
- How has the struggle transformed your relationship with your neighbors and the community?
- How do you take care of one another and your individual and collective needs in this context of resistance?
- What helps keep you united in the struggle?
- What would be the happiest ending to this story, in your view?