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Alternative food networks as care communities: territorial feminist perspectives from Latin America

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Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) emerge as community-based responses to the harmful impacts of the dominant agri-food system, promoting sustainable practices of production and consumption through short supply chains and direct relationships between producers and consumers. Through understanding care as a set of crucial practices and relationships that sustain life, these networks not only transform economic relations but also change how people care for each other and for the earth from a community approach. However, care practices within self-managed and primarily volunteer-based AFNs are often unequally distributed. Women are those who mostly carry out these tasks without proper recognition or compensation. This dynamic threatens the long-term sustainability of these networks. Based on bibliographic analysis and coauthors' experiences in this article we present a conceptual framework that shows how care can be analyzed in AFNs from a territorial feminist perspective and a multidimensional and intersectional approach. We consider three territorial scales—the bodies, the community (AFN), and the land—and six dimensions: economic, political-organizational, socio-cultural, affective, environmental, and health-related. We emphasize the need to rethink the distribution of care through the lenses of equity in order to promote socio-economic justice. Naming and making care visible within AFNs can lead to transformations in human relationships, encouraging ways of living, producing, and consuming that are more respectful, reciprocal, and in harmony with nature—breaking with the extractivist and productivist logics of capitalism.

KEYWORDS

Abya Yala, care, feminisms, sustainable food systems, territory-body-land

1 Introduction

In many countries, local initiatives are emerging as alternatives to the dominant agri-food and economic system. These initiatives advocate for a new political culture and ways of life grounded in a non-commodified view of nature (López García, 2015). They are collectively built to promote agroecology and food sovereignty (Sevilla Guzmán and Soler Montiel, 2010), as well as social and solidarity economies (López García, 2015; Curiazi and Cajas Guijarro, 2019).

Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) encompass diverse experiences, in the Global South and North, that diverge from the dominant agri-food system¹ (Deverre and Lamine, 2010; Di Masso and Zografos, 2015; Renting et al., 2003; Whatmore et al., 2003), which is predominantly characterized by industrial agriculture, excessive use of agrochemicals, and long supply chains that cause serious environmental and socio-economic problems (Calisto Friant, 2016; Delgado Cabeza, 2010; López García, 2015; Marúm Espinosa and Bourdeau, 2021; Ornelas et al., 2013). AFNs are short supply chain initiatives that involve both producers and consumers (Renting et al., 2003).

AFNs have been studied in relation to agroecology (Aguilar, 2022; Rosas-Domínguez et al., 2024; Sevilla Guzmán and Soler Montiel, 2010), food sovereignty (Bara et al., 2023; Di Masso and Zografos, 2015), and social and solidarity economy (Arellanes-Cancino and Juárez, 2022; Rodríguez Guerrero et al., 2022). There is a growing body of literature on feminism and the food crisis, agroecology, and food sovereignty (Begiristain and Álvarez, 2019; Calvário and Desmarais, 2023; Ellinger-Locke, 2011; Trevilla Espinal et al., 2021; Zaremba et al., 2021; Zuluaga-Sánchez et al., 2018), as well as on care and agroecology (Calderón Cisneros and Escobar Colmenares, 2024; Ezquerro Samper et al., 2022; Trevilla Espinal et al., 2020; Ume et al., 2022). Most of the literature on interconnections between AFNs and gender relations focuses on Global North producers (Azima and Mundler, 2022; Bruce and Som Castellano, 2017; Darkhani, 2024; Jarosz, 2011; Popławska, 2023; Som Castellano, 2015; Wells and Gradwell, 2001). These interconnections remained underexplored in Abya Yala. Abya Yala is a term that Indigenous movements have adopted to refer to the American continent from a decolonial perspective. In the language of the Kuna people, Abya Yala means “mature land,” “living land,” or “flourishing land.” The first time the expression was explicitly used in this political sense was at the Second Continental Summit of the Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala, held in Quito in 2004 (Porto-Gonçalves, 2011). In this article, we will use this term to refer to Latin America.

Care is increasingly relevant in community settings, yet few publications focus on this relationship (Vega Solís and Martínez Buján, 2017), and even fewer within AFNs, even though they have been described in *Abya Yala* as organizational forms that reproduce and sustain life (Bracamontes Nájera et al., 2022; De León Roblero, 2023; Rodríguez Guerrero and Leal Martínez, 2023).

The co-authors are members of a Mexican AFN called *Red de Economía Solidaria La Gira*,² which aims to create alternative forms of economy and life in the region of Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico, through local production and consumption (Hensler et al., 2020). Based on our experience as women who actively participate in this AFN,³ we can say that care is a fundamental element of the network's purpose and daily practice. We have also realized that sustaining this type of citizen organization requires significant care, which falls disproportionately on a few individuals, mainly women (De León Roblero, 2023; Moreno Uribe and Lezica Rodríguez, 2026). By “care,” we refer to what feminisms describe as a set of tangible and intangible practices essential

for sustaining lives (Agenjo-Calderón, 2023; Carrasco, 2003; Pérez Orozco, 2004), which have historically been rendered invisible and assigned to women (Carrasco, 2006; Pérez Orozco, 2006).

In this article, we argue that care practices within self-managed AFNs,⁴ such as short supply chains (e.g., alternative farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture, consumer groups, and cooperatives), are relevant to consider because most of these initiatives are formed with the intention of caring for territories and their inhabitants. We also highlight the multitude of tangible and intangible practices required for sustaining these AFNs, and the need for fairer care distribution. This underscores the necessity of developing strategies that allow these organizations to become self-sustaining, expand their reach, and amplify their positive impact over time. We propose analyzing the relation between care and AFNs using the concept of “territory-body-land” (*territorio-cuerpo-tierra*), coined by the community feminist Cabnal (2010). We believe this concept, which originates in *Abya Yala*, provides a more integrative view of care that can also be useful in AFNs in the Global North.

We present a conceptual framework to identify care practices within AFNs from a multidimensional, intersectional, and feminist territorial perspective. This conceptual framework is the result of a dialogic process combining deductive and inductive approaches, i.e., literature and experience. Its use in *La Gira* has confirmed its effectiveness as a tool for self-reflection for AFNs who want to examine care from a feminist territorial perspective. We begin by examining care as practices and relationships inscribed in the territory-body-land, drawing on various feminist frameworks and emphasizing the need for a community-based reorganization of care. Then, we define the concept of AFNs. We argue for the potential of AFNs to care for territory-body-lands, and the importance of a more equitable distribution of care to sustain them. We propose a conceptual framework to identify care practices within AFNs. We conclude by suggesting pathways for future research on AFNs and care, as well as contributions to self-reflective processes within Global South and North AFNs.

2 Caring for the territory-body-land from a community-based approach

Intuitively, we feel that care is essential to our lives, yet it is difficult to define. Care has been a central concern of feminist social movements and scholars for many years. Care has been conceptualized depending on the context. Each approach emphasizes different aspects of care (Jiménez Valdez, 2022). Nonetheless, any definition of care is inherently connected to human vulnerability and, consequently, interdependence (Tronto, 1993).

Below, we draw on elements of feminist economics, feminist political ecologies, ecofeminisms, and community (or territorial) feminisms to conceptualize care as practices and relationships that sustain life. These practices and relationships have been thought of the territory-body-land by community feminisms (Cabnal, 2010). From these perspectives, we understand care as being enacted in relation to one-self (self-care), to others (*interdependence* at interpersonal and community levels), and to nature (*ecodependence*) (Herrero, 2013). Care practices require time, energy, knowledge, resources, and emotional

¹ A food system is defined as a “network of actors, processes, and interactions involved in the production, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food” (IPES-Food, 2015, p. 3).

² For more information: <https://lagira.org/> (in Spanish).

³ Three authors took part in the process in 2018 that resulted in the creation of this Mexican AFN a year later. Two authors are still members of the coordinating group.

⁴ In this article, we do not consider organic farming, fair trade, and geographical indication of origin to be AFNs.

commitment. They also encompass deep contradictions: on the one hand, care is indispensable for sustaining (Carrasco, 2003); on the other, care has been historically rendered invisible, socially devalued, and oppressively assigned to women (Carrasco, 2006; Pérez Orozco, 2006) by the patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial system. Figure 1 illustrates this complex conceptualization of care.

We develop the concept of care as life-sustaining practices and relationships. We then introduce the notion of territory-body-land and discuss the importance of community-based approaches to reorganizing care socially.

2.1 Care as practices and relationships for sustaining life

Care encompasses all the practices carried out to sustain life. According to Carrasco (2003), care is “the invisible hand of everyday life.” It relates to feeding, health, child-rearing, assisting people with illness and/or disabilities, hygiene, emotional support and planning and managing daily life (Moreno Uribe and Trevilla Espinal, 2021).

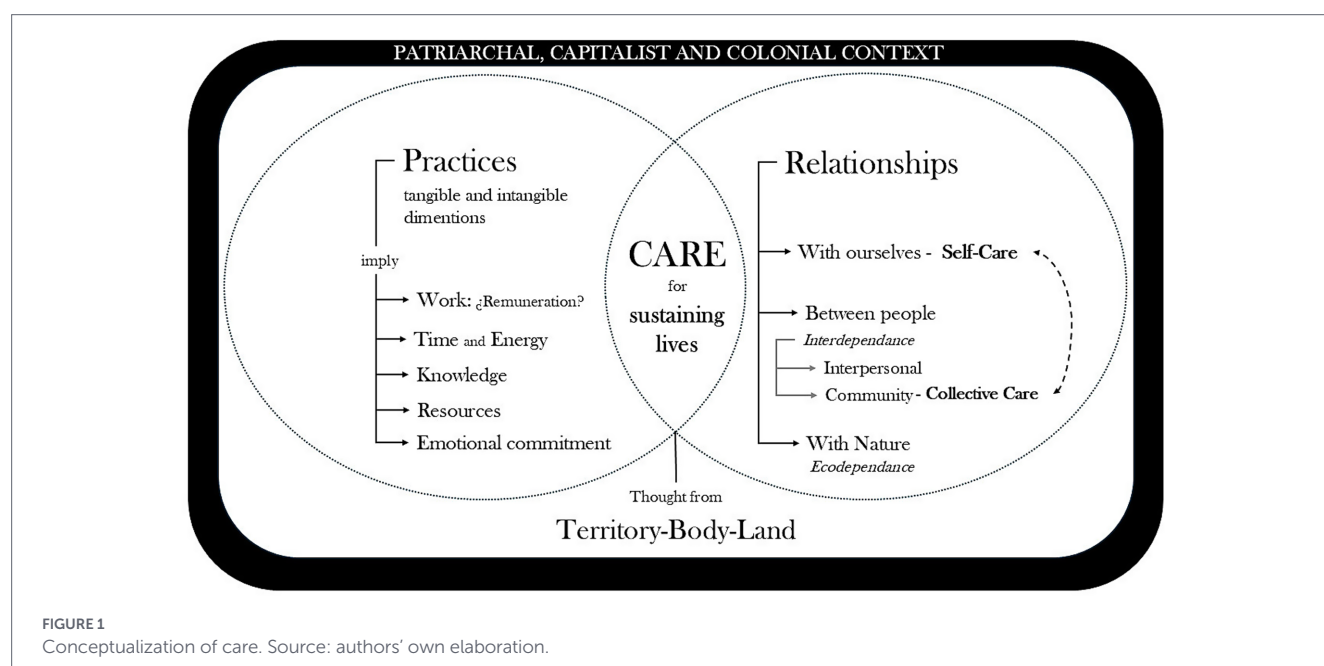
Feminist economists have recognized care practices as work within an economic system in which the primary goals are production and capital accumulation. In this system, only tasks that can be monetized and belong to the wage economy and the public sphere are considered work (Pérez Orozco, 2004). This allowed for the denunciation of the false division between reproductive care work, which is primarily done by women, and productive work aimed at generating capital, which is considered more masculine. It also rejected the associated division between the private domestic sphere and the public sphere (Carrasco et al., 2011; Federici, 2013; Pérez Orozco, 2004). Feminist political economists have also highlighted how capitalist economies depend on care to reproduce labor, while simultaneously undermine the conditions that enable it (Braedley and Luxton, 2021; Fraser, 2016). Feminist political ecologists have applied the same reasoning to the extractivist approach industrialized capitalism takes toward the environment (Plumwood, 1993; Rocheleau et al., 1996).

Feminist economists and ecofeminists have shown that care work is essential for both the reproduction of the labor force and sustainability of human and non-human lives. This perspective provides a less anthropocentric interpretation of care by considering its socioeconomic and environmental dimensions (Agenjo-Calderón, 2023; Carrasco, 2003; Herrero and Gago, 2023; Pérez Orozco, 2004, 2006).

Viewing care as work raises the issue of its lack of remuneration. It also raises the question of whether paying for care could recognize its value in both the domestic and public realms. Some feminist economists have undertaken the exercise of monetizing care, revealing that women have subsidized capitalist economies worldwide by performing unpaid care work. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (2000), for example, use the metaphor of an iceberg to describe the economy, stating that it “floats thanks to two-thirds of collective effort that remains invisible” in reference to care work. It is estimated that 80% of domestic workers worldwide are women. The economic value of the unpaid care work carried out by women aged 15 and older is at least \$10.8 trillion per year (OXFAM México, 2019).

Recognizing care as a practice also highlights the time and energy it requires. In Latin America and the Caribbean, women spend between two and four times more hours on unpaid work than men (PNUD, 2023). Within the patriarchal societal model, care has historically been assigned to women and justified through biological and essentialist arguments that portray women as naturally inclined to care because they can bear children (Puleo, 2005). Furthermore, care activities also require access to material and financial resources (OXFAM International, 2020).

As humans, we are profoundly interdependent beings who need care throughout our entire lives (Carrasco, 2009; Herrero, 2011). Feminist economists thus denounce the illusion of independence established by the patriarchal and capitalist system (Carrasco, 2003; Pérez Orozco, 2004, 2006). This interdependence can occur interpersonally between two or more individuals or communally within



organized groups (see section 2.3). Ecofeminisms⁵ also highlight the relationship of dependence that humanity has with nature, the ecodependence (Herrero, 2013). Ecodependence is also addressed, though with different terms, by community feminisms (discussed in the next section), which emerged from Indigenous women. Through relational ontologies, these women view humanity as an integral part of nature, like any living and non-living being (Escobar, 2014). Both interdependence and ecodependence show us that we are part of a network of lives -human and non-human- connected to one another (Herrero, 2012). In this sense, Fisher and Tronto (1990, p. 40) define care as “a species activity that includes everything that 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, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.” This definition encompasses interpersonal care, self-care, and environmental care.

Furthermore, care is also recognized to have a more subjective and intangible dimension related to affective-relational bonds and emotional wellbeing (Carrasco, 2009; Pérez Orozco, 2006). This dimension is experienced in relation to the self, to others, things and places, interconnectedly. For example, self-care is not only personal, as the prefix “self-” might suggest, but also collective, because we are interdependent beings (Guzmán Sierra and López Céspedes, 2022; Michaeli, 2017). Human rights defenders, journalists, mothers, and relatives of disappeared persons and/or victims of femicide emphasize that self-care cannot be conceived without collective care, and both are political tools for building more just and dignified worlds for all people (Carlson et al., 2024; Chamberlain, 2020; Wrigley et al., 2024). The Covid-19 pandemic reinforced this inseparability between self-care and collective care (Gravante et al., 2022; Schwarz, 2020).

Although care is essential for sustaining life, it is shaped by power dynamics, particularly intersectionality.⁶ Tronto (1993) has highlighted the inequalities surrounding the distribution of care, as well as the risk of fostering paternalistic and dominant practices. According to the author, those with more power tend to delegate caregiving tasks, while those with less power perform them under precarious conditions. These precarious conditions are referred to as “care chains.” Furthermore, caregivers may impose their own views on what others need, disregarding the autonomy of care recipients. Tronto emphasizes the importance of recognizing that caring is not merely an individual quality, but rather, it depends primarily on social organization. According to Tronto, the intention to care does not guarantee the

quality of care. This is why we must exercise caution when providing and analyzing care.

2.2 Caring for the territory-body-land

The term territory-body-land emerged from the experiences of community feminists in *Abya Yala*. It highlights how attacks on and exploitation of their territories—driven by mining companies and power plant construction—are also attacks on their bodies (Cabnal, 2010; Cruz Hernández, 2016; Haesbaert, 2020). This concept has given rise to feminist march slogans such as “Neither the land nor our bodies are territories of conquest!” “Territory-body-land” is a political, epistemic and ethical concept that also aims at understanding how violence operates. Violence against bodies and violence against the land are part of the same system of domination: colonial, patriarchal, racist, and capitalist. For community feminists, just as violence against territory-body-land is interconnected, so too are the acts of care.

Women’s body-territory is the first space of defense, autonomy, and healing. Recovering the body involves reclaiming sexuality, pleasure, the capacity to decide, and the memory of harm. Healing the body is also healing the territory. This is why community feminisms address care both on a personal and collective level. On one hand, they highlight the importance of self-care and collective healing of our bodies-lands (Jiménez Valdez, 2022). On the other, they point to the existence of territories of care as collective political spaces that do not operate within the divisions between culture/nature, mind/body, reason/emotion, or public/private (Trentini and Pérez, 2021). In urban areas, territories of care also refer to community networks where life is reproduced materially and symbolically (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2020). These networks can confront the privatization of the social, the patriarchal assignment of care work to women, and the lack of recognition of the material bases that sustain life (Celiberti, 2022).

A society that prioritizes economic growth over people and nature’s wellbeing is one that harms bodies and lands (Herrero, 2012). By disregarding the limits of natural goods and denying, hiding, and distorting the network of dependencies among all forms of life, capitalism inevitably leads humanity toward collapse (Herrero, 2011; Navarro and Gutiérrez, 2018). Ecofeminism and community feminism invite us to learn from the logic of life, drawing inspiration from nature to promote sustainable socioeconomic systems (Herrero, 2011).

2.3 On the need for a social reorganization of care

Feminist economists coined the term “capital-life conflict” to refer to the toxicity of the capitalist-heteropatriarchal-colonialist system as it destroys all forms of life, both human and non-human, through commodification (Pérez Orozco, 2021). One path to confront this conflict and aspire to more equitable societies is to think about the social reorganization of care. This implies rebalancing the production and distribution of care among families, the state, the market, and community organizations (Rodríguez Enríquez, 2015). Traditionally, this responsibility has fallen on families, and within them, on women.

Some feminists advocate for a greater role of the state in providing care through the implementation of national care systems (Espino and Salvador, 2014) to recognize, reduce, and redistribute care work, inspired by public welfare services adopted in European welfare states. At the same time, other scholars highlight the potential of community-based care, noting that although this dimension has always been

⁵ There are two main currents of ecofeminism: essentialist (Vandana Shiva, María Mies, Ivonne Guevara) and constructivist (Yayo Herrero, Alicia Puleo, Bina Agarwal). The former considers an intrinsic and innate relationship between women and nature, while the latter affirms that this relationship is a social construction (IPES-Food, 2015). It is not the purpose of this article to enter into this debate and comparison, although the authors position ourselves more within constructivist ecofeminisms. For more information on these ecofeminisms, see Puleo (2005).

⁶ Caregiving has been analyzed in relation to multiple inequalities. A central theory and analytical tool developed by Black feminists in the 1990s, particularly by authors such as Kimberlé Crenshaw and later Patricia Hill Collins, is intersectionality (Viveros Vigoya, 2016). Intersectionality considers that power relations and the system of domination are mediated not only by the social category of gender, but also by race, class, age, sexual orientation, among others. An interesting aspect that intersectionality raises is that certain groups can find themselves in positions of both oppressor and oppressed at the same time, depending on the situation.

present, it has not been sufficiently studied (Vega Solís and Martínez Buján, 2017; Vega Solís et al., 2018). Community care or care in the community refers to collaborative experiences in which the design and execution of care are in the hands of a collective that takes ownership of its conditions and benefits, sometimes giving rise to new communities (Vega Solís et al., 2018).

In *Abya Yala*, Moreno Uribe and Casados González (2024) refer to “care communities” as social organizations formed with the intention of practicing care as political responses in violent, precarious, or aggressive contexts. Due to their great complexity, care communities are subject to tensions and contradictions: on the one hand, sustaining them entails a heavy workload and mental burden—mainly for women, since these organizations are feminized—and, on the other hand, they are a source of great joy and solidarity.

3 Alternative food networks as care communities of the territory-body-land

By highlighting the links between care and AFNs, we recognize the potential of AFNs for caring for territory-body-lands as a form of care community, while we also point out that the sustainability of these AFNs as community organizations depends on many forms of care that must be approached from an equity perspective.⁷ Moreover, we propose a conceptual framework to represent the relationship between AFNs and care from a feminist territorial perspective and a multidimensional, intersectional lens.

3.1 Alternative food networks, agroecology and care

Although what are now referred to as AFNs have long existed -and were in fact the norm prior to the rise of industrialized agri-food systems- they were not conceptualized or named as such at the time. Their political significance and explicit positioning as AFNs have become more visible since the late 1990s and early 2000s.

There is no consensus definition of AFNs as their objectives and forms depend on the context in which they emerge. The concept refers to a set of initiatives that break away from the conventional agri-food system (Deverre and Lamine, 2010; IPES-Food, 2015; Whatmore et al., 2003), promoting principles of economic, social and environmental sustainability (Forssell and Lankoski, 2014) like direct relationships between producers and consumers (reduced intermediaries), shorter transport and logistics distances, community participation and learning, and production practices perceived as more ecological or ethical. In general, the proximity between producers and consumers and the various communication strategies fosters bonds of trust (Jarosz, 2000; Kaufmann et al., 2023; Renting et al., 2003) and contributes to the building of social capital (Furness et al., 2022).

AFNs emerge from specific political, cultural, and historical contexts and develop through interactions between rural and urban areas (Deverre and Lamine, 2010; Jarosz, 2008). They are diverse and heterogeneous organizations. While literature from the Global North includes third-party certifications for organic agriculture, fair trade, and geographical indication of origin within the AFN concept (Renting et al., 2003; Le Velly, 2019), Latin American literature just includes short supply chain like alternative or agroecological farmers' markets, community support agriculture (CSA), consumer groups, cooperatives, and direct-sales systems at farms and community gardens (Bracamontes Nájera and Benítez Keinrad, 2021). The level of involvement of producers and consumers in the logistics and decision-making processes of AFNs varies depending on many factors, including the structure of each collective, the interest and willingness of participants, and the time they can commit. This article discusses a proposal primarily aimed at AFNs established through short-supply chain and local citizen initiatives. These AFNs operate mainly on a self-managed basis and rely on volunteer or low-paid labor.

In the literature on alternative food networks (AFNs), the first debate concerns the scope and capacity of AFNs to build more sustainable food systems due to their very local scale of impact (Bellante, 2017; Bracamontes Nájera, 2024; Michel-Villarreal et al., 2019; Forssell and Lankoski, 2014). The second debate concerns the “alternative” nature of these initiatives or, more generally, of alternative food practices (Whatmore et al., 2003; Goodman, 2004). Attention is drawn to the risk of binary or dualistic thinking, which tends to posit an essentialist separation between alternative and conventional food systems, when many of these systems could be considered hybrid, as they involve conventional actors and infrastructure (Hinrichs, 2003; Ilbery and Maye, 2005; Sonnino and Marsden, 2006). These criticisms are directed primarily at AFNs in the Global North and, more specifically, at organic farming, fair trade and designations of origin (Le Velly, 2019). However, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, our proposal, which has its origins in *Abya Yala*, is directed primarily at short supply chains established by citizens and operating on a self-managed grassroots basis, thereby excluding other alternative models. This does not mean that AFNs in *Abya Yala* are free from contradictions or links to conventional models, as they are embedded within a global capitalist context (Le Velly, 2017, 2019).

This article presents AFNs as a community-based political response to the tyranny of the agri-food system. AFNs are organizations that seek to establish systems for producing, distributing, and consuming food (and other goods) that operate according to principles that are different from those of the dominant system. These principles include establishing direct links between producers and consumers, creating more equitable political and economic relationships, producing healthier foods in a sustainable way and encouraging mindful consumption (Bracamontes Nájera and Benítez Keinrad, 2021). The alternative nature of these AFNs and their potential to challenge the hegemonic agri-food system is closely tied to the socio-economic and political context in which they arise, as well as the motivations that drive them.

AFNs are studied as social and political movements of food activism (Gravante, 2020) which practice solidarity economy (Arellanes-Cancino and Juárez, 2022; Rodríguez Guerrero et al., 2022) and build trust-based relationships (Cadavid Castro et al., 2019). They contribute to the development of agroecology (Rosas-Domínguez et al., 2024) by building participatory guarantee systems (Roldán Rueda et al., 2018; Torres-Salcido, 2022).

⁷ Speaking of equity rather than equality in relation to care involves recognizing that people do not start from the same conditions nor occupy the same positions within the social relations that organize care. In this sense, the concept of equity makes it possible to address the structural inequalities that shape care, such as those relates to intersectionality (gender, class, ethnicity, age, or migration) rather than relying solely on the abstract idea of treating everyone in the same way.

Agroecology, in turn, promotes caring for nature and human health. It accomplishes this by mimicking natural cycles in production system design and eliminating agrochemicals (Nicholls et al., 2016). Building on this connection between agriculture and care, Mincyté et al. (2025) coined the term “agri-care” to demonstrate that agricultural practices involve care, thereby challenging the conventional separation between production and reproduction.

Nevertheless, agroecology has its own set of contradictions. First, because food production is a human necessity, the field retains an anthropocentric approach. This approach has been criticized by “more-than-human” ethics (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Seymour and Connelly, 2023; Tsagdis, 2025). Beacham (2018) emphasizes this human-centric focus, even within alternative food systems. Second, power relations surrounding gender, class, race, and other social classifications persist in agroecology, thus justifying the incorporation of a feminist perspective (Gayo et al., 2025; Pickering, 2024; Zaremba et al., 2021). This would also highlight the contributions of women and other marginalized groups in the field (Chanyau and Rosenberg, 2023; Ramirez-Santos et al., 2023; Reyes and González Castillo, 2024; Sibanda, 2025; Trevilla Espinal et al., 2021; Zuluaga-Sánchez et al., 2018).

3.2 The roles of alternative food networks in caring for territory-body-land

AFNs offer a response to the negative impacts of the hegemonic agri-food system on health, the economy of small farmers’ families, and nature (González-Romero and Cánovas-García, 2021; Sánchez Hernández, 2009). These initiatives arise from social groups or movements seeking to transform relationships and promote more democratic forms of organization around food production, distribution, and consumption (Bracamontes Nájera, 2024).

Below, we present a categorization of six territorial impact dimensions of AFNs, drawn from the literature reviewed on AFNs in *Abya Yala* (Arellanes-Cancino and Juárez, 2022; Bara, 2022; Bracamontes Nájera, 2024; Cadavid Castro et al., 2019; García Bustamante et al., 2022; Pasquier Merino et al., 2022; Rodríguez Guerrero et al., 2022, 2023; Monachon, 2017; Gravante, 2019; Santana, 2011; Salgado-Sánchez and Castro-Ramírez, 2016).

• Economic dimension

AFNs contribute to creating “other economies” local alternatives to capitalism, based on principles of solidarity and social justice, privileging people’s wellbeing over profit, and promoting fair trade. Providing spaces for direct marketing and establishing fair prices is a way for AFNs to care for small farmers by revaluing their work, often re-signifying their identity as peasants, and dignifying their lives. Unlike conventional markets, AFNs are ideal marketing spaces for peasants and small-scale farmers seeking to diversify their production and income.

• Political-organizational dimension

AFNs constitute new forms of political agency that bring together producing and consuming units for the collective management of

food systems by fostering horizontal relationships and encouraging collaborative work. In this way, they foster political arrangements that care for the active participation in decisions and practices of the different social actors involved. Alternative food networks also provide political education for the members.

• Socio-cultural dimension

AFNs help maintain traditional crops by valuing the traditional agricultural practices associated with them, promoting the exchange of culturally significant recipes to encourage consumption, and opening spaces for seed exchange. In this way, they contribute to caring for food culture within territories and their members.

• Affective dimension

AFNs foster direct and close relationships between producers and consumers from rural and urban areas, based on trust and affective bonds, solidarity and reciprocity. These affective relationships occur not only among AFN members but also with the territories they inhabit, promoting a vision that is increasingly less dichotomous between humans and nature. As spaces for gathering and celebration, AFN become emotional support networks. Additionally, they help care for the social fabric of territories and foster conscious, committed citizenship toward environmental care.

• Environmental dimension

AFNs promote sustainable, agroecological, and local production and consumption, thereby contributing to the care and conservation of ecosystems and to keep the members healthy. Many implement waste reduction strategies such as bulk sales, biodegradable packaging, and returnable container systems. Some are directly involved in territory defense and care. Reducing the distance products travel also contributes to the environmental care of territories.

• Health dimension

AFNs encourage the consumption of agroecological products and personal care items, contributing to the physical health of participants. They also promote reflections and practices for healthier living in both consumption and production (e.g., avoiding chemicals, substituting certain inputs). By providing spaces where affective bonds are revalued, they also participate in caring for psychological and emotional health.

We propose to think of these territorial impacts as care practices aimed at sustaining territory-body-land carried out by the community. Although some dimensions appear to be more closely linked to body care (“health,” for example) and others to the land care (“environmental,” for example), as communitarian feminism has pointed out, these scales and dimensions are interconnected. This means that a single care practice within the AFNs can impact multiple dimensions and scales simultaneously. For instance, organizing group visits to producers helps raise awareness and educate participants about production challenges relating to the political-organizational, environmental and socio-cultural dimensions. This can lead to increased sales for the visited producers (economic dimension, producer’s body) and strengthen bonds of trust and

closeness among attendees (affective dimension, producer and consumer's body).

Care communities have the following characteristics: they explicitly intend to provide care; they emerge as a collective response to specific problems through the organization of community care, they are characterized by constant deliberation regarding care and its associated challenges, and they prioritize the reproduction of life and community strengthening in their economic practices (Moreno Uribe and Lezica Rodríguez, 2026). In this sense, not all AFNs are necessarily care communities, even though they provide certain forms of care.

A distinctive feature of AFNs as care communities is their focus on the entire food chain, from production and processing to distribution and consumption. This affects both our bodies and the land, as AFNs promote a solidarity-based economy and agroecology to achieve this. In sum, this community response represents a form of care exercised within a context of oppression, precarization, and violence linked to the capitalist-patriarchal system (Casados González and Moreno Uribe, 2021). Although these AFNs hold great transformative potential for food systems, they remain vulnerable because the care they provide is caught in a continuous tension and conflict between capital and life (Pérez Orozco, 2021). Below, we highlight one of these fragile points.

3.3 Equity and care in alternative food networks

Despite the great diversity of organizational forms, functioning, and financing of AFNs afore mentioned, all require extensive care to be sustained. The work of many AFNs is supported by a great number of people, primarily women, who do not always receive economic compensation for this labor, or when they do, it often falls below minimum wage (De León Roblero, 2023; Bara et al., 2023; Bracamontes Nájera, 2024).

One of the challenges faced by some AFNs is ensuring that the workload required to sustain them does not depend on only a few people. This is crucial to protect the wellbeing of those who participate in care practices and the long-term sustainability of the organizations (Bracamontes Nájera, 2024). De León Roblero (2023) notes that this is no easy task given the diversity of lives, times, energies, ways of being, doing, and thinking among those who form these AFNs.

In a context of high labor precarization, some AFNs choose to remunerate coordination, management, and/or logistics tasks, while others prefer in-kind compensation, for example, discounts on purchases (Bracamontes Nájera, 2024). Although compensation (monetary or not) is a way to value the work, time, and energy involved in some activities, it does not guarantee a more equitable redistribution of care and sustainability within AFNs (De León Roblero, 2023). First, because remunerating these tasks tends to professionalize the people who assume them, concentrating responsibility in a small team. Second, because not everyone has the same economic needs, time availability, knowledge, or skills to take on these activities. Third, due to the limited budgets of many AFNs, remuneration is often restricted to tangible activities, excluding time spent in coordination meetings, process improvement planning, or convening gatherings, even though these are fundamental to AFNs' functioning.

The goal is not for everyone in the AFN to contribute in the same way, but for people to contribute collaboratively according to their own circumstances and possibilities for greater social justice. This implies finding diverse forms of collaboration suited to a diversity of

lives and profiles. For instance, it can be challenging for those raising an infant to attend the coordinating group's evening virtual meetings because the timing conflicts with mealtimes and bedtime. If that person is also single, meaning they cannot rely on a partner to help care for the infant, has to work all day to earn an income and lives in a community with limited internet access, then it becomes even more challenging. Therefore, it is insufficient to simply make work visible by listing tasks and counting hours; it is important to collectively define how work is distributed among different actors and subjects (De León Roblero, 2023) according to our contexts and from an intersectional perspective.

It is essential to consider equitable distribution of roles in AFNs as part of self-care and collective care practices—to care for those who care—and thus avoid reproducing the oppressive model that these AFNs resist. In this sense, it would be worthwhile to approach who performs these care tasks sustaining AFNs as community organizations from an intersectional perspective, in order to better design strategies that facilitate collective work with just distribution of care.

3.4 Care in alternative food networks: a conceptual framework

As a summary, we propose a conceptual framework that promotes reflections on care in AFNs from a feminist territorial perspective and a multidimensional, intersectional lens (Figure 2). Care permeates—though to varying degrees depending on context—the economic, political-organizational, socio-cultural, affective, environmental, and health dimensions outlined above.

Bodies appear as the primary territories integrated into a community territory—the AFN—which itself is situated within the territory-land. The divisions between dimensions and scales permeable as a single care practice can encompass multiple dimensions and even territorial scales simultaneously.

Finally, the proposal is to examine these care practices through the lens of intersectionality to understand who is sustaining these forms of care and in what tensions context. The social categories relevant to consider in AFNs are not predetermined; while gender appears to be a central category, it would be interesting to explore others such as age, class, education, race, origin (rural/urban), role in the AFN (producer/consumer), and so forth.

By helping visualize the complexity of the relationships between AFNs and care, this conceptual framework can also be used within AFNs themselves as a tool for internal dialogue to foster collective reflection on care by identifying care practices and locating them across different dimensions and territorial scales.

Reflection can be expanded through triggering questions such as: Are there care practices that impact multiple dimensions and/or scales simultaneously? Which ones, and how? Which dimensions and scales do we care for the most and why? Are there dimensions we neglect? Is this acceptable? Who performs these care practices from an intersectional perspective (gender, age, class, race, roles within the AFN, etc.) and why? Are we comfortable with the distribution of care in our AFN? Do we care about other aspects not included in these dimensions? How could care for these dimensions and scales be improved by seeking a balance between self-care and collective care? What facilitates or hinders these care practices?

We test this conceptual framework in 2024, as part of a Participatory Action Research with the Red de Economía Solidaria La Gira to identify how care was practiced on

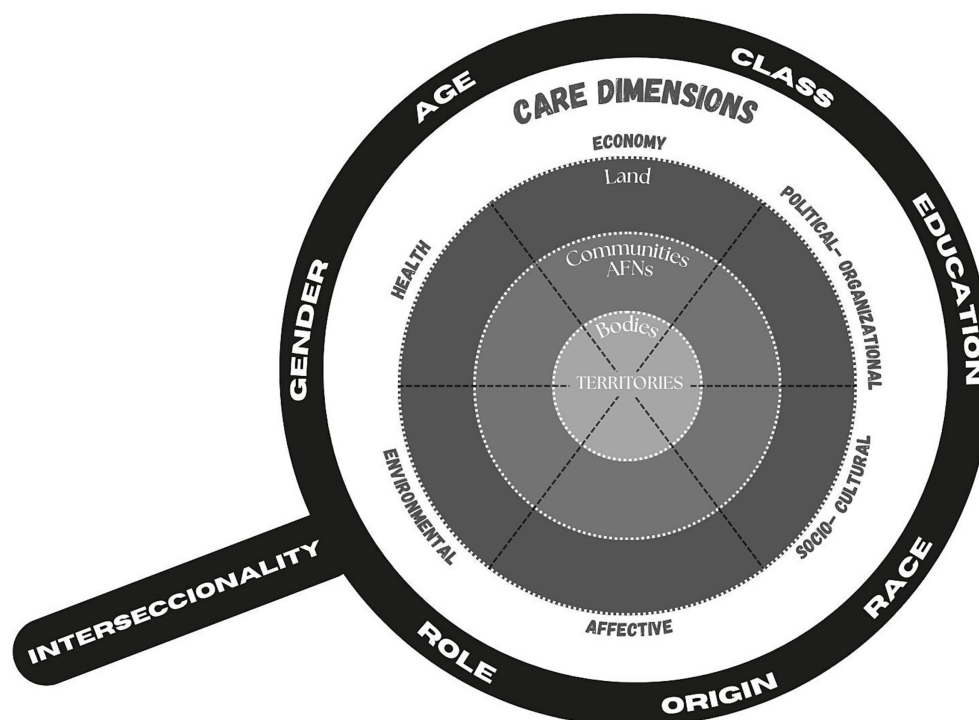


FIGURE 2

Conceptual framework representing care in Alternative Food Networks from a feminist territorial perspective and a multidimensional, intersectional approach. Source: authors' own elaboration.

territories-bodies-lands. Having predefined dimensions helped us name and make visible the amount of care we provide, which often goes unseen. We realized that single care practice can impact different territorial dimensions and scales simultaneously. Through this exercise, we were able to identify the dimensions where our efforts are concentrated and reflect on this. We also realized that the care that emerges from the community scale manages to permeate, to a greater or lesser extent, bodies and land. The intersectional issues were examined at a later stage of the research process with *La Gira*, helping to develop strategies for more equitable care distribution (Jarri et al., in press).

Applying this conceptual framework to the AFNs can help to identify situations of injustice and vulnerabilities, leading to improved care practices within the networks. By highlighting the complexity of care within the AFNs, this conceptual framework could inform future research on the topic. Furthermore, it could contribute to acknowledging the role of the AFNs in caring for territories, bodies and land, and thus advocate for policies that strengthen them.

4 Final reflections

From a conceptual discussion on AFNs and care grounded in feminist approaches from *Abya Yala*, we identified an important role of AFNs in caring for territory-body-land. We emphasized that the sustainment of these AFNs as community organizations depends on numerous care practices that must be considered from an intersectional perspective. We also proposed a conceptual framework as a research and self-reflection tool for AFNs to think about care from a

feminist territorial approach with a multidimensional and intersectional outlook. We hope this tool contributes to discerning pathways to strengthen care within AFNs and to build political demands to redistribute care, both within AFNs and more broadly.

This article contributes to the literature on care and agroecology by exploring the role of organizations that facilitate the distribution and consumption of agroecological products, an area that remains largely unexplored. The concept of “territory-body-land” enhances studies on care in agroecology by exploring the interrelationship between bodies and territories more deeply. This concept paves the way toward a multispecies approach to care. Feminisms from *Abya Yala* further expand this analysis by integrating an intersectional perspective that goes beyond gender. This allows us to problematize the underlying power relations of care practices in households, communities, and AFNs in both the Global South and Global North.

This study does not empirically address how care is provided in AFNs. In the case of *La Gira*, however, care practices are analyzed in Jarri et al. (in press). Therefore, future research and self-reflective processes within AFNs should delve deeper into how care is enacted internally, making visible the time, energy, resources, knowledge, and affections involved, while considering the great diversity of organizational forms.

Additionally, it would be relevant to analyze how women who maintain these AFNs perceive the balance between enjoyment and exhaustion, both emotional and physical, in order to prevent burnout. Another interesting topic would be to identify criteria for AFN care remuneration and explore whether AFN members consider it a viable solution for ensuring the sustainability of AFNs. It would also be interesting to compare different strategies for redistributing care according to context.

The article emphasizes the necessity of conducting additional research on the distribution of care from an intersectional standpoint. Such research typically employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data. Suggested methods include those drawn from social research, such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, life stories, and focus groups, as well as methods more closely linked to feminist participatory action research, such as mapping and narrative practices. For more information on possible methodologies for studying intersectionality, we recommend McCall (2005) paper.

Finally, we also invite further inquiry into the conditions that enable or hinder both the care of territory-body-land by AFNs and the sustainment of the AFNs themselves.

Recognizing and naming care within AFNs can transform them into more relational, affective, and life-sustaining processes. This demonstrates that we can relate to each other and organize ourselves differently by respecting the cyclicity of nature, our bodies and our collective processes. Perhaps the truly alternative nature of AFNs lies in their ability to create ways of living, relating, producing, and consuming that differ from the dominant capitalist-heteropatriarchal-colonial system, opening new imaginaries and paths that place care for life and justice at their core.

Author contributions

LJ: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. JM: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. LH: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. VM: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing. CL: Methodology, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared that this work was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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