

Community Radio as a Space of Care: An Ecofeminist Perspective on Media Production in Environmental Conflicts

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This article examines the ways in which community radios can act as spaces and vehicles of care for communities fighting extractivism. I draw from fieldwork research carried out in Argentina, and look at experiences of community radio in four provinces: Catamarca, San Juan, Córdoba, and Neuquén. In this task, I adopt the perspectives of ecofeminism and the ethics of care. An ecofeminist ethic of care, I argue, is a useful framework for looking at community media and environmental conflicts because it allows us to jointly think about care for the environment and relations of care within communities fighting to preserve life. In my analysis, I explore the idea of care in urgent resistance and care as a quality of prefigurative social relations and processes. I identify four different ways in which radios facilitate relations of care, and argue that the underlying logic to the ethic of care enacted through these radios is one of interdependence.

Keywords: community media, ecofeminism, extractivism, Argentina, radio, care, environment

In Latin America, environmental conflicts are often linked to the preservation of the commons, and involve a dispute over the supposed benefits of the dominant development model (Coryat, 2015). Social movements stand against environmental damage and the unjust production and distribution of risks, and focus on such issues as the effects on health, lifestyle, and territory of environmental degradation (Merlinsky, 2017, pp. 245–246). In this context, extractive activities such as open-pit mining, deforestation, and fossil fuel extraction are often imposed through great violence (Machado Aráoz, 2014, p. 64). This violence is exerted on the territory, and also on the bodies of those resisting extraction, who suffer not only the consequences of environmental degradation but who are also subjected to increased control and repression on behalf of the state, corporations, and in some cases, paramilitary forces. For the most part, environmental degradation and its surrounding conflicts are underreported in the mainstream media (Mercado-Sáez & Koop, 2018).

The aforementioned dynamics correspond to what scholars in Latin America have termed “extractivism,” an economic and political model based on the extensive extraction of natural resources mostly destined for export, framed as the continent’s only path toward “development” (Gudynas, 2009). Though

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extractivism has its origins in the colonization of the Americas, the region has recently seen a new stage of this model referred to by some as neoextractivism, which was propelled by the commodity boom of the early 2000s and coincided, in some countries, with the emergence of socially progressive governments. Most recently, after a decline in commodity prices, the region is entering yet a new era of extractivism, one in which the expansion of the extractive frontier is violently pushed to ensure maximum profitability (Svampa, 2019).

In Argentina, the resistance to extractivism has taken the form of local collectives and regional and national networks that mostly follow an autonomous organizing logic and are characterized by a new, shared valorization of the territory—what can be understood as an “ecoterritorial turn” (Svampa, 2019, p. 44). In this context, a wealth of community radios has emerged, reporting on environmental news and protests, and also offering an alternative perspective on the outcomes and impacts of extractive activities in the territory, countering in this way both invisibilization and the dominant development narratives of the mainstream media (Svampa & Viale, 2014).

This article examines the different ways in which community radios in Argentina act as spaces and vehicles of care for communities fighting extractivism. I choose to focus on community radio because this has long been and still remains a key medium for enacting social change and imagining new forms of community life in Latin America (Hayes, 2017, p. 275). The article explores the idea of care in instances of urgency and resistance, as well as care as a quality of prefigurative social relations and cultural production processes. It offers a walk through different experiences of community radio in four provinces of the country: Catamarca, San Juan, Córdoba, and Neuquén. In this task, I adopt the perspective of ecofeminism, and more precisely, and ecofeminist ethic of care, one that seeks to rethink and transform humankind’s relation to the rest of nature (Kings, 2017, p. 71).

An ecofeminist ethic of care, I argue, is a useful framework for looking at community media and environmental struggles because it allows us to jointly think about care for the environment and relations of care among communities. This perspective on media practices can facilitate an understanding of media production as a relational practice that is not distinct or separate from the environmental context and conflicts that are reported on. In my analysis and discussion of the data, I propose that there are four different ways in which radios facilitate relations of care. Finally, I argue that the underlying logic to the ethic of care enacted through these radios is one of interdependence.

This article seeks to make a contribution to the study of community media by proposing ecofeminism as a framework of analysis, and care as an important phenomenon that has been so far overlooked in media and communication research. In addition, the article aims to contribute to an emerging body of work focusing on the role of community and counterhegemonic media practices in the fight against extractivism (e.g., Coryat, 2015; Kidd, 2019). Qualitative research on the role of community radio in the context of environmental struggles can provide valuable evidence of the social value of community media, with the potential of informing media practice and policy in Argentina and beyond.

Ecofeminism and the Ethics of Care

Ecofeminism argues that “there are important connections—historical, experiential, symbolic, theoretical—between the domination of women and the domination of nature” (Warren, 1990, p. 126).

Ecofeminism is therefore both a feminist and an environmental ethic, and it contends that the separation that sets humans above nature in Western thought is responsible for a “violent rupture” between nature and humankind (Kings, 2017, p. 70). Ecofeminism contemplates the links between the injustices faced by women and the degradation of nature. For instance, in cases where women are in charge of home agriculture and food collection, one might consider how deforestation affects their social and economic possibilities.

Ecofeminism has received criticism for what has been termed a tendency toward essentialism; in other words, a strand of ecofeminism has upheld that the close relationship between women and the environment is rooted in biology, as are the differences between women and men (Pérez Prieto, 2017, p. 14). However, other strands of ecofeminism have challenged these notions and adopted a constructivist perspective instead. Indeed, already, in the 1990s, U.S. American feminist scholars were warning of the dangers of claiming women are biologically closer to nature than men. Their critiques mostly focused on two issues. First, that by arguing for this relationship, ecofeminism gave way to patriarchal arguments such as women’s predestined calling for motherhood, which in turn has been seen as justification for the task of care being relegated to women only. And second, much Western ecofeminism has assumed a universality of the female condition that ignores how poverty, racialization and the structural conditions in different regions, for instance, affect women in different ways (Stabile, 1994).

In response to this, intersectionality has been integral in thinking beyond essentialism and grasping, for instance, the role of class in the relationship between women and their environment, and in the environmental injustices that women face. Kings (2017) argues that women’s “closeness” to nature is variable, and depends on their role and position in society more than on any biological connection:

The division of resources and labour are factors which greatly influence gender differences in attitudes towards the conservation of the environment, with rural women more likely to take an active role in its protection given the degree of their dependency on nature for subsistence and survival. (pp. 76–77)

An intersectional ecofeminist analysis can also offer a more holistic approach to issues including land rights, indigenous rights, and menstrual hygiene. Intersectional ecofeminism sees the oppressions of women and nature as linked historically, materially, and conceptually, but not essentially—or, at least, not more so than the environmental oppressions felt by men as well (Mallory, 2010, as cited in Kings, 2017, p.70).

Feminisms from Abya Yala–Latin America²

Non-Western feminisms are those that emerge outside the epistemological foundations of Modernism (Gargallo Celentani, 2014 p. 17). In the case of Abya Yala–Latin America, where women have increasingly gained a central role in social movements, Maristella Svampa (2015) proposes considering the

² “Abya-Yala” is a term used by the Guna people of Colombia and Panama to refer to what has been termed the Americas since colonization. The term means “land in its full maturity,” or “land of vital blood,” and it has been adopted by several indigenous groups in the region. I am using two terms here, “Abya Yala” and “Latin America,” to recognize the plurality of positionalities and epistemologies emerging from the region.

"feminization" of social struggles in parallel with their "environmentalization," acknowledging the marked increase in conflicts over land and the exploitation of the commons. However, in this region, and especially outside urban centers, both the identity of "environmentalist" and of "feminist" are often not assumed. This is because one does not become an environmentalist or a feminist by choice, but because of the need to defend life and territory.

In Abya Yala–Latin America, as could be argued for other regions in the Global South, we find various forms of popular,³ community, and indigenous feminisms, which, in contrast to liberal feminism, are more concerned with the links among land, territory, and bodies—in particular, for instance, the issue of access to land (Korol, 2016; Ulloa, 2016)—and are committed to situated knowledge production. These forms of ecofeminism link their antipatriarchal struggle to a wider struggle against capitalism, ethnocentrism, and anthropocentrism (Pérez Prieto, 2017, p. 17). Popular, community and indigenous ecofeminisms address the issue of interdependence between different forms of life and their environment, and do so from a decolonial perspective, challenging Eurocentric versions of development, and the individualism promoted in the modernity paradigm (Gargallo Celentani, 2014).

When looking at Abya Yala–Latin America, argues Svampa (2015), it is also important not to follow an essentialist view of the relationship between women and nature, because we still need to address the naturalized division of the production and reproduction of the social. However, though many feminist thinkers and doers in the region adhere to such constructivist perspective, it is important to note as well that some see the label of essentialism as misguided, and consider it a Western category that is not suitable for framing some of the practices and beliefs of indigenous women or of other currents such as ecofeminist theology (LaDanta LasCanta, 2017, p. 37). We could therefore consider a cultural pluralism perspective on ecofeminism instead, one that recognizes different perspectives and sees humans and nature as neither fixed nor unchangeable (Li, 2007).

An Ecofeminist Ethic of Care

In this study, I am interested in exploring the idea of an "ecofeminist ethic of caring" (Swanson, 2015), or an ethic of care that is rooted in both feminist thought and environmental concerns. I follow from ecofeminists like Swanson (2015) and Curtin (1991) in considering the work on ethics of care carried out by feminists like Noddings and Gilligan. Gilligan (2013) speaks of the relational aspect of those activities that fall under care, and sees the ethic of care as a feminist ethic, which can lead to a radical liberation of humanity. Noddings (1984) also addresses the relational aspect of care and argues that care is reciprocal. She therefore doubts whether we can care, for instance, for nonhuman animals, or for that matter, the environment. Noddings' position on this regard could be read as anthropocentric, since she considers that care for the environment is only possible insofar as it directly affects human beings. In response, Curtin (1991) argues that "an ethic of care has an intuitive appeal from the standpoint of ecological ethics" (p. 65). This means we can experience nonreciprocal care, as in the case of working to preserve a natural habitat. Swanson argues that it is possible to conceive of "an intersection between an ethic of care and ecofeminist ethics based on a common assertion of relatedness" (p. 93). Instead of

³ "Popular" in Latin America implies an origin in or association to the working class.

thinking in terms of separate relations of reciprocity, and in line with the perspectives of feminist land defenders in Abya Yala-Latin America, I propose thinking about this relatedness in terms of interdependence, the understanding that all aspects of an ecosystem relate to each other. Assuming interdependence with our environment and different forms of life implicates an understanding of nature as different from resource.

In a society where women are often expected to put the needs of others before their own, an ethic of care can easily be abused. That is why an ethic of care—in this case an ecofeminist one—must be exercised “as part of a radical political agenda” (Curtin, 1991, p. 65) that breaks with the confinement of care to women in the domestic space and expands the reach of caring to others. This does not mean that women should disassociate themselves from care and nurture, but rather that an ethic of care should include everyone. With this in mind, while acknowledging the positionality and role of women in environmental struggles in Abya Yala-Latin America, in this study I choose not to focus on the roles and experiences of women specifically. Instead, I look at how an ecofeminist ethic of care can guide media practices that are part of collective struggles for the preservation of life, and focus on the possibilities of radio as a medium for facilitating care.

An ecofeminist ethic of care is political, and as such must be contextualized (Curtin, 1991, p. 67). A political and contextualized ecofeminist ethic of care is one that is culturally and geographically situated, and that advocates for care as a relational and political practice between and among human beings, nonhuman beings, and other entities in nature. It understands a relationship of interdependence among entities in an ecosystem and proposes care as the fundamental ethic to support those relations. In a moment of social, political, and environmental crisis at a global scale, an ecofeminist ethic of care can help us imagine a postcapitalist alternative to the development paradigm based on extractivism and the view of nature as resource (Elmhirst, 2017, p. 56).

Community Radio

Community media are those that involve community participation (Hayes, 2017, p. 268). They can act as spaces for members of a community to become active in generating change in their immediate environment and beyond. Community media differ from mainstream, commercial media in that they are invested in building collective leadership. Furthermore, “by valuing local cultures, organic processes and grassroots governance,” community media “shifts attention to diverse ways of organizing or managing and away from centralized modes of control” (Paranjape, 2007, p. 468). They are sites for cultural mediation and can be catalysts for engagement in community life (Hayes, 2017, p. 274). Such is the case of community radios, which can act as platforms for people to talk about local concerns as well as facilitate empowerment and the consolidation of communities (Gaynor & O’Brien, 2012), ideally within a democratic structure (Hochheimer, 1993, p. 474). When radio programming is developed with or within communities, it can also be a means for learning and promoting changes within that community (Harvey, 2011, p. 2039).

In Latin America, community radio has had an important role in reestablishing democratic processes in the aftermath of a wave of military coups in the second half of the 20th century. In each country, this took different forms, as radio was taken up by urban organizations, but also by indigenous

communities and other groups, as was the case of tin mine workers in Bolivia (O'Connor 1990, p. 103). In his study of Bolivian tin miners' radio, Huesca (1995) proposes looking at radio as a counterhegemonic practice that is both a "social force and an agent for popular participation" (p. 105). Radio, in this case, serves multiple purposes: It is a platform for promoting culture and building community bonds, but also, during times of political and social crisis, radios act as sites of resistance and organizing (O'Connor, 1990). Though the case of the tin miners in Bolivia was a landmark experience that goes back to the late 1940s, community radio became widespread in the region later on, in the 1980s and 1990s (Hayes, 2017, p. 273). This rise of community radio meant to disrupt the alliances between the state and commercial media, which had resulted from neoliberal reforms around that time (Hayes, 2017, pp. 273–274).

In Argentina, there is great diversity in the objectives, location, and social role of community radio. This includes religious and indigenous radios (the latter holding a special legal category), those that belong to civil association and cultural centers, and those that emerge from local neighborhood associations or work cooperatives. In many cases, community radios are part of organizations that also have other educational, cultural, and/or communications activities (Gerbaldo, 2010, p. 6). These tend to have in common the "aim for the democratization of society, through the democratization of speech" (Gerbaldo, 2010, p. 7). In recent years, this aim was pursued through the Audiovisual Communication Services Law project (Law 26.522; Segura et al., 2016). The law emerged as a grassroots-led project aiming at democratizing audiovisual communication. It was sanctioned, after much resistance from conglomerate media, by the center-left government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in 2009, and only partially implemented during her time in office (Hernández Prieto & Pérez Alaejos, 2017). In 2015, it was quickly modified by newly elected president Mauricio Macri in ways that have been deemed to diminish the democratic regulation of the sector and once again favor big media businesses (Guzmán, 2016).

Critical communication research from Latin America has been key to developing theory on grassroots, democratic, and alternative media and communication. Indeed, the promotion of horizontal as opposed to "vertical" forms of communication was a result of the prominence of dependency theory in the region, as well as being influenced by the work of Paulo Freire (1970/1996) and by the theology of liberation (Huesca, 1995). In this context, the term "popular radio" has often been used to describe the experiences of noncommercial, community-oriented radio. To see oneself as popular implies a positioning against a socioeconomic system in which such sectors are excluded from power, not just in terms of their ability to communicate, but also economically, socially, and politically. These radios' objectives for change therefore go beyond the democratization of information and expression, as they are part of movements for deeper structural change (Mata, 1993). Another term commonly employed to refer to independent, counterhegemonic, and/or community-based media is "alternative media." In Latin America, this term has become contentious because of the differing meanings ascribed by different theorists and practitioners, with some focusing on the counterhegemonic aspect of contents and others claiming that alternative media needs to embody non-exploitative processes and relations as well to be truly alternative (Sager, 2011). In what follows, I will be speaking of community radios, given that the focus of this study is on care within communities in the context of environmental conflict. I will do so by also applying the frame of popular communication—because this positionality is key if we wish to understand both the political positioning and relational role of community radios in Argentina and Latin America more broadly.

Community Radio and Environmental Conflicts in Argentina

The data set for this study consists of interviews and field notes gathered through participant observation conducted during 2017 and 2018 as part of a project looking at narratives of resistance to extractivism in Argentina. The data refers to radios in four provinces, all of which emerged in response to specific environmental conflicts: Catamarca and San Juan are sites of open pit mining; Córdoba is undergoing rapid deforestation and expansion of soya monocultures; and Neuquén is currently experiencing the first consequences of fracking. These four sites capture the three main activities (open-pit mining, monocrop industrial agriculture, and oil extraction) that are emblematic of the extractivist model (Svampa & Viale, 2014).

The article draws on 15 interviews with activists who are or have until recently been directly involved in the setup and/or running of community radios in the context of environmental conflict. Of those 15 interviews, 10 were conducted in person as part of fieldwork carried out in different locations of the country, and five were conducted over the phone or through Skype. Interviews were in depth and semistructured; participants were asked about the history of the radios they take part in, their experiences as part of the radio, the kinds of content they broadcast, the internal structures and processes, and the role of radio in the wider struggles they are part of. Participant observation, which involved two 3-day visits to Vista Alegre, Province of Neuquén (August 2017), and Andalgalá, Province of Catamarca (March 2018), allowed firsthand, situated engagement with everyday activities and experiences of communities fighting extractive projects, including visits to radio stations and participation in media events. Field notes and interview transcripts were coded and analyzed using inductive, latent, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Radio and the Movement Against Open-Pit Mining

In March 2018, I traveled to Andalgalá, a town in the province of Catamarca, northwest of Argentina, and the site where the first open-pit mine in the country, Bajo La Alumbrera, opened in 1997. In Andalgalá, the opposition to the mine began with a small group of neighbors who were dismissed as “crazy” and “antiprogress,” but over the years evolved into a widespread movement that now includes the majority of the town. Two decades of open-pit mining have made evident the various negative impacts that such activity can have, including the pollution of water sources, a sharp increase in cancer cases and other diseases, the demise of small-scale farming, and the fracturing of the social fabric (Machado Aráoz, 2014, pp. 59–60). Since 2009, locals have been fighting the opening of a new, larger mine called Agua Rica, which they have been able to halt through legal channels, pointing to the lack of proper environmental impact studies for the project. The hub for antimining organizing in Andalgalá is the Asamblea del Algarrobo (assembly of the carob tree), so named because of a carob tree under which the first meeting was held. The assembly is diverse and intergenerational, including people from across the social spectrum. It is worth noting, however, that a large percentage of those who have been most active in the fight against open-pit mining are teachers. From the assembly emerged the radio station El Algarrobo, a project that began to take shape around 2010.

Ruth,⁴ a teacher from Andalgala and member of the assembly, explained to me that there were different motivations for creating a radio as part of the struggle against open-pit mining. The first was that they felt the news they heard from other local, commercial radios were not representative of the reality of the conflict, so assembly members wanted a space for sharing their own perspectives. The second was the realization of the power that radio can have in how certain events within the conflict unfold. She referred to a specific protest in 2010, during which the town was sieged and protesters were violently repressed by the police. As this took place, one of the reasons many people came out to support the antimining protest was that one of the local commercial radios was doing live coverage of the protest. The effect that the live reporting had made it clear to the assembly that radio had an important role to play in their movement. The assembly took its first steps into the world of radio by hosting a radio show, *La Voz del Algarrobo*, at a local station (a "sensationalist one" as described by Eliana,⁵ a local artist and activist). Then, when the radio began to rise the fees for their spot—an act perceived by members of the assembly as an attempt to silence them—they decided to open their own radio station.

When the radio first started, there were around 20 people involved, and they split into two groups: One took care of the building of the station, and the other began to plan the programming. From the beginning, they established a connection with the Red Nacional de Medios Alternativos (RNMA), a nationwide network of alternative media. When the radio began broadcasting, most of those involved had no prior media experience, and had to learn by doing. To facilitate training on the different areas and skills, they established a rotation system for participants. Ruth explained that in the years she has participated in the radio, she has taken on every possible role, from technical support to the production and hosting of shows.

Jorge,⁶ also a teacher and member of the assembly, described the strategic role of the radio during protests and moments of heightened tension and danger in relation to the mining conflict:

For us, not just for Andalgala, but also for instance for some road blockades that we have done in the towns of Belén or Tinogasta, Radio El Algarrobo has been key because it has allowed us to communicate what was happening in those places and, through the Red Nacional de Medios Alternativos, update all our *compañeros* in the rest of the country. So, it is a key element, right? Having the radio, because it is broadcasted online and people listen to it here and practically in all the towns around Andalgala as well.

But the role of the radio is not limited to these particular instances. Rosa,⁷ also a teacher, shared that their commitment is a daily thing. They have shows every day, some live and others recorded, and are committed to generating awareness on a daily basis. The radio's programming is diverse, including news shows, history shows, music shows, and even a religion show. What is common to all of them is the reiteration of the assembly's position in relation to the mine.

⁴ Phone interview with Ruth, March 10, 2018.

⁵ Personal interview with Eliana, March 29, 2018.

⁶ Phone interview with Jorge, February 21, 2018.

⁷ Phone interview with Rosa, February 27, 2018.

One such program is called *Illuminating the Path*, which is hosted by assembly member Daniel. The show looks to explore different themes that are at the base of the struggle against the mine from the perspective of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. Daniel⁸ shared with me that he was somewhat apprehensive about doing this show at the beginning, because he feared it would not be well received, particularly by those who are not catholic or not active within the church. However, he said the response from different sectors of society has been very positive. People tell him it is good because it makes them think about issues such as responsibility, participation, and compromise in relation to the struggle. In Andalgala, said Daniel, there are many religious people, and there is a kind of "popular religiousness," one that can be linked to the influence of the theology of liberation in the region. Also, as expressed by Eliana, there is a sense of connection with the natural environment that is experienced as sacred; a deep respect for the environment and the interdependence of beings. In his show, Daniel uses documents issued by the Catholic Church such as encyclical texts to reflect on the conflict surrounding mining. Many of these texts, he explained, deal with ecological issues. The official position of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in the province, however, is promoting, something that has generated an internal conflict for several devout people who are part of the assembly. Speaking of the mines, Daniel said, "We cannot allow them to perpetuate this lack of equilibrium of nature, because it provokes a great damage to all. And 'all' is the indigenous peoples, the catholic people, and mankind in general." He added,

So, what we do from the radio . . . aims at showing people that in our struggle there is a whole discourse from the religious field, from the Christian social doctrine, one that is not condoning what we are doing [open-pit mining]. And let me tell you, a lot of people have come to me to comment about the show, and they tell me that sometimes they feel more relieved with what they are doing [as part of the struggle], that they are not doing anything bad.

By providing moral and spiritual support to people who are part of the fight against open-pit mining, particularly those who are struggling to reconcile their activist activity with the position of the Catholic Church, Daniel performs an act of care for his neighbors while also advocating care for the environment.

In the province of San Juan, where locals are fighting against open-pit mining as well, radio also has a caring role in supporting the struggle, and one of the ways in which they do this is by informing people. Marcela,⁹ from the town of Jáchal, shared that when a particular aspect of mining and its impacts are too technical, they interview or invite a relevant expert to the radio. They see this as fulfilling their commitment to the community. In other words, they care for their neighbors by taking on the task of democratizing expert knowledge, in a context in which technical, scientific language is often employed to exclude nonspecialists from debates.

Media production can be a crucial platform for community care in these struggles, but it can, however, have a toll on people. After a while, Ruth and others in Andalgala ended up taking a step back from the radio. For her, a combination of things caused this: The physical exhaustion of sustaining work,

⁸ Personal interview with Daniel, March 29, 2018.

⁹ Phone interview with Marcela, March 13, 2018.

the assembly, and the radio; personal differences and splits within the assembly that made it into the radio; and the exhaustion caused by the repetitive, negative messaging the radio has, given that its main objective is to serve as a voice of the assembly and the fight against mining. Ruth also said she felt the radio does not have the momentum or reach it had at the beginning, but she still recognizes the difference it made in the struggle: "I think Radio El Algarrobo had this thing of . . . seeing things differently, [showing] that not everything is as those in power say. The other power, the one we hold, was heard."¹⁰

Community Radio as Part of Sustainable Alternatives

El Brote is a radio that is part of an alternative community in Calamuchita, province of Córdoba. The community is called Semilla del Sur (seed of the south), and it functions according to the principles of permaculture, bioconstruction, and community cooperation. Here, radio is experienced as a form of community and popular communication. Carolina¹¹ is one of the people behind El Brote. She is an environmental activist with a background in media and communication. Carolina shared that she started working in community media as a reaction to the isolation she felt working in the academic environment. She added,

I always thought I'd find myself working on some aspect of community media, and I chose to work here because of a matter of fondness and love for this organization [Semilla del Sur], of seeing all the work they had been doing, without a dime, how they are committed to the struggle and the defense of a healthy environment, because these *compañeros* had to live in their own flesh the effects of "agrotoxics."¹²

Carolina explained how moving to Calamuchita involved not only a change in her positionality in relation to the environmental conflicts of the region—now reporting from the frontlines instead of reporting from the city—but also a change of lifestyle:

When we report on the issue of fumigations and we come into contact with reality and with personal experiences, well, there is a change, a break. One can theorize and think and all that is great, because it gives us tools for interpreting. But, well, I felt one had to be present from a different position, from a more real place, if you like, working and actively participating in the organization.

After visiting Calamuchita and becoming involved with Semilla del Sur, she made the decision to leave behind the city, the smog, the noise, and start a new life. As she says, "I have my own vegetable garden now." Indeed, Semilla del Sur is a place where many young people have arrived in search for a way of life that is more attuned with nature.

¹⁰ Phone interview with Ruth, March 10, 2018.

¹¹ Skype interview with Carolina, January 22, 2018.

¹² "Agrotoxics" is the term usually employed by environmental activists in Argentina to refer to chemical pesticides and herbicides.

Community radios often involve the training of participants. In Andalgalá, this was particularly the case as there was little to no radio experience among the assembly participants. In the case of Radio El Brote, people like Carolina already held a range of skills, and she, with others, was proactive in building structures for skill sharing and the professionalization of other participants, acknowledging how these skills could be useful to them for employment. In her words, "We began to build the idea of a communications cooperative, always thinking about other ways of relating to each other, other forms of work, of payment and other economies as well."¹³ For the people starting El Brote, the project of a community radio was the embodiment of the aforementioned Audiovisual Communication Services Law; an act of militancy that served to "strengthen democracy through community media,"¹⁴ in Carolina's words.

Community radios can be understood as being embedded in networks and economies of care. Though Radio El Algarrobo was part of the Network RNMA, El Brote is part of FARCO (Argentine Forum of Community Radios). FARCO provided support and legal advice to El Brote on the occasion of the radio facing closure. Through FARCO they have access to training opportunities, and support with material issues. Through the network, they have managed to receive secondhand equipment from other radios, what they describe as a "solidary bond" that supports new initiatives in community media.

The radio is shaped by the developments in the community, including collective learning experiences and other forms of initiatives for social change. One example of this is the show *Mujeres al Encuentro* (women's gathering), a morning news show that emerged after members of the community had attended the National Women's Gathering (the largest annual feminist event in Argentina), and on their return facilitated a series of conversations and instances of knowledge sharing within the community, raising important issues around gender, care, and organizing that, it was felt, merited creating a continuous space for reflection.

Many of the radio shows indeed feed into, or emerge out of, other social and cultural activities in the community, such as music concerts and poetry readings. But also, neighbors have found a place and a space of social support in the radio. The radio acts as a medium for them to share their stories and their perspectives on the world. It has a kind of social legitimacy that is territorial, that allows people to come to the radio when they are facing a particular issue, even if they are not regular participants. Neighbors who are not active participants of the radio still contribute to it by helping upkeep the building, donating materials such as doors and windows, and/or volunteering their time. From Carolina's perspective, it is in these kinds of relationships that community media is sustained.

Carolina feels the radio allows people to feel empowered. She said all the work they do is out of love. Love

¹³ Skype interview with Carolina, January 22, 2018.

¹⁴ Skype interview with Carolina, January 22, 2018.

is the tool and the engine that propels all the activities and all we do, because if you are not comfortable and you don't love what you are doing (and you don't have an economic retribution for that), you cannot sustain it, and it does not become a reality.¹⁵

There is an ethic of care that underpins every aspect of their media practice. Materially, as well, Carolina noted how their lack of funds and reliance on secondhand equipment meant that care in their day-to-day practice at the radio is fundamental to the subsistence of the station, as they cannot afford to replace equipment if something is broken.

As is the case for Radio El Algarrobo and the radio in Jáchal, El Brote also plays an important role in instances of heightened conflict or threat. At the radio they see themselves as "activists for popular communication, but also environmental activists."¹⁶ One of the news they covered in 2017 was that of the pollution of water sources in the Dique Los Molinos, a local dam. This is one of the largest water sources in the province, providing water to more than a million people and currently seeing alarming rates of contamination.¹⁷

Same as Ruth from Andalgalá, Carolina acknowledged the difficulties of keeping the work of the radio going. She pointed, for instance, to a particularly difficult period over the summer, when many participants are busy doing paid work in the tourism industry. The lack of resources is also a main barrier for the sustainability of the radio, but they manage to get by and cover all basic needs through various channels. This includes advertising spots for local businesses, agreements with local water and energy cooperatives (advertisement in exchange for free services), and selling organic produce from the radio station building, in addition to the aforementioned support from the local community.

Open Radio in the Fight Against Fracking

Community radio can embody an ecofeminist ethic of care by bringing together people and strengthening collective identities and bonds among participants, and by asserting feelings of belonging and territoriality in the context of environmental conflicts. In the town of Vista Alegre, province of Neuquén, a local assembly has been leading the fight against fracking since 2016. One of the assembly members, Milton,¹⁸ shared with me that the community was perplexed when it found out there were plans for fracking in its locality, which borders the river. He said, "Thanks to the river, we have the forest, the farms. Almost everyone here has fruit trees, everyone grows vegetables and has animals. We found it crazy that someone would want to do this in a place that generates life." Milton explained that if the river was polluted as a result of fracking, this would have a negative effects on the community, something that it had already begun to identify in nearby localities. Water pollution, said Milton, affects people's health. It also affects farming, which negatively affects people's income source. He added that the expansion of the oil industry in the region was also leading to greater inequality and transformations in their way of life; as farming declines,

¹⁵ Skype interview with Carolina, January 22, 2018.

¹⁶ Skype interview with Carolina, January 22, 2018.

¹⁷ See Ozán (2017).

¹⁸ Personal interview with Milton, August 26, 2017.

land is sold off to build housing for workers in the oil industry, thus transforming the economic and social fabric of the region.

As part of its mobilization, the assembly organizes cultural events where the community gathers and shares information about the conflict. One of the modalities they employ to this effect is the open radio. Open radios are public events, usually in open spaces such as squares, during which a radio show is produced live. Sometimes shows are broadcasted on a radio station and online, and other times they remain as live, unrecorded events. Open radios can include conversations, news updates, speeches, and recorded or live music. They take the familiar format of the radio and turn it into a public event that takes over a public space (Argote, 2013). In August 2017, I attended an open radio in the main square in Vista Alegre. This took place over several hours on a Saturday afternoon, as people slowly started coming out of their houses and into the square. The event featured a range of activities, including games for children, dancing, and the making and sharing of food. In between music and other activities, updates on the fight against fracking were delivered, and those who were not active in the struggle were invited to join the fight for the protection of the commons. Though the activities of the assembly are mostly led by young people, the intention is for the whole town to become involved in the movement against fracking. In this context, open radios are social occasions that generate moments of shared joy while also fulfilling a duty of informing and caring for a community that is facing a perceived threat in its territory (Serafini, 2018).

Discussion

The cases presented here make for contemporary examples of the longstanding tradition of popular radio in Latin America, one that is committed to the democratization of communication, but also strives for structural change on economic, social, and political fronts. The movements discussed here have faced varied external and internal challenges that have threatened their sustainability, from brutal police repression in Andalgala, to legal setbacks in the move toward banning fracking in Vista Alegre. Inside movements, activists have faced instances of burnout, internal disagreements, and even instances of sexism, as disclosed by interviewees. Such issues are common and are difficult to overcome. Thus, it is paramount to identify the ethics and mechanisms of care that are already in place and that have the potential, if placed at the core of practice, to support movements and individuals when facing internal conflicts, external threats, and personal difficulties. The cases presented in this article suggest that community radios have an integral role in facilitating care for the community and the ecosystem. Through thematic analysis of the data, I have identified four ways in which this takes place.

The first way in which community radios enact care is in the form of protection. As platforms for communication radios can be used strategically to amplify calls for protests or other events that need support, or to warn people about instances of police repression or wrongdoing from companies operating extractive sites. This is the case in Andalgala, where past instances of police repression served as a lesson on the power of radio for alerting the community at great speed. It is also the case in Vista Alegre, where open radios allow members of the assembly against fracking to warn the rest of the community about the threats that fracking imposes to their water sources. Radio can be a means for alerting and protecting others from danger, and for facilitating community support in contentious situations, thus caring for both the community and the environment.

The second way in which radios can be spaces of care is through the facilitation of personal transformation. As community radios, most of these platforms offer training opportunities and provide people with new skills that can help them in expressing their views and pursuing their passions, as well as contributing to their employability, as articulated by Carolina from El Brote. Furthermore, community radio can provide a space for people to “speak their truth,” tell their side of the story in a conflict when mainstream media systematically side with corporations and the state when it comes to extractive projects, as expressed by Ruth from Radio El Algarrobo. This facilitates the empowerment of individuals and in turn supports the collective struggle.

In the third place, radios can become spaces of social support for the community. In the case of El Brote, the radio became a hub within the permaculture community of Semilla del Sur, where people can take part of the radio’s activities as part of the production team, but also as active audiences. The radio in Jáchal, San Juan, became a point of information for the community, taking on the important role of democratizing knowledge. Daniel’s radio show for Radio El Algarrobo, which discusses Christian teachings in relation to environmental concerns, provides moral support for people who are actively involved in the struggle against mining and for the Christian community more broadly. And in Vista Alegre, open radios act as moments of bonding and emboldening of the fight against fracking, as people come together in events that are both social encounters for community building and moments of territorial political organizing.

Finally, these radios are not only vehicles for enacting care but also part of wider networks of care. All radios are supported by solidarity networks. These include local communities—for example, when local neighbors supported the building of El Brote by providing windows and doors—as well as nation-wide media and radio networks. These wider networks provide different forms of care, from material support with the donation of equipment, to training opportunities and legal support.

The four types of care identified suggest that radios can be integral to environmental struggles in two ways. First, community radios can be key tools of resistance, alerting and informing at crucial times. And second, they can be central spaces for prefiguring sustainable and socially just ways of living. By facilitating certain kinds of relations based on care, which are embodied in their organizational forms, economies, cultural production processes, materialities, and ways of being in and with the territory, community radios can act as spaces for the prefiguring of social, economic, and ecological relations.

What sustains all of these processes and relations is an ecofeminist ethic of care based on the principle of interdependence. The cases discussed display an understanding of territory as being intrinsically linked to the body and the community—when one is affected the other is, too (Machado Araújo, 2014, p. 6). This understanding of interdependence, I argue, is a popular one, shaped by the history and characteristics of the region. Though environmental issues are always linked to other social, economic, cultural, and political dynamics, in Latin America the structural factors that lead to environmental degradation and the powers that sustain those dynamics are long-standing and visible. Environmental conflicts are therefore strongly linked to social, economic, and political conflicts—both local and transnational—and experienced in this way by those who are part of the struggle. As a result, the understanding of interdependence manifested in these practices is one that comprehends the connection

between caring for the environment and building sustainable relations with human and nonhuman beings and entities, and that considers how these relations are conditioned and affected by the geopolitical powers and socioeconomic structural issues that result in any given situation of environmental degradation or conflict.

Conclusion

The expansion of the extractive frontier over the past two decades has resulted in an increase of environmental conflicts in Argentina and across Latin America, making extractivism and environmental degradation pressing issues for analysis in the region. This article addressed these issues by offering a situated ecofeminist perspective on the role of community radio in environmental conflicts. This perspective allowed me to examine the ways in which media, in this case radio, can facilitate instances of care. The results point to an understanding of interdependence as key in relations and processes of care, both between human actors and communities and with other forms of life and the environment.

Understanding interdependence and what it can facilitate can be an important contribution to studies of care, media, and the environment. As researchers of communication, we must not only look at the narratives that actors generate for addressing environmental issues but also think about the processes behind these narratives, and the values and beliefs that underpin those processes. In the Latin American context, environmental conflicts are deeply connected to long-standing political and economic structures that constitute a particular model of development, one that threatens the survival of whole ecosystems (Svampa & Viale, 2014). It is hoped that findings from this study will not only inform media and communications research and policy but also encourage future research on media production that further investigates the potential of media for contributing to postextractivist futures through practices of care.

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