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Responsive and responsible methodologies. Emplacing care with collaborative filmmaking

Jessica Jacobs[1] | Alice Salimbeni[2]

[1]Queen Mary University of London, London, UK

[2]University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan, Italy

Correspondence
Jessica Jacobs, Queen Mary University of London, London, UK.
Email: j.jacobs@qmul.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper is a response to the call for more caring kinds of scholarly transactions that acknowledge our interdependencies. We delve into collaborative filmmaking as a method that emplaces care in a range of different ways and that highlights researcher responsibility in the fieldwork. Recognising that discussions on care and responsibility often remain abstract, we ground our exploration in a recent collaborative filmmaking research project to argue that collaborative filmmaking can challenge researcher positionality and foster a deeper understanding of power dynamics in research practice and process. Starting from existing literature that tends to oversimplify research processes due to the pressure to present 'knowledge', we highlight the discrepancies between polished academic presentations and the intricate and sometimes contradictory realities of fieldwork. This paper offers insights for activists and other scholars in feminist and queer geographies, emphasising the role of care in shaping academic research.

KEYWORDS

care, feminist geography, fieldwork, participatory filmmaking, responsibility, scholar activism

1 | INTRODUCTION – *ALICE AND JESSICA*

In this paper, we address collaborative filmmaking as a method that emplaces care (see Bailey et al., 2023; Raghuram, 2016) and raises concerns about researcher responsibility and responsiveness in fieldwork. We contribute to the literature around filmmaking and scholar activism to address issues faced by scholars working in the field and struggling with their own responsibilities as researchers. We go beyond a focus on the ethics of care because we wish to highlight the responsibility to challenge existing inequalities and place researchers and participants' emotions at the centre, as well as prioritise the establishment of a mutual care relationship *in* and *outside* the fieldwork. This kind of framing also allows us to illuminate the matters of live research that do not go well and/or have an emotional impact on the individuals involved. As researchers, we remain frustrated by the literature that early career scholars are confronted with, that make the research journey look so easy. We are also worried by the way academia pressurises researchers into hiding their difficulties. Frequently, broad assumptions are disseminated as absolute truths, yet each fieldwork experience is distinct. The most personal dimensions of fieldwork, including fears, concerns, and mistakes, are at times overlooked. Additionally, many

of the discussions on care are limited by being framed in the context of ethics, particularly so when the ethics in question are spoken of in an abstract manner, rather than being informed by practices of care. We take the position that care is not confined to ethics or morals. It is also important to understand care as a practice (Raghuram, 2016, 2019; Tronto, 2009). To overcome these limitations, we will frame our discussion around a recent collaborative filmmaking research project that used fictionalised storytelling to address some of the challenges cisgender white women face in their urban daily life, as well as their privileges (Salimbeni, 2022a, 2022b). We will next outline how a research methodology using this kind of collaborative filmmaking can be a way of 'making care visible' (Askins & Blazek, 2017) to pay attention to reciprocity, to follow an ethics of care that places emotional connection at the centre of the research, considering them a site of power (Lawson, 2007). We focus on the way the researcher and the participants 'emplace(d) care' (Raghuram, 2016, p. 515), and we pay attention to participants' unexpected practices of care that often challenge the researcher's positionality.

This led us to consider how we can use collaborative filmmaking as an activist and feminist responsible method to do geographical research, as a responsive method that adapts to its surroundings and contexts. Following Lorde (2018), can we use collaborative filmmaking to dismantle the master's house? We discuss the following collaborative filmmaking project as a case study and use the reflections that it raises as a way of addressing concerns in academic practice generally and for other activist scholars within feminist and queer geographies who are addressing their own fieldwork uncertainties. We wish to present our work in a manner that doesn't obscure the challenges and the behind-the-scenes complexities. This is also an act of care because we wish to avoid the potential feelings of inadequacy that can arise when fellow researchers encounter situations where they do not align with the polished presentations often depicted in academic papers, where researchers project the best image of themselves, instead of the intricate real ones.

2 | CARING ABOUT OUR CONCERNS – *ALICE AND JESSICA*

We are both geographer filmmakers and feminist scholars. We recognise that there are power differentials between us. Coming from two families of migrants, Jessica is a white other native English speaker and while she has spent over 20 years in UK academia, all her positions have been as a precarious worker, the last 10 years on a series of fixed-term and part-time contracts at the same Russell Group university. Alice identifies as a Sardinian white non-binary person socialised woman. She is a native Italian speaker and a precarious researcher who has just completed her PhD, based in Southern Europe. As we met to write this paper, we worked hard to accommodate each of our writing preferences and work and non-work schedules. We did not immediately feel the need to discuss our different levels of English. Alice wrote the first drafts partly in Italian and partly in English in the shared document, before translating it to English. Before submitting the paper, we wondered how to proceed. The most obvious solution would have been for Jessica to proofread Alice's English, since care lies also in mutualism (Lawson, 2007), but this would have created two problems. The first is that this process would have reproduced the inequitable position that access to leading journals requires non-native speakers to either work with a native English speaker or pay a proofreader (Müller, 2021). The second hurdle was that a process like this would have reproduced a linguistic standardisation that would obscure the diverse way we think our thoughts, a difference that we did not want to lose (Anzalduá, 1991). We agreed that Jessica would only rework phrases, words, or sentences that could be difficult to understand. This means our paper does not look perfect. We know it, but it resonates with our political voice, different geographical locations, and embodiedness. Care, for us, lies in this case also in sharing the responsibility for inaccuracy and errors.

Our first conversation related to this paper came from a session Jessica organised for the 2022 AAG entitled 'Can we use filmmaking to dismantle the master's house?', where Alice submitted an abstract. We have found that this question has since become the core element of many of our discussions. Whenever we get in touch to talk about a specific topic, for example Alice's film or this paper, we digress to speak about how we feel and understand filmmaking in the context of our precarities, and our responsibilities and privileges as researchers. As many feminist geographers previously discussed (Mountz et al., 2015; Pratt, 2010), ours is more than just a form of human exchange among colleagues voicing personal concerns. It is a 'buddy system' (Lopez & Gillespie, 2016) to support each other emotionally, to share difficulties, to better comprehend how to deal with recurring struggles, and to develop a critical understanding of our personal engagement in our filmmaking fieldworks as an important part of our research. Like Lopez and Gillespie (2016, p. 1695), 'we see the buddy system as opening the field for radicalizing our work, and in turn, for radicalizing the academy more broadly'. Inspired by them, we signed the paragraphs. Authorship is not a point of contention since we discussed and wrote every part together. We aim not to emphasise a difference in our efforts but rather sought to shape the paper in a manner that makes space for Alice's intimate reflection on the field and for a shared reading with Jessica.

Our discussions tackle our attachment to participants, friendship engendered by filmmaking, authoriality, privileges, positionality, extractivism, and our commitment not only to challenging inequalities in society but also to the people who work with us in the field of research, in both the short and long term (Di Feliciantonio, 2023). As Di Feliciantonio (2021) writes, research produces and reproduces social relations through the way we interact with the people we meet and these social relations are embedded with emotion and reciprocity and mutuality. In the field, we receive and give care in complex and articulated ways (Askins & Blazek, 2017) and we do this perhaps unconsciously within the emotional dimension of our work through empathy.

As we are employed by universities on mostly fixed-term contracts, we are many times obliged to extract knowledge from our participants within a specified time period, and in a way that is designed to be useful for our academic careers. To us, in both theory and practice, this knowledge extraction is 'parochial, patriarchal and colonial' (Askins & Blazek, 2017, p. 5). That is what we have been taught to do for the 'higher purpose' of imbued-with-our-whiteness scientific research, but it is not what we want to do. Our express desire not to be that kind of researcher has in no small part led both of us to shift away from more established research methods and towards the use of filmmaking as a means to engage in fieldwork following a research care ethics (Askins & Blazek, 2017; Bartos, 2019; Bondi, 2008; Di Feliciantonio, 2021; Dickens & Butcher, 2016; Kaufman-Osborn et al., 2018; Lawson, 2007; Raghuram, 2019). We do not want to put forward filmmaking as the latest trend, the latest methodology, the least violent, the least extractivist, the best one. Much has been said recently about the potential of creative methodologies (Hawkins, 2013, 2015), but this growing literature often still fails to recognise that the choice to use creative methodologies as filmmaking can itself signify a class and/or racial privilege. Academic filmmaking generally does not further your career unless you are already established in the academy. So until those who hire new academic staff start to recognise films as equal but different from journal papers, for a researcher who does not have tenure, who is precarious or discriminated against, making a film can also mean taking a career loss. A loss of the time away from drafting and submitting the papers that are the traditional pathway to any kind of secure academic career development. Yet the act of making a film is of course also a privilege, no matter the cost.

Filmmaking is often used to cope with very asymmetrical fieldworks in terms of power (Kindon, 2003, 2016; Mistry et al., 2016), but we want to be cautious moving forward in this discourse. We do not believe that, as researchers working with power asymmetries, we should fool ourselves that our intervention alone as searchers of 'truth' means we are helping our participants (or our funders, when there are any). We want to avoid any construction that leads scholars to increase their already-many-times-too-developed-heroic-ego by believing that their work and its fallouts are justified by the paternalistic intent to, first, create human 'others' that are in need of our care and attention (Noxolo et al., 2012), and, second, to improve other people's lives through our work. This in and of itself is not an act of care. Researchers are not heroes or care-givers, nor will they save the planet with their academic papers, even if sometimes by continuing to 'other' people it looks like they think so. If literature on extractivism states that researchers always *take*, a reflection on how researchers *receive/are given* more than they expected in terms of care, empathy, listening, and support is missing (see Di Feliciantonio, 2021). We therefore want instead to consider how participants practise care to the researcher in at least two ways. First, they share their knowledge and this can be considered a caring work for us, and as most of the caring work is unrecognised, devalued, and rarely remunerated (Dalla Costa & James, 1975; Federici, 2020, 2022; Krasny et al, 2021). Participants (mostly) dedicate their time to our research for free, taking it away from something else while the economic value of our time is recognised (even if not everywhere, and not everywhere in the same way). One way to acknowledge this embedded inequity is to ensure that research participants are financially compensated for their time (Warnock et al., 2022). It should be noted that even if we are able to financially compensate the participants as we would like to do, extractivism and power asymmetries are still there, and we should still care about the quality of the time we share with them and its impact, for example, the repercussions that having received a sensitive question can bring. Second, participants care for us also in ways that we could not calculate or expect by helping us to cope with the emotional charge of our research, or even with our personal life outside the field (Di Feliciantonio, 2021).

3 | HOW DO THEORIES OF CARE RELATE TO THE PRACTICE OF CARE – *JESSICA*

We are aware of criticisms of care particularly as a form of ethical practice. It is rare for care to be discussed without invoking ethical considerations (Di Feliciantonio, 2021). As Lawson says, we have an 'ethical responsibility to care' (2007, p. 1). Invoking the ethics of care speaks to the power asymmetry between researcher and researched, yet this framing arguably echoes the language used in frameworks that outline an employer's legal 'duty of care' towards their employees,

where we are told that we must care because it is our 'duty' as researchers (see Martin & Inwood, 2012). Yet care in the field goes beyond responsibilities and legal obligations. Care provides a way to embed emotional information, reciprocity and affectivity in the process of knowledge production.

We are also both concerned with the way we carry out our research in the field (see Askins & Blazek, 2017) when we imagine care as something to be exchanged mutually among subjects. As Raghuram (2016) shows, many scholars writing about care ethics are located in the Global North and have prioritised a reading of this concept based on gender rather than class or any other difference. Raghuram explains that the ethics of care thus conceived makes sense when used to explain phenomena concerning the Global North.

We are both based in the Global North and we have both worked with subjects who have acquired a significant proportion of the privileges of being situated in this part of the globe. I also make films with subjects based in the Global South. However, we are also precariously placed in this privileged world and, in the languages that Alice has put forward, the practice enacted within her fieldwork resonates with her militant experiences within a borderland that does not find a proper place either with those who claim to come from the Global South or with those who are in the North.

The risk of reducing this process to a discussion of just ethics or care is precisely the diminution of care as something associated with women's labour that can obfuscate not only its intersectional complexities but also the immense power being wielded in this concept, especially when it is examined and emplaced within the practice of research and the researcher's relationship with the participants. As Raghuram notes, 'Care also offers a set of norms about how relationality could be envisaged and practised ethically' (2016, p. 524). If the ethics of care is produced and reproduced by relationality, it circulates. The possibility opens to an iterative process that is shaped and formed through practice. If this is so, then, as researchers, our ability to make interventions in this circulatory practice happens at different points in this relationality. The extractive potential speaks to this power in a way that a notional discussion of care cannot prevent. As Lawson (2007) notes 'we need to take seriously the ways in which social relations are produced through emotions and the ways in which emotional connections are also sites of power' (pp. 4–5).

Fricker's notion of epistemic injustice (2007) also highlights the extractive power asymmetry between the researcher and the participants. The qualitative researcher's epistemic practice is often to gain knowledge 'by being told'. The relationship between care and the flexing of this power has been explored in the field of healthcare. It has been noted that the professional healthcare provider's act of care towards patients can also be an act of ensuring their privilege as the knowledge-holder and caregiver is retained while the knowledge of the 'patient' or care receiver is simultaneously diminished. This process requires a form of denial of power on the part of the caregiver to work. The caregiver here fails to acknowledge that privilege while simultaneously 'ignoring or belittling' the knowledge of the patient (Williams, 2020).

If we fail to 'acknowledge' the existence of these inequalities, theories of knowledge and knowledge production that come from the Global North easily reproduce all pre-existing inequalities. The question arises of how the ethics of care can prevent the subject of research being 'wronged' if our epistemological framework assumes that their knowledge is treated as somehow less than the knowledge held by a 'professional knowledge holder'. All while the researcher understands themself to be performing an act of care while carrying out their research. The researcher's power to ignore and/ or belittle others' knowledge during the research-gathering process and beyond when writing-up research in publications while still claiming to care is also highlighted in the critiques of researchers made by indigenous scholars and the decolonise movement (Leckey et al., 2022; Odumosu, 2020). The precarious researcher is also affected, even if they are working outside or within the cracks of an academy that doesn't practise its duty of care towards them (Burton & Bowman, 2022; Ivancheva et al., 2019).

Thinking that caring for research participants in this context is enough carries the same risk. To push 'against the binary of care-giver and care-receiver toward a shared practice of care in which we both care for and care about together' (Lopez & Gillespie, 2016, p, 1694), Lopez and Gillespie talk about 'caring with'. Caring with means, to us, not considering participants to our research as objects of our attention (see Ramdas, 2016) but as subjects with whom to share experiences and thoughts. Emplacing an ethical care framework to our research goes beyond the notion of researcher as care-giver and participants as care-receiver. It also widens the playing field of fieldwork to consider the messy parts of our fieldwork that are often dismissed as they are not considered worthy of presenting as knowledge. As Lawson notes, 'care ethics suggests a broad range of methods and an expansion in what counts as evidence in our work' (Lawson, 2007, p. 9). Through care, we are more able to explore the good, and the not so good, aspects of the data-gathering process as we carry out our research in an unequal world.

Care practices evolve and inform an ethics of care that is itself constantly unfolding. We start from practices to imagine how the ethics of care is informed by the choice of filmmaking with participants. The filmmaking process we describe here and that we want to consider is particular since it used fiction and parody to translate the experiences recounted

by participants into something other than reality, taking the production of knowledge into other realms, but we will not have the space to delve into this peculiarity (see Salimbeni, 2022a, 2022b).

4 | MAPPING CARE THROUGH THE FIELDWORK – *ALICE*

In November 2019, I was starting my second year of the PhD programme. During this period, Brussels undertook a radical urban transformation aiming to reconnect different areas to make the city a more inclusive place (Rosa et al., 2020). I wanted to approach that presumed inclusiveness from a feminist perspective. Inclusive for who? To justify what political purposes (see Browne et al., 2021; Farris, 2017)? I was advised to engage with heterogeneous groups of women because it would have been meaningful for my research aims. Nonetheless, I didn't feel ready or politically mature enough to confront my privileges with less privileged subjects. I was aware of the potential perpetuation of white-centric knowledge and the white-women classist and racist model, but I was also aware of the risk of exoticising other people's lives with my white privileged perspective (Katz, 1994). I feared that I would have been the worst kind of extractivist paternalist researcher without being able to acknowledge it. I did not want to try myself at the expenses of others. This is why I preferred to utilise my own white, and at that time also cisgender, privilege to interrogate classist and racist urban policies made *in my name*. Full of uncertainties, I felt I was walking on eggshells and running the tangible risk of enacting violent classist and racist practices. To talk with people having similar privileges to critically address them together and acknowledge how they were used for exclusive urban policies, I involved a transfeminist association that I was following, *Le poisson sans bicyclette*, and I put a call on their Facebook page direct to people who identified as women to participate in a workshop entitled *Atelier de la Traversée*. There was no mention of whiteness or cisgenderness in the call, but they were invisible data (Ahmed, 2007) and my words for sure resonated with these two privileges. Indeed, out of the 20 self-identified women who responded, I met with 14 applicants aged between 21 and 52 years old, at the time all were cisgender and white except for one person who identified as 'mixed'. Many participants were not originally from Brussels and described themselves variously as architects, artists, office workers, shop assistants, students, unemployed, waitresses, and PhD scholars. Two women were going through very hard times due to lack of money, and one had an invisible disability. Three of us identified as queer.

From a survey, reasons for participation were numerous: 'to share and produce something useful', 'to explore and communicate the relationship with the city', 'to reconcile with urban space', 'to learn about the feminist environment in Brussels'. During the first meeting, Sara, a participant, decided to share with the group that her motivation to participate in this workshop was driven by a need to confront and heal from her traumatic experience of rape in Brussels several years before. Sara's disclosure of her experience immediately emphasised the importance of care and attentive listening among all participants and the researcher with them. Finally, we identified two needs common to all of us: engender a place for mutual 'critical understanding and compassion' (Marchese & Tzk'at, 2021, p. 193: our translation); and 'turn into matter' – as Sara put it – some of the struggles lived by the participants and by me to be able to share them outside of our group in a mutual conscientising political practice. After having shared personal experiences of gender oppression and white privilege and having debated about each one of them for five meetings we were emotionally tired.

As Lawson asserts, 'emotions of outrage, grief, and joy have epistemological power' (2007, p. 4) because they show that something is felt or is not felt as fair, and it is worth investigating. The group generated numerous reflections infused with similar emotions, prompting the group to seek a way to cope. Our way to cope was to create something imaginary and transformative together. This is when we got to filmmaking, and particularly to making short films for reasons of feasibility according to the group's amateur ability. Filmmaking fosters the opportunity to transform reality through imagination (Jacobs, 2013, 2016a, 2016b; Kindon, 2003, 2016; Pratt & Jacobs, 2018) and imagination 'allows access to possible or imaginary worlds and to re-examine the worlds in which we live' (Leavy, 2013, p. 20). Conversely, 'without imagination, without recognising the importance of "introducing invention into existence"' (Fanon, 1996 [1952], p. 202), 'it is not possible to think and practise geographies that rival hegemonic violence' (Palermo, 2023, p. 52). Imagining alternative urban scenarios, therefore transforming reality through fiction and in this particular case also through parody (Salimbeni, 2023), became a part of our ethic of care because it engendered new places for listening, sharing, and transforming.

As said before, participatory filmmaking is often used to approach fieldworks where there are strong power asymmetries between participants and the researcher, for example in projects where to question inequalities people are asked to self-represent themselves while the researcher (often white and Western) holds an external position (Mistry

& Shaw, 2021). With Jessica, we acknowledge that self-representation is a possible method to decolonise research practices even if always alongside the risk of exoticising other people's lives with Western and white-embedded questions. But this definition does not suit our work. We prefer to refer to our films as 'collaborative' since the power asymmetries between me and the others were not the same as the ones occurring in a participatory project. In the case we are considering, power asymmetries were perceived, especially at first, in the different roles the researcher and the participants played in the research process. But as I told the group that I was also deeply emotionally invested in the research, as it touched on issues directly relevant to my own life, they placed me in the new position of being a subject both providing and needing care like all the others. This is not unrelated to the way things turned out to be. Participants emplaced care in unexpected ways, displacing my positionality as a researcher, questioning directly the sometimes paternalistic and heroic (therefore masculinistic) *duty* of unrequested care I performed. They also challenged the delicate relationship between me keeping the lead of the fieldwork to ensure a result, and participants' requests to be recognised in their authority and self-determination.

5 | CHALLENGING RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY THROUGH CARE – *ALICE*

> Dear, I guess it's a lot of work for you. [...] Would you like to meet there tonight after I go to basketball and have soup?
>
> (Pauline, a message on WhatsApp)

> Sometimes it's hard. You struggle to bring attention back to the city, but we often end up talking about something else [...] I pass by Saint Gilles on my way home. Come up for a beer?
>
> (Noémie, a message on WhatsApp)

In the stages before the actual filmmaking, we think that the group emplaced care in different ways. Referring to academic relationships, Lopez and Gillespie 'consider "caring-for", the more hands-on stage of care-giving, and emphasise "caring-about", the stage in which one nurtures caring ideas, intentions or feelings, reflecting on possible trajectories between the two within and beyond academia' (2016, p. 4). They talk also about 'caring with' as caring for and about together, moving beyond individualisation, across scales, to enact practices of resistance. Using these three caring ways to describe the fieldwork, the participants and I acted out a practice of *caring for* each other as people engaged in relations of proximity, and linked by the sensitivity that minorities have in perceiving the vulnerability of their own bodies (Butler, 2004), emplaced in particular by Sara's account. We also *cared about* each personal experience together, nurturing caring ideas and developing a communal understanding of power inequalities (Bartos & Ives, 2019; Ramdas, 2016). In that moment, 'the act of caring with ... started as a shared way of feeling and thinking' (Lopez & Gillespie, 2016, p. 4), or better 'thinking-aloud together' to understand what the stories had in common while exploring the many connections between 'micropolitics of everyday interactions' and 'the vast scale of the systems that shape them' (Graziano et al., 2021, p. 160; see also Orozco, 2021; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; The Care Collective, 2021). Caring with each other, we brought into a dialogue the personal and the political of our experiences (see Fragnito & Tola, 2021). Empirically, each participant chose some spaces, she represented them with creative audio-visual methods, and then she recounted her thoughts and emotions concerning both the privilege of whiteness and the gender oppression to the others for a collective discussion. Debating each other's experiences helped the participants and me to be more conscious of our privileges and to feel 'less alone' (Pauline) for what we felt was oppressive. Pauline says during an interview: 'It was something great also just that we had made such a nice space where to talk about things that happen every day and to every one of us and that we do not consider important anymore because we get used to it, I mean, to being discriminated against and feeling bad. It is not normal and not fair we feel like that'.

Nevertheless, I felt concerned that translating the real experiences shared by myself and the group into written stories would entail delving deeply into fear, suffering, and violence beyond our previous engagement. I expected this challenge from the beginning of the fieldwork and had coped with similar emotions in my previous research. However, during those months, I grappled with personal difficulties associated with the pressure of my PhD and a general sense of low self-esteem and uncertainty. Some stories unexpectedly profoundly triggered me, highlighting the emotional impact of the meetings for both myself and other participants.

Jessica and I mentioned the buddy system research (see Lopez & Gillespie, 2016) earlier to explain the relationship between us, and our way to care for each other and about the same issues together to cope with the emotional burden of solitary research in the field and its personal fallouts. As the project progressed, I developed a close relationship with Noémie and Pauline, the participant authors of the two messages with which this section begins. A particular buddy system, not among researchers but among researcher and participants, occurred between me and them when care escaped the research topic and involved our life besides the workshop. During some free time we spent together while creating a friendship, they noticed my worries for being at least partly responsible for Noémie feeling drained by the meetings' emotional toll or Pauline feeling triggered by the others' experiences. I said to them I was sorry for that. I cared about them and our shared space, and I thought that I should have better taken into consideration this possibility to be able to know what to do since they both felt difficult emotions within a space that was created, at least in the beginning, by me, for 'my' research. Noémie was very direct, and she said I should have stopped worrying like that since *we* could have just discussed this with the others. She kept saying *we*. *We* are gonna make very cool films, *we* are gonna deal eventually with any kind of issue, this is gonna be a very cool experience *we* make together as feminists, *we* are gonna participate in festivals together. She looked a bit annoyed, as she later proved on other occasions in our friendship, by my overly unrequested care-giver attitude.

During these conversations, Noémie and Pauline's care practices mixed my personal and professional spheres, transcending the typical care-giver and care-receiver dynamic, and providing me with unexpected opportunities to receive care in the field (Di Feliciantonio, 2021). By caring for me while I was struggling with my role, they also both started caring much more for the workshop, which they knew was very important for me. I believe this care escaping from the research spaces was an essential factor in ensuring the completion of our short films.

We want to bring a last example concerning how participants practised care with me. One day I missed the streetcar. I was 25 min late and anxious because I hate being late. When I arrived at the café, I found that the participants had already arrived, made themselves coffee and tea, and were deeply engaged in discussing the details of one of our films' endings. They did not wait for me to start. It dawned on me that I had previously assumed I was indispensable as the group's lead researcher. However, I realised that I may not hold as much authority as I thought and needed to redefine my role to be less paternalistic and performative. This dynamic reshaped my self-perception in the field while recognising the agency of the other participants, their authority, and their legitimacy. I received the care that alleviated the mental charge of the research and enabled me to move beyond the hyper-performativity we often feel compelled to exhibit in fieldwork (Figures 1).

FIGURE 1 Adèle (right) holds her phone with a picture of a scene the group had to reshoot because the group shot it out of focus the week before. Julie (centre) asks us if she is framing the exact same shot. Adèle and I (left) try to give some suggestions. (Photograph: Coralie Van Pottelsberghe).

6 | CARING IS MORE THAN SHARING – *ALICE AND JESSICA*

One of the issues being addressed in the literature concerns the fact that the ethics of care is not fixed, and that it needs to be constantly informed by more practices of care (Raghuram, 2016). It is also important to recognise that care is not just a question of ethics but a powerful political tool. In this section we try to move behind the scenes and talk about the practices of care that inform our ethics of care as geographer filmmakers.

From the outside, collaborative filmmaking can often be thought of as a process of co-production where everybody shares responsibilities and/or takes turns in all roles. Certainly, each of the constituent phases of a film requires a significant investment of time (Gandy, 2021) from all the people involved. Yet, despite significant investment of time, effort, and emotional labour on all sides, the participants and the researcher do not carry out the same amount of work, and any potential benefits are not evenly distributed, or even distributed in relation to the amount of effort and time put in. For example, it is now only two of us who are writing this paper who are speaking about the collective work of an entire group. While we can potentially gain from this publication, it is hard to see how the other participants can benefit as much as us, even if we acknowledge their roles. The narration of the process within and outside academic circuits, as well as being an act – in this case with political and militant spillovers – is also an integral part of researchers' work. In many or most cases, it is the main purpose. Therefore, it seems legitimate to us to explain what we mean by researching through the making of a collaborative film with research participants, and in what sense we think such a process could be practised with care.

For both of us, caring is not just about the labour of caring for and it is not just about sharing.

Following a conception of research ethics of care as a set of practices that place emotions at the centre (Lopez & Gillespie, 2016), we consider it important to decentralise the academic onus on publication that can exert pressure on researchers to gloss over some of the more problematic elements of data gathering. This is achieved by collaboratively running the stages that enhance the capacity of the group (and individuals within the group) to produce collective critical and performative thinking, build alliances of intent (Butler, 2017), and discuss and imagine future alternatives (Palermo, 2023). We consider it important to do this while respecting the people involved and their abilities, their authorities, their wishes and desires, and the quality of the time spent together. We do not consider it important to request or expect participants to do anything they do not wish to do: the collateral and follow-up work is up to the researcher, unless the participants have offered to participate in that as well because they want to.

As we said, we do not want to polish this paper in a way that other researchers will think we got very cool solutions to advise others in their fieldworks. We have no answers for this section, just contradictions. A tension between self-care and responsibility articulates around the opposition between verticality and horizontality, holding control and not holding control of what was going on.

We want to challenge first the myth that merely practising a form of horizontal organisation can reduce power inequalities by saying that we consider it important and *care-full* from our position of relative power that the collaborative stages are managed horizontally only when participants want this to be done horizontally, and vertically when the participants want this to be done vertically. In agreement with the participants, and with respect for each person's life and their daily commitments, Alice worked between the meetings to propose adjustments, resolve inconsistencies, fill narrative holes, go to the urban spaces and verify the feasibility of the hypotheses, and to then submit the modified version to the group during the following discussion and have a refined baseline on which to work together again. The extra work, in terms of time, done by the researcher – always saying where she went and what she did so that anyone who wanted to could join – did not detract from the collective and collaborative quality of the writing of the stories. On the contrary, it allowed the time spent with the group of participants to be devoted punctually to the collective critical analysis of the contents, instead of being dispersed in collateral activities, difficult to be introduced in their already busy daily lives.

This is a practice of care that allows the fieldwork to be conducted with what looks like a light touch, but it unequivocally imposes heavy work on the researcher. As we have argued, the responsibility for questions lies with the researcher who (theoretically at least) will be remunerated for the work she does. But we also want to highlight the fact that there are much less (emotionally and timefully) impactful ways of doing research than engaging in the filmmaking process. Choosing such a method responds to the ethics of care and the sense of political responsibility of the researchers as well as their emotional and human needs, but in some cases risks clashing with self-care because it imposes an invisible work of care – emotional and practical – of the space shared with the participants. Also, this care-work goes unrecognised. An easy answer would be 'You bought the ticket? Take a ride!' or in Italian '*Hai voluto la bicicletta? Ora pedala!*' Yet this seems too reductive. Instead, we want to highlight the cost of creating a collaborative space for filmmaking in research, and how difficult it is to balance a research ethic of care, responsibility for the research, relationships with participants, respect for the participants' time and for the caring work they do for free for the researcher, the researcher's time and

self-care, and political goals. We want to challenge the tension between self-care and responsibility by highlighting the contradiction between having control of the research process as a practice of care, and also being willing to lose control of the process as a practice of care.

As we mentioned in the previous paragraph, care is also letting things go their own way, carried by the participants where they want to take them. We acknowledge moments and conditions in which the research moves forward as a collective enterprise beyond the researchers' control. Care is also taking steps to not allow the researcher's voice to count more than that of others. This, however, we realise, does not always apply. On the set, for example, Alice tried to get things going in their direction, leaving control to the others, but then had to do a lot of work outside the group to ensure a satisfactory end result for everyone. Because the participants had never made a film before, this made the set appear 'amateurish', and extremely chaotic, even if generative of new thoughts and ideas (Garrett, 2011; Garrett & Hawkins, 2014). On the set – apart from those who acted as actresses – all the participants took turns in performing the different roles of director, script, camera-person, audio-recorder, and so on. This allowed for the lively negotiation of positions of power, of who was going to film and who was going to be filmed, and thus who was to be the watcher and also who was to be watched, but it also turned out to be very messy.

> There were 12 people on the set today. We were in the basement of *Le poisson sans bicyclette* and we were about to shoot the final scene in which the leader of the pissers lights a cigarette, raises the volume of the radio and listens to a journalist reporting on the feminist uprising she has spearheaded. Sara was in the scene. Ernesto had his earphones in and was holding the microphone. Unfortunately, the microphone, this time like so many others, was also on stage along with his whole arm, but whoever started the video recording (two people) paid no attention. Pauline takes care of the editing secretary, but one time out of two she forgets to mark the scene reference. It's no big deal, because even Ernesto one time out of two forgets to say what sound he is recording. Simone takes care of the clapperboards, but she always clicks them so close to the camera that you never see the moment when wood knocks on wood and produces the sharp sound needed to synchronise audio and video. These three mistakes combined will cost me weeks of synchronisation. Adèle stands behind camera with Pauline and they place the tripod, don't fix it properly and the image, while recording, starts to tilt to the right, then to the front. The camera almost fell to the ground.
>
> (Fieldwork notes)

As Kindon (2003) explains, when the film fails to recognise the presence of the researcher it produces distanced and disembodied claims. We may add that when a film fails to show the agency of the participants it can produce a-political claims. Besides, mistakes such as forgetting to switch on the microphone, not focusing the image, or even operating the clapperboard out of frame (see the end of the film Urban Piss Ups: vimeo.com/533947273) were valuable because they function as expressions of the group's political voice by showing their relationship to the process, showing who was behind the camera and therefore situating the knowledge fostered by that specific situation (Kindon, 2003, 2016). Perhaps in these cases Alice should have been clearer and asked the group to be more orderly because then she would not have had so many additional operational complexities further along the production line. Here it was very difficult to figure out what to do and where to turn: give directions and ask them to work with a minimum of 'professionalism' or leave room for others to play and experiment. On the one hand, there was the care for Alice (we said: a precarious researcher from southern Europe) that would greatly reduce the processing time of the material and would enable her to write a paper more quickly to improve the possibility of finding a new job after submitting her PhD. On the other was the care for the time the participants would take out of their lives and make available for this filmmaking process. In this case, care for the researcher's time and targets conflicted with care for the participants' time and targets. We do not want to idealise care for the participants without considering how difficult it is sometimes to tension it with self-care. Otherwise, the risk is again to promote the heroism of the researcher who must hold everything together, themself, the others, the research, the objectives.

7 | RESEARCH OUTPUTS AND CARE AS A POLITICAL PRACTICE – *ALICE AND JESSICA*

So far, we have seen how Alice's project helped to create a group of women who expressed the need to materialise a message based on their experiences of gendered urban struggles, and the collaborative filmmaking element of the workshop made this materialisation possible. Here we will discuss the message that was materialised, the final outputs – the three short films.

As published outputs, the films themselves could be seen to have their agency that existed alongside but not in harmony with established knowledge-production practices of care. One of the key anomalies relates to participant confidentiality. Researcher ethics most often require and rely on the promise of anonymity as part of expectations of caring for the participants. Throughout the research process the participants have appeared under a pseudonym, at Alice's suggestion and following university ethical guidelines. While ethical approval systems of universities expect participant anonymity at some level, Alice also wondered whether she had projected the need to protect some stories of violence with a pseudonym, realising at that moment that she had acted as a patronising researcher and had overdetermined the other priorities of participants without recognising their authority and ability to make decisions for themselves: they did not want to be 'protected' (see Di Feliciantonio, 2021).

When it comes to disseminating research as a film, the question of anonymity changes. While anonymity is still an important element of filmmaking and there is a whole genre of creative filmmaking practice where metaphor and symbolism are used to maintain anonymity, it is also the case that participants who make films expect to be acknowledged by being made visible. When it came to listing the credits, the participants asked to appear under their real names.

Opportunities to publish films made as part of academic research are growing across the social sciences but they are still limited. Anthropology has the *Journal of Ethnographic Films*, and *Social Research Online* has just launched a new publication area within the journal, Beyond the Text. In geography, the opportunities include *Film Geographies*, established by Jessica with Joseph Palis (University of Diliman, Philippines) in 2017. While the three films have been submitted to several film festivals, in the Global North at least, film festivals tend to focus solely on the output and excludes films that do not fit relatively rigid levels of audio-visual quality. They do not tend to accommodate films where the process is as important, if not more, than the output. Nonetheless, one of the films 'By Bike She Lives' (Salimbeni, 2021) was invited to the International Cycling Film Festival 2023 in Herne. A small delegation of five participants went to screen the film with Alice. Before the event, during the dinner, Alice and the participants had an interesting debate. The organisers explained that only two people could go up on stage and they would only have a few minutes for discussion. In the end, a collective decision was made that Alice would go up to speak. The participants agreed that this could not be avoided. It was collectively decided that the second person would be the main actress, Noémie.

What then ensued was a political debate between the participants and Alice to understand how best to practise care in terms of their engagement and through the film and how to decide exactly what aspects of the work should be shared in front of the almost one hundred people that made up the festival audience. Alice offered to say in a few words something about the research framework then immediately leave the floor to Noémie, but then she realised she was acting in a paternalistic way while performing the academic that steps aside, enacting unwanted practices of care and overdetermining Noémie who wanted instead to share the floor with her.

8 | CONCLUSION – ALICE AND JESSICA

Using a case study to discuss the collaborative filmmaking methodology engaged in by Alice, we have examined the role of care and its relationship to the production of knowledge when it is applied to the processes of fieldwork research. We have argued that an interpretation of care has to go beyond a surface understanding where researchers risk perpetuating colonialist and paternalistic attitudes in academia.

As a responsive and responsible methodology, collaborative filmmaking offers us an enormous potential to reach beyond an ethics of care and enact care as a political practice. This potential applies throughout the knowledge-production process, from the initial research proposal, to obtaining funding, engaging with institutional guidelines, engaging with participants, right through to film story development and production and dissemination. Films take on an agency of their own after they are shared, and the potential here is also yet to be known.

Alice's proposal to create three short films was not without emotional challenges, as the weight of the shared stories impacted both Alice and the participants. The buddy system, between Alice and the participants, and Alice and Jessica, emerged as a vital mechanism to share emotional burdens and navigate the complexities of the research process. The blurring of boundaries between Alice's roles as a researcher and a friend, as exemplified in her relationships with Noémie and Pauline, added a layer of complexity to the care dynamics within the group. This fusion of personal and professional spheres influenced the fieldwork, reshaping the roles of care-giver and care-receiver. Noémie and Pauline, in embracing Alice's dual identity as a researcher and as a friend through care, challenged traditional researcher–participant dynamics.

The choice to reflect on our relationship with the subjects of our research is not just about care, it is essential for innumerable reasons, highlighted in wider calls to decolonise the academy. Our argument here is not that filmmaking is a miracle solution that solves these issues, allowing us to be 'carefree' in our research. As precarious researchers we practise our work under conditions of institutional paternalism and our inequitable funding and working conditions are not likely to instantly resolve themselves on any offer of a permanent post. Rather we argue that we make films with participants in an academic context precisely because we care about radicalising academia. And practising our care is a political act. Creating projects that focus on the use of collaborative filmmaking is not a way of avoiding issues of paternalism, rather our argument is that it allows us to focus on and explore the potential of filmmaking to render paternalism, the emotions, the messiness and injustice held within methodological and dissemination processes more visible. It allows us to find the locations for care, and if those spaces don't exist in our methodologies, then, as an act of care, it gives us the opportunity that we need to create them. The potential is intimately connected to the choice of the researcher to make a film with participants in a way that cares with, not just for, them.

We found a refuge in filmmaking because we believe that through this methodology we can work on our extractive responsibility as researchers and explore how we can practise a care-full way of collaborating with other people. Nonetheless, we think that no matter how hard we try now, and we will try in the future, to make our research a way to foster places of care, this will never be enough. Within the paternalistic neoliberal infrastructure we exist in as scholars, we will always be under pressure to be extractive. It is hard to see a way in which participants and collaborators can gain in the same way as the privileged scholar, no matter how precarious or discriminated against that scholar might be. We instigate, as researchers, situations, we ask questions, we raise doubts. This is not a problem as long as we recognise that privilege and use that academic privilege to produce political care-full knowledge that overcomes our individualistic purposes. The epistemological and methodological issues remain because it is built into the way we get funding, and the way we instigate situations, ask questions, and raise doubts is shaped also by how we are expected to use these answers to produce papers that might offer a way out of positionalities of being the ever-precarious researcher who wants to keep doing this job. In the meantime, we will keep exploring the potential of collaborative filmmaking as a means to help us dismantle this master's house.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Vimeo at https://vimeo.com/alicesalimbeni

ORCID

Jessica Jacobs https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8760-6555
Alice Salimbeni https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2954-2594

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