

From Theory to Practice: Leveraging Feminist Approaches to Care at a Time of Crisis Workshop 20 to 21 July 2022

Convenors

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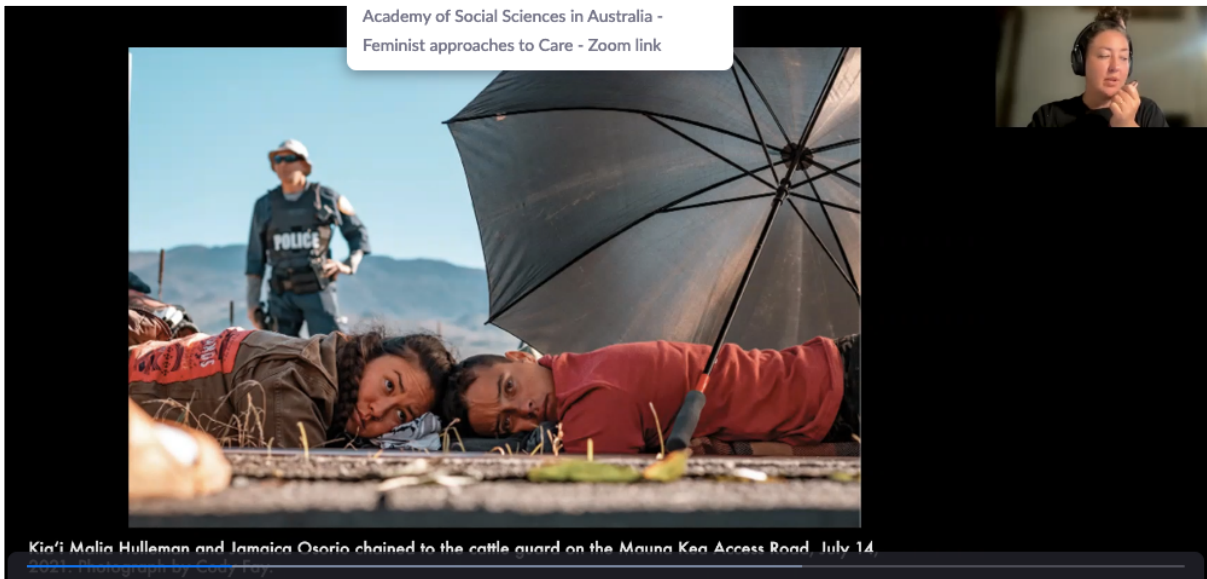
Summary

This interdisciplinary workshop took place at the University of Adelaide in July 2022 and brought together academics, community practitioners, curators and landscape architects to critically examine how feminist approaches to care can intervene in current crises and socio-political debates. Academics came from national and international locations and a range of disciplinary fields, including gender studies, anthropology, public health, sociology, environmental studies, education, art theory, and media, all of whom have research interests in feminist concepts of care.

The workshop aimed to:

- 1) take this critical moment of crisis to re-position care as a productive intervention;
- 2) strengthen a critical exchange between social science, other disciplinary approaches to care, and community partners;
- 3) develop a vision for more effective ways in which feminist values of care can be translated into policies and practices.

The 2 day workshop comprised a keynote, 4 roundtables and 2 events. We began with a keynote from Dr Hi'ilei Hobart, Assistant Professor of Native and Indigenous studies at Yale University, and co-author of *Radical Care* with Tamara Kneese (2020). Dr Hobart's keynote was entitled *Radical Care (in yet another time of crisis)*, and she discussed radical care as a powerful response to an inequitable world – and called attention to the power structures of care (its commodification) as well as the feminisation and undervaluing of care as a form of labour. Contemporary articulations of care she argued, often presume individualism, benevolence, and moral purity, despite the fact that societal conditions shape the practices of care. The focus of her talk centred on the building of the world's largest telescope in Hawaii on Indigenous land (the sacred mountain Mauna Kea) in 2019, and how radical care was built through food kitchens in the Indigenous encampment, resistance and land sovereignty in the context of settler colonialism. Here care work was practised as *kuleana* – an Hawaiian concept for reciprocal responsibility. The infrastructures of the camp kitchen included capitalist ends (through importation of industrial, expensive and colonial foods), but also held things together through repair and restorative work (care, collaboration and community towards sovereign futures). A central contradiction Dr Hobart highlighted is the ways that care is a gendered, racialized and undervalued labour that sustains inequitable systems, but at the same time it is also the site where possibilities, ingenuity, renewal and collective survival emerge. Hi'ilei asked us to attend to care not simply as theory but as praxis – as practices of infrastructures, of maintenance, of what care can do. Care work has always held things together and there is always someone, somewhere who is patching things together, often invisible (and highly gendered).



Our first roundtable (**Theoretical interventions of feminist care**) explored the rapid expansion of the concept of care, cautioning about the ways in which it is strategically used for political gain and commercial profit. If care can have myriad multiple meanings and can be anything, does it risk losing its potential as a site of productive, political intervention? This panel was led by Emerita Chris Beasley (UoA) and Professor Celia Roberts (ANU). Prof Beasley gave an overview of the feminist uses of care (care as labour, feminist ethics of care (from mothering to welfare reform), and more contemporary valuing of care in posthuman and new materialist iterations of care. What does the adding of 'radical' to care do? Prof Roberts contributed to this history of feminist care by taking the discussion into feminist techno-science field of care, citing the work of STS scholars such as AnnMarie Mol and Vicki Singleton. This emphasis was on distributed and enacted practices of care, and knowing what good, bad and ambivalent practices of care are, and do.

In the lunch hour we met at the Art Gallery of South Australia to meet with Elle Freak, Curator of Australian Painting and Sculpture. Elle took the group on a tour of a select number of works that deal with care, including Care through Craft (e.g. Karna shield and shell necklaces); Care as Mother, wife and artist (e.g. Joy Hester, Ethel Fox); and Care through migration, the body and self (e.g. Hossein Valamanesh, Chiharu Shiota). Concepts of care as a curatorial practice were also explored, in particular the care required to place objects and images in conversation through careful curating.



The second roundtable (Practices of care in the contemporary world) considered examples of how ideas of care are put into practice; where and how that is theorised; where it is not, and what

difference that makes for the success or failure of feminist approaches to caring. The focus in this session was on sensitivity to context and environment. Dr Chao began by an exploration of Indigenous praxiologies of more than human care in West Papua – care as cultivations, care as curiosity, and care as curating. Indigenous care can be extended in multiple ways, for example to palm oil – in terms of resistance to the structural violence of large-scale agricultural developments, but also expressing empathy for the monocrops of palm oil and compassion for the fruits ripped from the plants. In this context care multiplies, it is embodied and sensory, and extends to multiple entities. Dr Verlie (Sydney Environment Institute) spoke about the challenges of teaching climate change and care with undergraduate students. This care work can be exhausting and unrewarding as educators grapple with climate anxiety and emotions that overwhelm. Using the oft repeated phrase from Audre Lorde, Dr Verlie works to build collective care and solidarity with practical skills of self-care, and frames climate environmentalism as care work. Climate grief is embodied and felt – it can be traumatising. In addition, there is a feminised discourse around nature, those who care for nature, who are often volunteering and underpaid (so this care work is devalued). Dr Jana Norman delivered a theoretically rich discussion building on the work of feminist philosophers Karen Barad and Rosa Braidotti, looking to the ways in which bodies are deeply entangled across multiple spaces (including all bodies of matter, not simply the enlightenment bodies of the person). How do we ‘dump dualism’ and re-set the human-earth relationship? Dr Annapurna Nori drew on her current State based Covid-19 and PhD work on the wellbeing of older Kurna and Ngarrindjeri women in South Australia. Key to this discussion was how to manage or hold tensions of care (care for country, care for self, care for kin) amidst racism and a crisis of health and social care.

A group dinner was held on the first day for workshop members.

Our third roundtable (**The politicisation of care during crisis**) began on the second day and examined industries and systems of care during crises. Dr Caroline Alcorso began by discussing the workforce crisis care in the context of aged care and disability. This workforce is chronically understaffed (the workforce turns over every 3 years), complex and fragmented. The crisis is endemic and devalues the workers (80% who are women), devalorises the recipients of care (who have no power) and devalues collective care of our elderly and less abled through the privatisation of care and neoliberal management. Another sector of health care was discussed by Dr Tanya Zivkovic (Future Fellow, UoA) who described the registers of pressure that are embodied and felt during the process of organ donation – itself the ultimate gesture of caring. Bodies are under pressure, and systems are under pressure; bodies are burnt out and the extraction of organs fills other bodies with untold grief. These felt pressures of compressed and grieving time are escalated through bureaucratic pressures, of form filling, finances, funerals, coronial procedures and unanswered questions. Alternative practices of care were offered by Dani Abbott from The Australian Centre for Social Innovation, who presented a program called Family by Family – an organisation that reimagines the workforce and how care is delivered and by whom. Recognising the industry of care (which was itself aligned with the prison industrial complex), Dani identified the multiple points of care, the different demands on families and the different experiences of ‘care’ from professionals. Important to this work is the worlds that are made through storytelling, and Dani referred to this work as evidence informed practice.

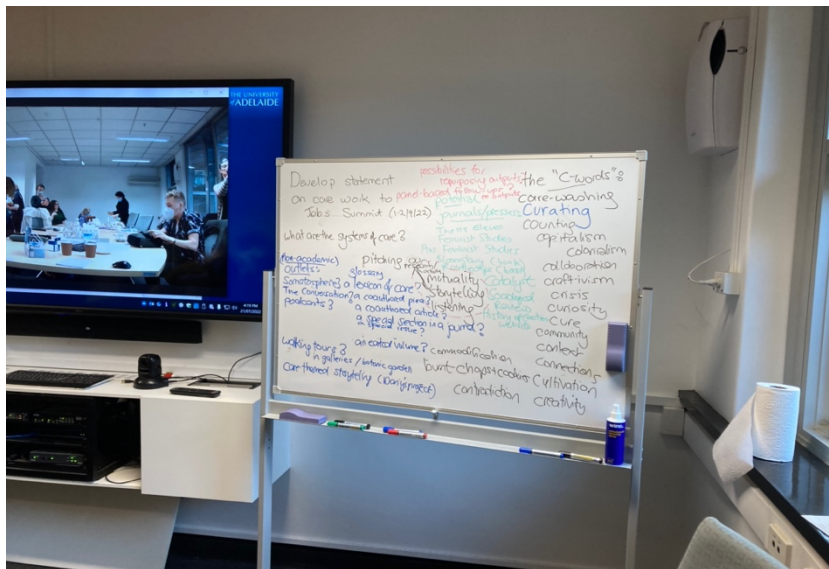


Our lunch time tour took us to the botanical gardens where we met with landscape architect Dr Kate Cullity. Similar to our Art Gallery visit, Kate's landscape work is a nexus of care and creativity, delivered through commitment of a team. Kate walked us to the new wetlands area, detailing how practices of beauty, aesthetics and care were integrated into this garden. Key to bringing this design and its functionality together were collaboration, and collaboration across different sectors of Indigenous knowledges, urban design and infrastructure, wetland ecologies, plants, biology, animals and people.



The final roundtable (**Brainstorming: Developing new feminist approaches of care for the 21st Century**) provided space for rethinking feminist approaches to care. In a world that is fractured and polarised, how can care be rethought? Prof Rob Cover explored the absence of care in online spaces, and the toxic worlds that are now deeply embedded in digital hostility. Linking this hostility to gun violence in the US and the violence of COVID denial, Rob asked how might we think about theories of care with a new lens? What new frameworks do we need (no point in using current frameworks but we can't escape the discourses that have shaped our thinking). While Tronto's 3

aspects of caring have been useful (caring for, about and caring with) they are not independent or distinct from each other. Judith Butler's ethics of non-violence can help us to reframe how we think of interdependency – for dependency here is key. Dependency is the antidote to the rampant individualism that plagues neoliberal worlds. Violence is a lack of care for the ecology in which we thrive; violence occurs when the infrastructures of care fall apart. Rob suggested 4 frameworks of care: 1) listening and conversation; 2) story telling for care; 3) promiscuous care and 4) unworlding/unmasking the current arrangement (we can't work with these systems anymore). They need to be undone. Our next presenter Dr Jacqueline Millner noted how dependency is a deviant position (like the diminution of care as a feminised concept). Millner drew on feminist care ethics to explore how contemporary artists in the *Care: Art and ethics: an exhibition series* focuses on aesthetics to value those caring practices which have been historically devalued in gendered and colonial discourses. In critically exploring how care can be creatively enacted in regional Australia, Millner drew on philosopher Puig de la Bellacasa to highlight how care in art practice materialises through the 'mundane doings of maintenance and repair that sustain everyday life', acts that are marginalised and overlooked by dominant, successful (technoscientific) mobilisations.



The final session considered workshop outcomes, next steps, and future collaborations.