

10

INTRODUCTION

Everyday Struggles and Contestations Around Care

Kim Trogal and Tihomir Viderman

Why Should We Care about Care, and What Do Struggles and Contestation Have to Do with It?

Care creates social bonds and glues societies together; we care and are cared for, and this is what sustains societies. No matter how vital to human development and relations, care is simultaneously something capitalist societies tend to undervalue yet concomitantly is often idealized or romanticized to legitimize a neoliberal form of governmentality. Struggles to recognize the value of care and struggles to provide care are not new but are rather long standing, double-edged and deeply revealing of the conditions in which they occur. The contemporary condition of Europe's capitalist societies in which we ourselves are located makes evident how care is tied to struggle and how much care is struggled over. Care workers, low-wage domestic workers, nurses and cleaners, are all struggling over basic workers' rights. We want to put forward that such struggles and contestations are important not only because they articulate the value of care and its importance for everyday life but, they actively reconstruct caring relations.

The urban dimension of struggles that make care visible as a social practice manifests in contested relations around a crucial boundary or fault line between the public and private. This boundary was one of three 'moral boundaries' that Joan Tronto (1993) described as socially reproducing forms of organization and relations of power. She argued that these moral boundaries needed to be re-drawn to render care and its values visible and felt within the public, and particularly pointed to the need to recognize how such boundaries affect political strategies. In other words, she argued that the public-private boundary is where political strategy and the ethics of care meet and its negotiation thus plays a strategic role in conveying, sustaining, and contesting power relations. What we seek to contribute to this understanding from a spatial perspective is that the crossovers of care and caring relations cannot be fully grasped in the binary of public and private. While this boundary has been negotiated differently at different stages in capitalist development, once (responsibility for) care had been shifted from the private household to the state, care has been abstracted as a provision detached from its affective dimensions. We draw on Nancy Fraser's (2016) regimes of social

reproduction in capitalist development to scrutinize a shift from the realm of the private to the public, with care being increasingly subject to commodification in the form of the welfare state, followed by a return of care to the realm of the private in the current phase of financialization. Unlike in the early stages of capitalism, the realm of the private under financial capitalism is not purely or only a private household matter, but rather a domain of production spanning domestic life, the private sector, and invisibilized parts of the public sector that often operates under market principles. While the realm of the private has been institutionally made distinct from the public realm, the two realms are functionally intertwined in the way that care is rationalized as a service. As a service, the quality of its provision or lack thereof is publicly scrutinized, yet the labor and affective relationships invested in the provision of care are kept out of the public eye. This type of institutionalization pushes care deeper into commodified forms, further bifurcating societies with those who can afford care as a commercialized service and those who cannot; and on the side of ‘providers,’ with those who are protected by different forms of social contract and collective bargaining and those who are not.

While care can be seen as both a practice and social phenomenon that undergoes different transformations and interpretations, how it materializes in urban space matters. It is by paying attention to the urban every day and struggles around care that we can observe different forms of materializations of care. These affective materialities matter precisely because they are constitutive of society. What contemporary struggles and contestations over care therefore also make tangible is precisely this struggle of distribution across the private–public boundary and its negotiation. This is a thread running through all the contributions to this section of the book.

Struggles of Care and Capitalism

As feminists have argued, debates concerning the lack of care workers is not the root of the ‘crisis of care’ as it has been called, but results from a contradiction inherent to capitalism—a contradiction that manifests itself differently at historical moments and gives rise to different forms of social organization (Fraser 2016). What we want to further here is that contradictions extend beyond manifesting as different modes of organization but are also manifest in different affective dimensions of care and caring practices. This involves recognizing that while capitalism cuts caring relations in the way that it cuts affective relationships, it also builds caring relations in different forms, primarily by abstracting care as a commodified category and (more recently) as a financialized product. These processes then materialize ‘care’ in urban space as a provision or a service whose task is to simultaneously ensure the reproduction of society and consolidate asymmetries in power relations.

In approaching care from a narrow functionalist view, the commodification of core care activities and relations, such as care for children or for the elderly, is a key moment in the reproduction of society. Opening the activities of care and social reproduction to financial capital seemingly creates conditions of possibility for both social and economic development. Yet in the transition of responsibility for care and welfare from the private domain to the welfare state, and its subsequent (re)privatization (*ibid.*), we observe qualitative shifts in care, not just its mode of ‘delivery’ or ‘access.’ The state, stripped of responsibility for welfare, clearly has limited impact in shaping the conditions of unpaid and underpaid care labor. Not only the costs of exploitation are passed on to workers but also as a systemic principle, societies have been decoupled from affective dimensions and sentiments of care as a practice. The

privatization of care therefore has a double connotation. It is privatized at a market level, but what we also want to gesture toward is that it is privatized in the sense that in individualizing care, our struggles to provide care have become individualized as well. As the rationale of competition, privatization, and performance measurement extends throughout society, it also strips care provision of its affective dimensions. The privatization of care is therefore probably the most potent systemic tool toward fragmenting and atomizing societies.

By promoting austerity, neoliberal capitalism has undermined physical and social urban infrastructures, with both recursive and damaging effects on health, education, life expectancy, and physical capacities. We see worldwide environments of ‘uncare’ (Chapter 1, this volume), which are degraded by water crises, inadequate housing, and increasing forms of disinvestment in the built environment and the city as a shared space for living (Katz 2008). This includes the degradation of physical urban environment and in particular social infrastructures, such as schools, libraries, parks, and pubs. The disappearance of these spaces takes with them their social capacities, opportunities, and relationships. In this context, neoliberal capitalism is not just about the withdrawal of state welfare services, but has a clear impact on shared notions of lived space and the institutions that make up daily life. What this means is that neoliberal capitalism and austerity cut at both the physical spaces and materials of the city as well as at social relationships and at capacities to care. In such an environment, we argue that caring relations matter all the more because they build agency to contest.

The Power of Care Struggles

While the privatization of care and welfare accelerates troubling employment practices and the degradation of everyday life for many, care can nevertheless channel a noteworthy collective energy into a hope-filled struggle. Struggles mobilized around and with care motivate people to get together and to create caring relations. With the word struggle, we refer not only to a demonstration or a strike (the latter being one potentially institutionalized form of struggle), but also to the more intangible and embodied connections, defined by multiple caring relations. At the urban scale, caring relations can create protected places of collective efforts, which, in the feminist tradition, contest “a belief that the public and the private are discrete and oppositional domains necessary for organizing social, economic, and political life” (Wright 2010: 818, cited in Schurr and Strüver 2016: 89), thus rendering the politics of care a public issue. At such places the publics who are engaged in struggles feel supported and this is how agency is built. A plurality of those caring relations create collective formations that have agency to contest the tendency of financial capitalism to fragment caring relations. Here, we point to the host of different collective actions mobilizing to give voice to seemingly private struggles over livelihood within the public domain. This applies to collectives such as workers who through embodied actions, such as occupations of their factories or sit-ins, not only interrupt the established processes and hierarchies at their workplaces to directly claim the need for change, but also articulate these processes as public issues, thus contesting the public-private boundary between their workplace and society. In so doing they can count on the support of broader publics, who often informally support them, both materially and emotionally. Unlike articulating the collective struggle as a public issue, in the aftermath of capitalist crises, self-organized groups invest a lot of labor in collectivizing individual struggles. Through the creation of caring relations among seemingly atomized individuals and households they make individual struggles in the domain of a household a public issue. Yet unlike a factory

or workplace struggle, the boundaries of privacy are here much more difficult to negotiate, so these actions are directed at building relations, providing support, and articulating private troubles in the public domain. This fosters not only individual agency, but first and foremost a collective capacity to negotiate belonging, appropriate space, and improve the conditions of everyday life (Viderman and Knierbein 2020).

While we see that capitalism cuts at caring relations, struggles and contestations around care make visible (again) public-private boundaries, subjecting them to renegotiation and, importantly show that people still care. In order to have any hope for the future there has to be struggle. In this introduction, we are arguing that care is central to creating collective agency even when the conditions it emerges from actively fragment social relations, for this is precisely the reason why contestations matter. To evoke Judith Butler's (2012) conceptualization of 'bodies that care and are cared for,' collectivized caring relations should be understood not only as the essential means for creating commonalities but also as having power to disrupt and change the ground conditions from which they emerge. This would also be, to play on Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) words, 'the disruptive power of care.'

Introducing the Contributions

The chapters in this section introduce a range of different terrains on which struggles make tangible and negotiate the private-public boundary. A particular shared point of concern is that this boundary plays down the fact that the provision of care is problematically tied to citizenship and nations, while being deeply embedded in, and performative of, asymmetries in power relations.

The first, written by Caterina Rohde-Abuba, '*Respect Toward Old People: The Commodification of Ethnicity in Migrant Care Work in Germany*' (Chapter 11, this volume), focuses specifically on the colonial and racialized power relations affecting Vietnamese eldercare workers in Germany. Employing discourse analysis across a range of mass media, policy documents, and government communications alongside the words of carers and those cared for, Rohde-Abuba reveals discourses as a form of governmentality, which regulate regimes of care and exert relations of power. She shows how discourses construct culturally essentialist identities of the Vietnamese workers thus reproducing 'orientalized othering.' While the Vietnamese 'culture of respect' to elders is valued as an intrinsic attribute, it simultaneously intersects with the devaluing of those same workers' skills and educations, where workers are additionally seen to have poor German language skills and to have 'naturally' poor self-reliance in the workplace. Processes of 'othering' take place to undermine workers' professional knowledge, value, and income.

The problematic intersection of the provision of care with rights to citizenship is expanded on in Niroopa Subrahmanyam's contribution *Care for the Uncared (for): Slum Redevelopment and the Emerging Challenges of Accessing Care for the Urban Poor in Delhi* (Chapter 12, this volume). Her chapter introduces *Rajiv Awas Yojana* (RAY), a development scheme to provide affordable housing in India, seen as a means to improve and increase access to welfare provisions. Subrahmanyam examines ambiguities inherent to welfare provision concerning the matters of citizenship at the level of the household, the community, and the state through the lens of the Kathputli Colony, particularly in the light of the eviction and relocation of its inhabitants in order to give way to the RAY housing development. She explains that policy inadequacies and bureaucratic practices left many households excluded and in poorer conditions. Instead, she points to the complex socio-spatial infrastructures of care that already exist

in informal housing settlements, from small shops, community facilities, and gathering and meeting spaces, whose demolition represents a missed opportunity. She elaborates on how an engagement with existing systems through more incremental approaches could support existing livelihoods and improve already affordable infrastructures of care, while also increasing the inhabitants' legitimacy and agency to contest future demolitions and evictions.

The following two chapters are joined by a shared concern around the knowledge politics of the professional planner or architect and the emancipatory possibilities of learning, experimentation, and speculation with others. In their contribution, *Public Space and Children: Who Cares and Who Takes Care of?* (Chapter 13, this volume), César Matos e Silva and Robertha Barros situate their role as 'practitioners-as-translators' between professionalized forms of 'expert' knowledge of the city and social experiences or non-conventional practices that are often invisible. They present their practice-based participatory research project 'My Lime Tree Sidewalk' in Aracaju, Brazil to draw attention to the practices of domination, power, and class division that attend these knowledges. It is in children's experiences where they locate a potentially counter hegemonic form of knowledge to reflect on its emancipatory potential. Working with children and their parents, the practitioners-as-translators mapped contestation over public spaces uses, care, and responsibilities bringing a collective awareness of the existing 'uncare for the city.' Pointing to pedagogy as etymologically rooted in public space, the authors argue that public spaces of the city are sites of struggle, but importantly are also sites of learning.

Micol Rispoli's contribution *Careful Rearrangements: Experiments with Neglected 'Things' in Architecture* (Chapter 14, this volume) similarly questions the status of knowledges in architectural practice. Rispoli points to the lineage of feminist and participatory approaches to architecture that, by making space for others, and otherwise excluded voices and knowledges, form a counter point to prevalent technocracy. Rispoli draws on insights of knowledge politics and epistemology from Science Technology Studies to define care as a speculative practice and a commitment to multiple ontologies. Beyond including otherwise neglected 'things,' Rispoli argues, architecture practice must learn how to be affected by them. In the context of the traditions of architecture and design pedagogy, she further explores how an ethnographic attention could pose one such opportunity to thinking and experiencing space as an open-ended process of engaging with the unknown.

In the final contribution to this section *Infrastructures from Below: Self-Reproduction and Common Struggle in and Beyond Athens in Crisis* (Chapter 15, this volume), Isabel Gutiérrez Sánchez follows contestations and struggles of citizens to resist the effects of neoliberal austerity on Greek society. She brings an ethnographic and participatory approach to three citizen-led, self-organized, solidarity initiatives in Athens to analyze how these groups have developed new infrastructures against dispossessions and exclusions, in ways that are manifestly forms of resistance and re-composition at the same time. Gutiérrez Sánchez argues that the spatial and urban dimensions of these struggles, passing from occupy squares movements to decentralized yet connected solidarity initiatives, were key for the protagonists, each cognizant of the agency of spatial 'moves.' Here, she also points to the social reproduction of the initiatives themselves and the types and intensities of labor involved in sustaining them. Through these solidarity initiatives which are for, and with, migrants and refugees, we also return to the intersection of struggles over reproduction with struggles over citizenship.

The urban struggles and contestations taking place in the chapters presented here emerge in environments of 'uncare': in response to the shocks of austerity, of migration, and of violence;

forms of ‘othering’; and devalorization. These struggles and contestations are implicitly tied to the matters of citizenship and exclusions across various categories of difference, and span different terrains of knowledge production. Caring practices emerging in these situations are creating networks and relationships of solidarity which through formation of collective agency take on the transformative role in negotiating restrictive and unjust boundaries in everyday life.

References

- Butler, J. (2012) Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26(2): 134–151.
- Fraser, N. (2016) Contradictions of Capital and Care. *New Left Review* 100(4): 99–117.
- Katz, C. (2008) Bad Elements: Katrina and the Scoured Landscape of Social Reproduction. *Gender, Place and Culture* 15(1): 15–29.
- Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017) *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Schurr, C. and Strüver, A. (2016) “The Rest”: Geographien des Alltäglichen zwischen Affekt, Emotion und Repräsentation. *Geographica Helvetica* 71(2): 87–97.
- Tronto, J.C. (1993) *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. New York: Routledge.
- Viderman, T. and Knierbein, S. (2020) Affective Urbanism: Towards Inclusive Design Praxis. *Urban Design International* 25(2): 53–62.
- Wright, M. (2010) Geography and Gender: Feminism and a Feeling of Justice. *Progress in Human Geography* 34(3): 818–827.