Re-envisaging research on 'alternatives' through participatory inquiry: Co-generating knowledge on the social practice of care in a community kitchen

Alice Willatt

abstract

This paper explores the role of participatory action research (PAR) in shaping critical management studies (CMS) research with 'alternative' organisations. It looks to the emancipatory commitments of PAR, in conjunction with its aim to generate theoretical and practical knowledge, as a means to address recent calls for CMS to cultivate practical relevance outside the academy. I develop this argument by drawing on my doctoral research, which brings together feminist theories of care with participatory practice, to explore the engagements of a community kitchen based in the South of England. I trace how the research opened collaborative inquiry into the challenges of negotiating a politicised caring agenda in this emergency food provisioning context. I explore how it initiated efforts to democratise the communication structures of the national charity to which the community kitchen belongs, and also reflect on some of the ethical challenges I encountered along the way, relating to issues of voice, participation and the sustainability of the research outcomes.

Introduction

Historically, Critical Management Studies (CMS) has focused on market-orientated, profit-maximising corporate forms of organisation (Fournier and Grey, 2000). Recent years, however, have seen a growing interest in alternative forms of organising (Reedy and Learmonth, 2009). This has included organisations that challenge structures of patriarchy, racism and other forms of

oppression, reject market rationality, are community owned, non-hierarchically organised and premised on non-market forms of exchange (Parker et al., 2014). In the midst of this rapidly diversifying field, Cheney encourages scholars to consider the heuristic value and practical worth of this research, asking how we might lend support to the commitments and values of such spaces (Cheney, 2014).

Questions concerning the practical relevance of CMS are long-standing, often discussed in relation to the field's commitments to not only 'unmask the power relations around which social and organisational life are woven' but to also explore avenues for emancipation (Fournier and Grey, 2000:19). Despite these aspirations, there is little evidence to suggest CMS has been successful in either changing the oppressive managerial practices it critiques (Parker, 2002) or engaging the sectors of society it claims to represent (Fournier and Smith, 2012). Rather, scholars have criticised the lack of social and moral relevance in CMS research (Spicer et al., 2016), pointed towards the self-serving characteristics of the field (Tatli, 2012), and highlighted the potentially colonising and silencing nature of empirical practices on the people it claims to represent (Wray-Bliss, 2002). As Voronov points out:

> ... CMS scholars generally have failed to treat practitioners' knowledge, interests, and concerns as legitimate. Instead of finding a common ground between the concerns of researchers and those of practitioners and negotiating the differences in epistemologies, interests, and agendas, CMS scholars appear content to work in isolation in pursuit of purely academic challenges, with questions of practical relevance hastily inserted into the concluding paragraphs of research papers. (2008: 941)

These criticisms have resulted in calls for a 'third wave' of CMS that 'starts from the point of addressing and critiquing organizational issues that are of greater public significance' (Spicer et al., 2016: 226). This has encompassed discussions about engaged forms of scholarship that create progressive alliances between researchers and the researched, and reach out to audiences outside of the academy, such as activists and social movements (King and Learmonth, 2015). This paper responds to such discussions by arguing that participatory action research (PAR) has a role to play in developing a stream of inquiry on alternative organisations that pursues theoretical, practical and emancipatory interests.

PAR seeks not only to understand and interpret the world, but also to bring about positive social change through a democratic inquiry process intended to generate 'practical solutions to issues of pressing concern for people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006: 1). Much like the principles associated with alternative organisation, it strives to challenge and transform 'unjust and undemocratic

economic, social and political systems' and find more socially democratic and ecologically sustainable ways of living together on earth (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003: 11). Fundamentally, PAR is premised on a deep respect for local forms of knowledge and equally, the ability of communities to use this knowledge to create the changes they want to see. It marks a radical rejection of positivist epistemologies underscored by claims of objectivity and neutrality; rather, researchers adopt an overtly political position through their commitments to participation, co-production and social justice.

A small number of CMS scholars have highlighted the shared ideological premises of CMS and participatory research, for example by noting their mutual concerns regarding oppression, voice and power (Voronov, 2008). Brewis and Wray-Bliss argue that in positioning 'ethics as a central warrant for research', participatory approaches have a central role to play in radically re-imagining the relationship between researcher and researched (2008: 1531). However, they recognise that in the context of research with corporate organisations, emancipatory objectives risk being hijacked to advance managerial goals. In light of this, they argue that any prospective uptake of participatory approaches would need to be met with a related shift towards researching concrete alternatives. Stewart and Lucio make a similar point about the potential for 'management ideological capture', highlighting the need to locate the radical potential of PAR not in the method itself but rather in the 'socio-political orientation of the researcher' (2017: 537). There are also several examples of scholarly engagements with critical and participatory forms of action research, for example an inquiry on environmental conflicts between corporations and community groups (Strumińska-Kutra, 2016) and a voluntary sector organisation aiming to adopt non-hierarchical organising practices influenced by anarchism (Land and King, 2014).

This article aims to contribute to these discussions by making a case for CMS to further develop a participatory stream of inquiry within the growing field of research on alternative organisations. However, given there is much debate around what counts as 'alternative', and research in this area can bring us to a range of different social spaces (Parker et al., 2014), I recognise that PAR may not always be useful or appropriate. In light of this, I do not wish to make a universal argument for the role of PAR. Instead, I position its radical epistemological premises and practices, when adopted in conjunction with the critical commitments of the field, as one way, amongst others, to constructively address concerns around the practical significance of CMS research. This article explores the promise of PAR, alongside some of the challenges associated with its practice, by drawing on my own experiences carrying out a four-year research project with a community kitchen based in the South of England.

I present this paper in six sections. The first introduces PAR from its political and philosophical roots, identifying how the participatory worldview informs commitments to participation, voice and the co-development of knowledge in the service of social change (Heron and Reason, 1997). The second illustrates the role of PAR in shaping the performative identity of the diverse economies research associated with feminist political economists (Gibson-Graham, 2008). The third section discusses how this field has informed my own theoretical and empirical engagements with the community kitchen, and outlines the process of collaboratively establishing the research objectives with members of the community kitchen. Fourth, I outline the structured ethical reflection method (Stevens et al., 2016); a collaborative approach to research ethics that played a central role in setting the objective of the research and addressing key ethical issues. Fifth, I introduce the learning history method at the centre of the research. This is a narrative approach to PAR that involves bringing a core group of co-researchers into a process of reflection and learning on key organisational issues to develop narrative documents that inform action (Roth and Bradbury, 2008). Finally, the sixth section outlines some of the key findings, analysis, and contributions of the research, demonstrating how it generated an intersection of practical and theoretical knowledge on the social practice of care. It also reflects on some of the ethical tensions that arose and considers the limitations of the research outcomes.

Participatory action research

Participatory forms of research are sometimes approached from a purely methodological viewpoint, which risks side-lining political commitments to voice, participation and empowerment that are so central to its practice. These commitments can be traced back to the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and his belief that liberation from oppression must come directly from those who have experienced it. Particularly influential is Freire's (1970) understanding of action as derived from 'critical consciousness'. This is a process through which learning generates critical insights about oppression that raise consciousness around how networks of power and subjugation operate, are sustained and perpetuated, such that individuals are empowered to speak out and take action against such systems. Freire's work has informed the philosophical foundations of PAR, often expressed as the participatory worldview.

The participatory worldview identifies participation as fundamental to our experience of being in the world and making sense of all that we encounter (Heron and Reason, 1997). The encounters we have with the living world tell us not of our individual and abstracted existence but of 'being in a state of

interrelation and co-presence' (Heron and Reason, 1997: 5). The participatory worldview stands in opposition to dominant western philosophy and its limited understanding of 'human' as masculine, rational, autonomous and competitive (Reason, 1998). Its relational ontology, often expressed as a form of communitarianism (Gustavesen, 2001), shapes the social and ecological justice commitments at the heart of PAR. Communitarianism manifests 'as a form of ethics, the first principle of which is the interconnectedness of human life, respect for others, dignity, concern for the welfare of others and solidarity, as well as an abiding concern for ecological matters' (Lincoln, 2001: 127).

The participatory worldview informs the radical epistemology of PAR, which 'affirms the fundamental human right of persons to contribute to decisions which affect them' (Reason, 1998:149). The implication of this belief is that the individuals and social groups at the focus of social science research should participate in the knowledge produced about them. Instead of treating knowledge as a cognitive phenomenon that centres on the individual insights of the researcher who treats participants as passive objects of study, knowledge is co-generated through relationships, open dialogue, and action (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001). Participants play a central and active role in the knowledge production process, which draws on the breadth of their experiences and local knowledge. The communities involved in the research have ownership of the knowledge produced, and can utilise it to create the changes they want to see. This informs the 'extended epistemology' of PAR (Reason and Bradbury, 2006), which attributes value to propositional knowledge (knowing 'about' something through the use of theories and concepts) alongside practical forms of knowledge.

These philosophical premises shape the practice of PAR, which involves the researcher working alongside a group of 'co-researchers' as they move through iterative cycles of action and reflection (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). It begins with the inquiry group identifying a particular issue they would like to change, planning the change, acting and observing the process and result of this change, reflecting, and then re-planning the process again. As the cycles of action and reflection evolve, new learning and knowledge emerges which can inform and change the course of the research. It is for this reason that action research adopts an emergent form, requiring a fluid and malleable inquiry process that can adapt as the co-researchers engage in new learning that shapes action. There is an extensive body of literature on participatory research methods. A good starting point is *The Sage encyclopaedia of action research* (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014), which provides an overview of hundreds of methods, including the learning history and structured ethical reflection at the centre of my research with the community kitchen.

Drawing inspiration from the diverse economies field

If we are to cultivate a participatory stream of inquiry within CMS research with alternative organisations, one place we might look to for inspiration is diverse economies research in the field of political geography. Gibson-Graham identify this field as a 'collective project of construction', positioning PAR at the centre of research engagements with community economies (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 627-8). Diverse economies scholars aim to establish 'alternative ways of thinking economy outside of the dominant capitalocentric conceptions' by reframing our understanding of what constitutes the economy and an economic actor (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003: 146). In this sense, it holds strong parallels with research on alternative organisations, which has sought to decentre capitalist forms of organisation by casting light on a range of alterative organisational realities (Parker et al., 2014). When the meaning of economy, and indeed organisation, becomes rooted as a capitalist space 'structured by concentrations of power and qualified by deficiencies of morality and desirability' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxvii), this leaves little space for recognition of alternative economic realities. Reading for economic difference and diversity enables us to transcend theorisations of capitalist dominance, radically reframing our understanding of social and organisational life and casting light on a range of community economies responding to social and ecological justice concerns (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Rather than judging and dualistically defining these spaces as good or bad, alternative or mainstream, their approach requires being open to learning, recognising them as fluid and contingent as they seek to negotiate a better future in the austere conditions of the here and now.

Crucially, for Gibson-Graham, this involves the researcher/s drawing on their academic resources and skills to co-create knowledge alongside community economies, which can help them address the challenges they face as they attempt to survive and grow:

> ... rather than judging community economic experiments as unviable because they depend on grants, gifts, state subsidies, long staff hours, volunteer labor, unstable markets, and so on, we study their strategies of survival, support their efforts to learn from their experience (much greater than ours), and help them find ways of changing what they wish to change. (2008: 628)

In bringing together the reading for difference approach with participatory practice, diverse economies scholars strive to develop a 'performative practice where new economic subjectivities might be explored, realized and reiterated' (St. Martin et al., 2015: 14). This field provides copious examples of where PAR has been used to engender collaborations with alternatives, such as community food economies (Cameron et al., 2014), and co-generate practical knowledge that

has contributed to the social and environmental justice agendas of these spaces. It provides a rich source of inspiration for further developing a stream of inquiry on alternative organising that is underscored by a critically performative and emancipatory agenda. Indeed, the theoretical and methodological tools of this field informed my own doctoral research project with the community kitchen, which aimed to develop an intersection of theoretical and practical knowledge on the challenges of sustaining an emergency food provisioning service.

The community kitchen

The community kitchen, located in a city in the South of England, provides free community meals made from food waste collected from local stores and supermarkets. It is run by volunteers and is part of a larger national charity that has a network of similar emergency food provisioning projects. It adopts a dual social and environmental justice focus, responding to the food waste crisis and an intersection of pressing social crises, such as hunger, fuel poverty, social isolation, and loneliness. It is based in a community centre located in an inner-city neighbourhood reported to have some of the highest rates of child poverty in the country. The community meals are open to the public, attended by many marginalised social groups, such as people who are vulnerably housed, living with mental health issues, living with drug and substance addiction, single parent families, and pensioners. Many of the guests are living in food and/or fuel poverty, are homeless or in temporary housing, have received cuts or sanctions to benefits, and rely upon food banks and other emergency food provisioning services to feed themselves and their families. The distinction between 'guests' and 'volunteers' is not clear-cut, with many guests becoming regular volunteers over time and volunteers often coming to eat when not signed up on the volunteer rota. Aside from the community meals, the volunteers also run outreach educational workshops and pop-up meal events, many of which communicate political messages about the systemic causes of hunger and food waste.

Cloke et al. (2017) point out that much of the literature on emergency food provisioning services, such as food banks and community drop-in centres, depicts these spaces as co-opted by neoliberal state agendas, facilitating both the commodification of social assistance and individualisation of systemic injustices such as hunger and homelessness. These spaces often become cast as 'inextricably mired in the neoliberal politics of their context, and no possible good can be seen in them' (*ibid.*: 706). My research joins a small number of scholars drawing on Gibson-Graham's 'reading for difference' frame to develop a more nuanced reading. While being careful not to romanticise these services,

this involves departing from such readings and being open to the often 'neglected politics' (Williams et al., 2016: 2292) that emerge in the affective engagements and day-to-day practices of these spaces.

I bring together this reading for difference approach with feminist theories of care. Feminist care ethics depart from assumptions about the rationality of morality by situating moral decision-making in grounded social contexts, calling upon our lived experiences and affective responses to both others and the world around us to determine moral courses of action (Gilligan, 1982). Second generation care theorists, such as Joan Tronto (1993, 2006), break from early essentialist constructs of care as a gendered moral disposition, extending our understandings of care as an activity that takes place in private and local settings, to position it as a radical social practice. Tronto (1993) points towards the potential of lived caring engagements to stimulate a critical analysis of social relations of power and inequality that can motivate us to push for systemic change. However, she also documents how socially constructed moral boundaries have historically excluded the voices and experiences of women and other marginalised groups. The positioning of morality as requiring a detached and disinterested perspective, that is distinct and separate from politics, side-lines political arguments for care that foreground structural issues of inequality and social relations of power. By casting the experiences of marginalised groups as personal and private concerns, rather than public issues that require a political response, dominant power relations are sustained and perpetuated. She argues that re-negotiating these boundaries is crucial in order to carve out a place for care-based moralities in social life.

Hamington (2006) argues that although a number of scholars have developed theoretical accounts of the transformative potential of care, there are very few empirical inquiries that explore how these ideas give meaning to grounded social contexts. My research responds to this gap, while also addressing a practical issue of pressing concern to the core team co-researchers. Many of the community kitchen volunteers believed the central charity's business-like approach, and their focus on growth and expansion, compromised the local values, politics, and ways of working in the community kitchen. They were frustrated at what they saw as the charity's de-politicisation of issues such as food waste and hunger, arguing that they failed to either acknowledge or tackle the root structural causes. This became a central focus of the research, informing the selection and design of the learning history method, which aimed to open dialogue with representatives from the national charity, explore difference, and democratise the charity's decision-making structures to enable greater participation of those working on the ground delivering projects into communities.

It is important to point out that my role, as a researcher, was to work alongside the community kitchen team who were co-researchers in the inquiry. Following the guidance of Sarah, a community kitchen project co-ordinator, I sought consent from the central charity to carry out the research, and Sarah and I informed the central team of its focus. I was not under any obligation to serve the managerial interests of the charity beyond respecting their request for anonymity in the publication of the research. Different members of the community kitchen team had approached the central charity on multiple occasions, prior to the research, to discuss their concerns, so the central charity were aware of these issues before the research was initiated. They said they would be supportive of the inquiry's aims and open to hearing the co-researchers' proposals for increasing the voice and participation of the community kitchen and wider charity network.

Structured ethical reflection

The structured ethical reflection (SER) is a collaborative approach to research ethics, influenced by communitarian and feminist ethics (Stevens et al., 2016). It was developed in recognition that the standard ethical review processes, focused on individual researcher reflections and meeting universal ethical protocols, leaves little space for the voice and participation of those at the centre of the research. The SER involves the 'outsider' researcher bringing a group of co-researchers into a process of ethical reflection to identify the core ethical values most significant to their work, which are then taken forward to inform the different stages of the research process. In this case the SER helped navigate ethical challenges that arose and shaped collective decision-making at different junctures in the research. I initiated the SER early in the research with three co-researchers who were involved in the co-ordination of the community kitchen and were my first point of contact for instigating the research. I provided a list of over 60 values drawn from the SER literature, which are derived from ethics associated with PAR and intended to help guide the selection process (Stevens et al., 2016). In recognising the limitations of using prescribed values developed in a Western cultural context, I also invited the group to select their own. The three co-researchers identified and discussed five values, which were then presented to the wider co-researcher team, who revised and adapted them until they were satisfied.

The values were placed into the left column of an SER grid, with the top columns representing the stages in a research project, such as developing partnerships, constructing research questions, and the publication of research. Drawing on these values I worked through an SER grid to develop a series of ethical

questions relating to the different stages of the research. The questions are 'designed to serve as touchstones to determine how these values are being reflected at each stage of the overall research' (Stevens et al., 2016: 433). The grid below (Figure 1) demonstrates this process in relation to two values.

The SER is not intended to provide a clear direction or definitive answer to ethical concerns, but rather to open collaborative reflection, discussion, and mindfulness of important issues, which the researcher would be unlikely to identify through individual reflection alone. The co-researchers defined the first value of 'openness and transparency' in relation to my agenda, expectations and time and resource capacity. This discussion led to the establishment of a regular 'researcher briefing slot' in the community kitchen's weekly team meeting, in which I provided updates on the progress of the research, addressed issues that arose from the questions outlined in the SER grid, and responded to co-researchers' concerns.

The second value, 'social justice', reflected the team's wider commitment to addressing social causes such as hunger, homelessness, social isolation and social marginalisation, alongside the environmental issue of food waste. It was a vision of justice underpinned by a 'collective solidarity' with those who experience social marginalisation and exclusion. This value informed their efforts to create 'an inclusive environment' in response to the potentially asymmetrical power relations between the people volunteering and those attending the meals. Despite efforts to diversify the volunteer body by encouraging fluidity between guest and volunteer roles, a significant proportion of the volunteers, including myself, were white, middle-class and lived in neighbourhoods outside where the community kitchen is located.

Values	Developing partnerships	Constructing research questions	Planning project/action	Recruiting co-researchers	Collecting data/taking action	Analysing data/evaluating action	Member checking	Going public (presentation & publication)
Openness & transparency	How open have I been about my research goals, aims and intentions?	Who guides the writing of research questions? Has there been co-authorship?	Am I being open about the amount of time and resources I have available?	Have I communicated my research objectives in the recruitment process?	Have I ensured co-researchers have access to the data in order to plan action?	How can I be transparent in my analysis of the data and respect requests for anonymity?	Do participants have a chance to interrogate the data?	Do I have consent to present and publish research in journals, community platforms, at events, etc?
Social justice	How will the research and partnership serve the teams' agenda?	Do the research questions ensure a focus on the team's social & env. justice goals?	How will the proposed actions contribute to the team's social & env. justice goals?	Have I ensured the participation of a diverse range of community kitchen members?	Who benefits from the actions taken and how?	Whose voices are included and excluded in the analysis of data?	Do co-researchers find my analysis useful? Will it inform practice?	How can I communicate research to other groups with similar social and env. justice agendas?

Figure 1: Segment of Structured Ethical Reflection document

Reflections on the value of social justice opened discussion on the potential for the research to privilege these majority voices, particularly given the inward-looking focus on addressing the relationship between volunteers and central charity representatives responsible for delivering social projects of care into communities. This is problematic given 'almost all discussions of care start from the perspective of care giver, not care receiver', illustrating a wider 'intellectual trend in a society in which the lives of autonomous actors are taken as the norm for human action that care will be discounted as an aspect of human life' (Tronto, 2006: 15). The co-researcher team comprised of 15 people; four core project co-ordinators, seven self-identified as volunteers, and four identified as being involved in both guest and volunteer roles. Three of the volunteers spoke about experiencing social marginalisation relating to physical and mental health issues, being vulnerably housed, and/or being unemployed. The participation of these voices was of central importance. Further in this article I identify actions I took that aimed to include these individuals in the research process. These decisions were informed not only by the PAR literature, but also guidance on researching with socially marginalised groups (Liamputtong, 2007) and a mental health-training course I attended before beginning the research.

The learning history

The learning history method is a narrative approach to action research, developed for use in organisational contexts (Gearty et al., 2015). It involves bringing together the team of co-researchers to participate in individual and collective reflection on a pressing organisational issue. Through the research process they build materials that will allow them to address this issue with the view to creating change. Central to this is the construction of a learning history document, described as a jointly told tale between the researcher and organisational members (Roth and Bradbury, 2008). In this case, the learning history provided a process through which members of the community kitchen and national charity could address the long-standing tensions in their relationship. While members of the community kitchen had previously attempted to raise these concerns individually, the research sought to co-generate a collective and critically constructive voice intended to open dialogue with members of the central team on key concerns held by community kitchen volunteers, and call for a more democratic strategy with participatory structures of decision-making.

The learning history begins with the outsider researcher, myself, conducting cycles of reflective interviews with the insider research team and then synthesising this material, and other relevant historical data, into a meta-narrative of the organisation's history (Gearty et al., 2015). I conducted interviews

with 15 members of the co-researcher team, before bringing the co-researchers together for a series of workshops that focused on their relationship to the national charity. The workshops included a range of creative exercises that sought to explore different experiences and perspectives on this relationship. It included a 'story session' in which co-researchers reflected on pressing issues and tensions, as told through first-hand accounts drawn from transcribed interviews (informed consent was sought from each participant prior to the use of interview segments). The transcribed sections of the interviews were discussed, annotated, and mapped into different themes, which covered a range of interconnected issues, such as concerns about the charity's recently announced corporate partnership, and the lack of volunteer voice in decision-making concerning its future strategy. I aimed to make this process accessible for one co-researcher who had learning difficulties that impacted his ability to read and write, by ensuring written stories were orally presented.

I synthesised the data and themes generated from the reflective interviews and workshop into a learning history document, which adopts a two-column format with the researcher's narrative in the left column, and the raw data from interview transcripts and recorded sessions from the workshop in the right (the analysis section of this article provides segments of the document demonstrating this format). The intention of this process is to build a collaborative narrative that draws from a plurality of voices, making visible the role of the researcher's own voice in this process.

The first draft of the document was presented to the co-researcher team, and then underwent several iterations of checking and re-drafting, in which the co-researchers reflected on its contents and made amendments until they were happy with the final version. The co-researchers chose to name the document 'An Expression of Concern', rather than a learning history. They felt this more aptly represented its contents, which communicated the team's growing sense of alienation from the central charity's agenda and practices, and outlined proposals on how they might work together to address this disconnect. The document was shared with approximately nine members of the national charity, the CEO, and their board of trustees, who were invited to add written comments, in a bid to open a final cycle of reflection and learning.

Findings and outcomes

This section draws from the learning history and SER process to trace some of the findings and outcomes in relation to key areas addressed through the research process. First, the central charity's lack of engagement with the systemic

causes of the social and environmental issues they address, and, secondly, their corporate partnership with Gordanos (pseudonym used to protect the organisation's identity), a transnational services company. I discuss how the research developed learning on the boundaries that inhibit a politicised care practice, and instigated efforts to re-negotiate these boundaries by increasing the voice and participation of volunteers across the wider charity network. I also discuss some of the ethical tensions that arose in collaborating with co-researchers and reflect on the limitations of the research outcomes. In so doing, I aim to provide insight into how the inquiry generated practical learning and knowledge, informing efforts to democratise the charity's working practices, which also enabled the development of theoretical insights on the challenges and tensions of maintaining a social space of care.

Negotiating a politicised care practice

The following segment (Figure 2) of the Expression of Concern weaves together a range of perspectives on the charity's reluctance to draw connections between their emergency food provisioning activities and wider structural socio-political circumstances.

Several of the voices in this segment advocate for a politicised care practice that adopts a wider transformative agenda (Tronto, 1993) in which responsibilities to care stretch beyond providing a 'sticking plaster' response to hunger, social isolation and food waste. For Amir, the community kitchen responsibilities must encompass constructive engagement with the systemic cause of social and environmental injustices by taking action in local communities. Similarly, in Robert's case, caring for specific contexts of need and ensuring well-being at the local level, requires speaking out against oppressive forms of governance. They are critical of how the charity reduces care to an immediate response to the local and particular, and problematise its attempts to draw boundaries around the community kitchen's caring responsibilities, such as by silencing their efforts to connect rising rates of food poverty to government austerity policy.

However, through the research process it became evident that the 'practices of care display a range of ethical priorities, commitments, attitudes and beliefs' (Bowden, 1997: 184). During the learning history workshop, Tina's understanding of the community kitchen and wider charity differed from many of the other co-researchers. In the above quote, taken from discussions in the learning history workshop, she explains how the charity's 'brand of soft activism' was important to ensure prospective volunteers weren't put off by a 'hard-line approach' and to 'maintain relationships with supermarkets'. She spoke about the importance of the community kitchen adopting the central charity's 'un-

biased' and 'non-political' approach, which challenged other co-researchers' assumptions and beliefs about social change, opening conflict in the inquiry.

Figure 2: Segment of Expression of Concern document

Although conflict is not unusual in PAR, given it is a relational practice charged with complex power relations, it can be challenging to know how to respond. There were cracks appearing in what I had assumed to be the group's 'shared' vision of social change, as collectively defined at the beginning of the research through the SER process. I knew it was crucial not to ignore these cracks, but felt unsure how to hold inquiry into the conflict and where to locate my own political perspective in this process. Like most co-researchers, I too believed there was a moral imperative to engage with the wider systemic causes of the social and environmental crises they addressed. But, who was I to define the terms of the social change? After all, didn't I have an ethical commitment to honour the perspectives of the co-researchers, even when they diverged from the rest of the group's and my own?

Although it did not generate a resolution as such, returning to the established values generated in the SER opened reflective discussion on the relationship between care and power. It opened new learning and understandings of what it means for individuals to embody an ethic of 'solidarity' in their volunteering, and how this differs for 'charity'. During this discussion Sophie explained:

> If what you are trying to do is charity, it can feel like you are kind of standing in a higher position and giving charity to the needy, as in its going in one direction, whereas solidarity is supposed to be on the same level. It begins from the recognition that we live in a society that unfairly disadvantages and discriminates against some people over others. And it's about saying, right; we have to get together to do something to change this.

Sophie emphasises why caring for marginalised sectors of society must begin from an analysis of social relations of power, rather than an assumed position of detached objectivity. She highlights how benevolent approaches to care, in which recipients of care are cast solely in terms of need, neglects important connections between care and power. This understanding of solidarity implies standing with, rather than for, individuals who are socially and structurally disadvantaged. While the group discussion didn't resolve the different politics that led to the conflict in the first place, it did generate ethical reflection on the structures of power and privilege that imbue caring relations. It raised what care ethicists identify as important questions around autonomy and otherness in the lived practice of care (Sevenhuijsen, 2003). Furthermore, by returning to the SER, and the questions of transparency and representation of voice, I was able to open discussion around my authorship role and position in narrating this difference in the Expression of Concern. The final document reflects the co-researchers' requests to include diverse perspectives, even where they were contradictory. It underwent multiple rounds of checking, amending and re-drafting, in which I encouraged them to question my sense-making and framing of their concerns.

Following the dissemination of the Expression of Concern, the central charity provided a written response and invited the co-researchers into a dialogue about the issues and proposals outlined in the document. Two charity representatives, one of whom was Arnold, responsible for overseeing the community kitchen, visited the project to meet with the co-researchers. This opened a further cycle of learning, expanding co-researchers' understandings of the wider charity context in which the organisation exists and competes for survival, and how this limits the scope for a transformative caring agenda. They explained that the charity was reticent to engage in 'politics' for fear it might negatively impact their applications for grants and funding. This reflects research findings on how competition for funding increasingly drives the strategy and approach of non-profit organisations, particularly in the contexts of recession and austerity (Jones et al., 2016).

Arnold also spoke about the impact of the lobbying legislation introduced in 2014, which places restrictions on what non-political-party organisations can publicly voice in the period running up to an election. He explained it was complex to navigate, especially given they did not have the resources to employ a policy affairs officer, which left them 'reluctant to engage in advocacy work'. This statement became particularly pertinent to co-researchers in the year following the research, when 122 organisations, including others delivering social projects of care, wrote an open letter to the government, arguing that the legislation weakens democratic debate by silencing the voices of charities representing some of the most marginalised sectors of society (O'Dowd, 2017). This speaks to a wider trend documented by care ethicists in which the voices and concerns of those engaged in care work are often repressed in public debate (Tronto, 2006).

Re-negotiating the boundaries to care

The learning history not only generated collective learning on the challenges of negotiating a politicised care practice, but also served as a vehicle through which the co-researchers attempted to widen the boundary conditions around the charity's caring responsibilities in relation to their corporate partnership model of funding (see Figure 3). During the initiation of the research project, the charity announced their new partnership with Gordanos. This involved Gordanos donating money to the charity as part of their corporate social responsibility commitment to support community groups working on pressing social and environmental issues. This partnership was problematic for several co-researchers due to Gordanos' transport contracts with the Israeli government, which they saw as directly contributing to the subordination of Palestinian people.

We would like for community kitchens to have more of a democratic voice and influence in the decision-making process and selection of corporate partnerships to ensure they represent the principles of the charity and its wider community. One way this could be achieved is for the central office to develop an ethical criteria or protocol to guide their selection of partners, which kitchens could help develop and feed into.

Anisha (volunteer) speaking about Gordanos: "They are involved in building transport connections between settlements in occupied lands that are illegal under every law in the world and yet still exist… these settlements are built inside Palestinian land, the transport routes would connect them up making them more official, meaning that more Palestinian land was going to be lost, making these settlements irreversible. It also cuts up routes that Palestinians can travel on because they are completely trapped within their own country… it will validate the Israeli settlements, which is really bad from the land point of view, also for like practical things, like water, these settlements are draining Palestinian towns of water. It is an actual serious abuse of human rights. For the central charity to be socially moral and active, you shouldn't partner yourself

Tom (volunteer): "I volunteer with the 'Palestinian Network Group' and now I've found out about the central charity's partnership with Gordanos I feel really conflicted.. I don't want to be in an organisation that actually supports the illegal occupation and the violence that has been committed against people, including my friends that live in this city."

Question: what ethical principles might guide the selection of partners?

Sarah (co-ordinator): I asked whether there was criteria for accepting or rejecting partnerships and pointed out that I thought that the Gordanos one conflicts with the charity's goals. Essentially they don't have a protocol as yet but they did say it was something that they are putting together. That seems like exactly the kind of thing that the projects should feed into. We could come up with a brilliant protocol if it was done collectively, and then it means that we can carry on doing the good work that we are doing but you have got a kind of feeling that you have participated in the development of that."

Figure 3: Segment of Expression of Concern document

In the learning history workshop, Tom, who was vulnerably housed and experiencing mental health issues, spoke openly about how the community kitchen enabled him to meet his food needs while also forging meaningful relationships that were beneficial to his wellbeing. However, the recent partnership with Gordanos had left him 'feeling really conflicted' as it undermined his commitment to Palestinian activism. Anisha, a university student who spent time volunteering for an NGO in Palestine, argues 'for the charity to be socially and morally active, you shouldn't partner yourself with a company that has any kind of blacklist'. These accounts position 'morality and politics as a set of congruent and intertwined ideas' (Tronto, 1993: 7), calling for an extension of the moral responsibilities of the charity to encompass a (political) resistance to accepting funding from corporations inculcated in oppressive state regimes.

The learning generated through the sharing of these concerns informed actions to establish a politicised care-based form of moral accountability within the

charity's working processes. We hear this as Sarah calls for a 'collectively' designed ethical 'protocol' to guide the selection of corporate partners, which would include the participation of volunteers like Tom and Anisha advocating for greater critical scrutiny of corporate behaviours and engagements. In the meeting following the dissemination of the Expression of Concern, Sarah presented the proposal for the charity to introduce a digital participatory decision-making platform and discussion forum that aimed to democratise the charity's working practices by enabling volunteers from the charity's wider network to voice concerns and participate in key decision-making. She demonstrated how this might work in the case of developing an ethical protocol informed by the voices, local knowledge and experiences of those working on the ground in emergency food providing projects.

The charity agreed to implement the proposal and has since established an online forum for representatives of community projects to raise concerns and feed into decision-making. Most recently they have used this to invite members of community projects to participate in the design and running of their annual conference. This led to the community kitchen facilitating a training session for the wider charity network about how to engage in advocacy work that raises awareness around the causes and environmental consequences of food waste. Reflecting on the research, several co-researchers spoke about 'feeling a greater sense of belonging' to the charity. For some the research fostered understanding and sympathy around the differences that exist relating to where the organisation locates its responsibilities to care, alongside an acceptance of the limitations this brings.

Although the central charity has been in contact with co-researchers about the design of an ethical protocol, in the two years following the research they have not yet instigated this process, marking a significant limitation to the research outcomes. Furthermore, the research did not result in the dissolution of the corporate partnership model altogether, as several volunteers had wanted. Although the partnership with Gordanos was a one-year agreement, which has now come to an end, from Anisha's perspective the corporate partnership model of fundraising means the charity still risked being co-opted by corporate agendas, enabling businesses like Gordanos to present their activities in a socially and environmentally conscientious light. In the months following the research Anisha explained how her involvement had 'affirmed her commitment' to Palestinian activism and led her to 'significantly withdraw' her participation in the community kitchen. Although she occasionally volunteers, she now chooses to focus her volunteer engagements with another community food-based project that adopts an explicitly political message in response to the recent European refugee crisis.

At first, reflecting on this research outcome, I was concerned I had facilitated a research project that led to one of the longest standing volunteers (at that time) to withdraw her involvement, resulting in a loss of valuable knowledge and skills. However, although Anisha's withdrawal marked a real loss for the project, it was an action informed by learning generated through research, which ultimately enabled her to make an important ethical decision that was informed by a commitment to social justice. Perhaps what is more concerning to me, is that although Anisha was able to take this stand, for co-researchers like Tom, who relied on the community kitchen to meet their weekly food needs, such an action would come at a significant personal cost to his health and well-being. In this sense, while the research was successful in creating different forms of change at the individual, group and organisational level, there were also limitations relating to power and who was able to participate in enacting such change.

Conclusions

At its most general level, the research generated learning on the aims, objectives, and role of the community kitchen and its membership of a parent organisation. It opened up what are fundamentally axiological lines of inquiry pertaining to where we locate the value of such a project. Does this lie in its capacity to provide an immediate emergency response to the pressing social and ecological crises of our times? Should we locate it in its ability to cast light on the structural causes of such crises and push for social transformation? Or, do we root it in the messy intersection, somewhere in between?

In developing cycles of dialogue and reflection, the research facilitated learning on difference and the challenges of addressing it. It underscores the potential of PAR – its participatory epistemology, focus on real life contexts, social justice concerns and orientation towards action – in developing a powerful intersection of theoretical and practical knowledge on the challenges of sustaining a social project of care. It provides insight into how we might locate a 'common ground between the concerns of researchers and those of practitioners' (Voronov, 2008: 294), in this case by pursuing mutual interests in care as an important social practice, radical theory, and ethic. Although this paper has not provided concrete answers to the difficult ethical challenges that may arise through collaborative inquiries relating to issues of voice, power and participation, it has cast light on some of the methodological tools that might help us address these issues. By bringing care ethics into conversation with PAR I suggest our inquiries with alternative forms of organisation can develop a 'care-full' research practice that places important ethical and practical concerns at the forefront of our research engagements.

Since completing this research I have become aware of numerous other social projects attempting to grow by adopting similar strategies to the charity discussed in this article. In so doing they have developed partnerships with business organisations, governments, politicians, and in one case, a high-profile celebrity. This has opened up pockets of internal conflict around the consequences of such actions in compromising the values and beliefs of those working on the ground in localised contexts. While this research does not offer neatly packaged solutions to such challenges, it does generate insight into how organisations might acknowledge and confront these difficulties through a democratic inquiry process that gives credence to a range of voices and experiences. It points towards the potential role of researchers working at the critical intersections of organisation and management in nurturing such inquiries. Fundamentally, it suggests that at the heart of this process must lie an engagement with the wider question: what are the fundamental beliefs and premises that bring us to this work in the first place, and how do we sustain these moving forward?

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the author

Alice recently completed her PhD at the University of Bristol, where she now holds a teaching post. She is currently working on some forthcoming publications, while planning a trip to Latin America to take some time out of academia and explore community food projects in pastures new.
Email: alice.willatt@bristol.ac.uk