**Chapter 4**

**‘The Only Blonde Girl in Manila’: Challenges and Opportunities as a White Western Young Woman Postgraduate Researching in Asia**

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**Abstract**

In this chapter, I discuss how postgraduate researchers and early career scholars from the global north can conduct care-full and responsible fieldwork in the global south, drawing on my experiences as a white western young woman postgraduate researching in Manila, the Philippines. I demonstrate how the intersections of gender, age, ethnicity, and status simultaneously constructed me as privileged and vulnerable and reflect on the ways this influenced my research process. Based on these experiences and engagement with literatures concerning responsible and care-full research, I suggest four key areas postgraduate and early career researchers can consider when travelling ‘south’. These are: 1) think more carefully about the intersections of gender, age, and ethnicity; 2) consider how to speak about their own position and research without denying privilege; 3) commit to practices of sharing and caring; 4) engage with the field more responsibly using social media.

**Key words: f**ender, ethnicity, care-full research, postgraduate/early career research, Asia, the Philippines.

**<a>1. Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss ways in which postgraduate researchers and early career scholars can conduct research in the global south which is care-full and responsible. I do this through a reflection on how my position as a postgraduate researcher, and particularly as a white woman from the global north, influenced my fieldwork interactions. I demonstrate how the intersections of gender and ethnicity structured my experiences when researching in the Philippines in ways I did not envisage, reflecting on my discomfort at ‘discovering privilege’. I offer several of the strategies I used to conduct more responsible and care-full research as an aid, particularly to postgraduate and early career researchers, who often have limited experiences and resources to draw on (Bauder, 2006; Browne and Moffett, 2014).

Through reflecting on the constraints and opportunities available to me as a postgraduate, this chapter contributes to the existing literature on postgraduate and early career research (Faria and Mollett, 2016; Hammett, 2012; Jokinen and Caretta, 2016; Melin, 2005; Schuermans and Newton, 2012). I argue that the under-preparedness of postgraduates and the limits to their research activities present clear barriers to conducting care-full and responsible research in the global south in particular. By offering an honest account of my ‘entry into academic work’ (Raghuram and Madge, 2006, 275) and turning to concrete suggestions that postgraduate and early career researchers can adopt to ensure their research remains responsible and care-full, this chapter also contributes to more open discussions about the realities of cross-cultural research from global north to south (Ross, 2015; Sundberg, 2005).

Since returning from fieldwork I have provided advice and guidance to postgraduates both formally by sharing my experiences in fieldwork workshops and informally with friends in my department and wider networks. This advice has already proven useful for global north postgraduate researchers researching in the global south; some advice, such as that concerning the possibilities of using social media to transverse distance to the field, are practices that many postgraduates are increasingly turning to. An aim here is to connect these emerging practices to postcolonial literatures and demonstrate the opportunities for postgraduates to enact care-full and responsible research.

Before beginning with the discussion, it is useful to provide context to my wider research and my own positionality. I am a young (at the time of fieldwork 23), white, cis-het, British, working-class woman from the North East of England, who recently finished my PhD studies in Human Geography. My reflections here centre on this period. Following undergraduate research with Filipino nurses and care workers living in the UK, which came about due to my mother’s work as a nurse, my doctoral research was oriented to the Philippines. I analysed how nurses interpret and negotiate the pressures of migration, engaging in new mobilities within the Philippines and beyond. From June to December 2015, I carried out 48 interviews with nurse graduates and students living in Metro Manila, 34 of whom are women, and 36 who were within six years of my age. The disconnects between the lives of my participants and myself are in some ways vast – our cultural experiences and knowledges; occupations; racial and ethnic identities; at times gendered, classed, aged, and sexual identities; and our wider positioning as subjects from the global south and north. There are, of course, similarities, as my student status, youth, and experiences of precarious employment served as points of commonality and facilitated friendly discussion and the sharing of anecdotes. As I demonstrate, there is a need to consider how positionality plays out in specific research settings (Hopkins, 2007), bringing attention to how the intersections of our identities are influenced by place.

This chapter is organised into three sections. First, I discuss the key tenets of responsible and care-full research and demonstrate the difficulties postgraduate and early career researchers may have in meeting these. Second, I reflect on my position as a white western young woman living in and researching Asia, demonstrating how I sit between constructions of privilege and vulnerability. Third, I offer suggestions for postgraduates undertaking responsible and care-full research focusing on the stage of recruitment, on the research interview, and on the potential of social media to facilitate caring interactions. Ultimately, I recommend certain activities that postgraduate and early career researchers from the global north can engage in before, during and after fieldwork to build care and responsibility into their research practices.

**<a>2. Responsible and Care-full Research**

I draw on the notions of ‘responsible’ (Jazeel and McFarlane, 2007 & 2010) and ‘care-full’ (Raghuram et al., 2009) research, whilst recognising their limitations and partiality. Indeed, as both terms are open to multiple meanings and possibilities, they can be difficult to define, and more so to enact (Raghuram et al., 2009). Responsibility is considered key in postcolonial research as it pushes us to become attuned to how historical events and processes inform present interactions. There is an imperative to be responsible to the people we research and speak to, and to the places we represent in the dissemination of research (Raghuram et al., 2009). We must consider how the location of a researcher in the global north constrains their ability to be responsible in the global south in the face of institutional and disciplinary pressures. Jazeel and McFarlane (2010: 121) highlight that ‘[a]ssemblages of journals, citation patterns, unequal distributions of academic resources […] as well as regimes of graduate and staff training’ all serve to ‘limit’ a researchers’ ability to be responsible. Furthermore, despite the necessity for responsible research, ‘there is no formula for responsibility’ (Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010: 113) meaning that it is up to researchers to be highly vigilant, critical and adaptable to ensure responsible research is conducted (Browne and Moffett, 2014).

Care-full research is the notion that care and ‘mutual obligations and relations of trust’ should characterise interactions and behaviours within research (McDowell, 2004: 157). This goes beyond notions of responsibility and ethics, calling for more intimate and proximate relationships between the researcher, place, and participants (Newstead, 2009; Popke, 2006). Care is recognised as a social relation and is therefore inherently political (Popke, 2006). In this sense, ‘[c]are embraces responsibility yet it usefully forces attention to the mediation and embeddedness of responsible relations in […] interpersonal contact zones’ of the field (Newstead, 2009: 80). Care-full research demands that we stress our ‘connectedness to others’ (Lloyd, 2004), and is more of an ‘attitude […] a way of relating to others characterized by values of compassion’ than an ‘activity’ (Popke, 2006: 506). For example, Crang and Hughes (2015) stress the importance of postcolonial economic geographers engaging in ethical consumption, and enacting care to those who are not known and may never be known.

Both care-full and responsible approaches bring attention to the need to be vigilant about our own practices and understandings, acknowledge that we cannot stand beyond discursive practices but are complicit in their reproduction, and recognise the limits of knowledge (Kapoor, 2004; McEwan, 2008; Spivak,, 1988). This is a difficult endeavour and demands a critical consideration of how we preconceive, and speak to, for and about participants. Jazeel and McFarlane (2010:118) ask us to consider how ‘the demands and limits of responsibility [are] shaped by our locatedness outside the borders of our field spaces’, and to examine how our institutional pressures structure our ability to be responsible researchers. This means examining the context in which research agendas are produced and paying critical attention to how they change the scope of responsibility and limit our ability to be responsible. These pressures include institutional norms and hierarchies, the influence of the knowledge-production-complex (Robinson, 2003), and the commodification of academic knowledge production (Jazeel & McFarlane, 2010).

**<B>2.A The Limits for Postgraduate and Early Career Researchers**

In the case of postgraduate and early career researchers, I argue that many of these pressures are further pronounced. The restraints of postgraduate study prevent many researchers from engaging in the tenets of responsible and care-full research. Limits on funding and time can prevent sustained and repeated engagement. A lack of existing networks can inhibit the extent to which the research aims can be developed collaboratively. Raghuram and Madge (2006: 277) contend that ‘a postcolonial method starts early on’, recommending that research questions are produced within the context of research and in collaboration with key stakeholders where possible. Postgraduate students pursuing research in an area or with a group that is new to them are effectively restricted from adopting a postcolonial method ‘early on’.

Furthermore, distance and abstraction from the field site mean ‘it can become all too easy to forget any obligation toward place and the responsibilities it demands’ (Jazeel, 2016, 654). For global north postgraduate researchers who travel south for research, the risk of distance from the field site is greater than for other global north researchers. Limited funding, at least in comparison to academic staff, prevents many from undertaking return visits for further data collection, dissemination, or to maintain networks (see also Schuermans and Newton, 2012); nor are many able to undertake earlier pilot visits to collaboratively shape research agendas. Additionally, self-funding is impossible for many, whilst teaching, caring and/or other work commitments can limit the time available to travel (Lewis, 2017). Uncertain future prospects, competitive job markets, and generally insufficient funding packages leave many postgraduate and early career researchers in somewhat precarious situations further affecting their ability for return visits (Caretta et al., 2018). Lewis (2017, 399) argues that the pressures on postgraduate and early career researchers prohibits ‘co‐production, knowledge translation and real‐world “impact”’, key elements of responsible and care-full research. The unprivileged location of postgraduate studentship within wider university hierarchies (Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010) complicates the extent to which postgraduate students can engage with responsible and care-full practices of postcolonial research.

Finally, although postgraduate and early career students are often afforded opportunities for extended periods of international fieldwork – and being deeply embedded in the field is a key responsible research practice allowing the cultivation of deeper relationships (Lewis, 2017) – they are generally relatively inexperienced researchers, unlikely to be well versed in methodological practices (Willison and O’Regan, 2007). Indeed, of the growing literature that examines postgraduate and early career research, a common theme appears to be their under-preparedness before entering the field (Hammett, 2012; Hammett and Hoogendoorn, 2012; Melin, 2005; Raghuram and Madge, 2006; Schuermans and Newton, 2012). Quality and relevance of research training opportunities, supervisory input, ethical requirements, and institutional support are hugely variable (see also Browne and Moffett, 2014; Gready, 2014), while for many researchers, myself included, the start of fieldwork represents the first time they have entered the field (see also Gokah, 2006). The likelihood of ‘messy’ fieldwork encounters is heightened, while many feel unable to share failures with supervisors ‘back home’ (Jokinen and Caretta, 2016). In the next two sections I reflect on how my positionality created challenges for care-full research, and consider my strategies to counter these limitations, bringing attention to moments of care within research encounters.

**<a>3. Between Privilege and Vulnerability: As a White Western Young Woman in Asia**

Literature concerning ‘outsider’ research was developed in both feminist (Horowitz, 1986; Katz, 1994; Rose, 1985 & 2013) and postcolonial methodological canons (Ergun and Erdemir, 2010; Mullings, 1999; Rubin, 2012; Sultana, 2007). Outsider research refers to any occasion where the researcher is of a different gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, sexuality, ability, age, occupation, education level, interest group, etc. to the participants. It is agreed that the overwhelming majority of research involves an element of ‘outsider-ness’ (Pickerill, 2009; Rubin, 2012), although in cases where a ‘privileged western researcher’ travels south this is further pronounced (Griffiths, 2017: 2). It is important to reflexively explore and examine how our social positionings, or our various axes of positionality, impact, influence, and determine our research practices, field encounters, and dissemination of results (Reid‐Henry, 2003). Care should be taken to go beyond documenting one’s positionality, and to instead reflect on the various and competing ways axes of positionality *intersect* to influence interactions in the field (Katz, 1994; Mullings, 1999; Sultana, 2007).

Here, I examine how my positionality as an outsider – as a white, young, female, western, highly mobile, well-educated researcher – influenced relations in the ‘field’ and how this impacted on my ability to perform care-full research. This requires consideration of what the field is and how mine and others’ positionalities play out within it. As I demonstrate, the role of whiteness and associated status is complicated by my gendered and aged identities. I was simultaneously constructed as privileged *and* vulnerable, a common occurrence for western women in the non-western world (Jokinen and Caretta, 2016; Ross, 2015). By reflecting on my discomfort with both labels, I highlight the importance of carefully examining and considering how we speak not just to, for and about those we research, but how we speak about ourselves – the ‘politics of self-representation’ (Mullings, 1999: 340).

***<b> 3.1 ‘The Only Blonde Girl in Manila’***

For white, global north researchers, fieldwork in the global south involves a reorientation in identity as one becomes a ‘privileged northerner’ (McEwan, 2008) and undergoes ‘a discovery of whiteness as a marker of privilege’ (Baaz, 2005: 85). Whiteness becomes racialised as markers of gender, class and sexuality appear less significant (Abbott, 2006). Growing up and studying in the North East of England, an overwhelmingly white region of the UK, my whiteness had never been challenged. Yet in Manila, despite forewarnings in fieldwork training, my ‘discovery’ of privilege was sudden, intense, and discomforting. From the moment I boarded the Manila-bound flight, my paleness was photographed by passengers, my ‘tallness’1 bestowed on me responsibility of packing and unpacking the overhead baggage bins, and I was first referred to as ‘Ma’am’ by passengers and cabin crew alike. I was made ‘acutely aware of the ways in which my gender, race, and biography as a privileged [British] citizen’ (Sundberg, 2005: 17) shaped my new life.

Whiteness is not unusual in Manila. The colonial relation between the US and the Philippines has facilitated significant flows of people between the two places. Over half a million Americans visit each year, and estimates on the number of US migrants in the Philippines vary from 30,000 to 200,000 (U.S. Department of State, 2016). Most travel guides to the Philippines, and Manila specifically, note the westernisation of the Philippines arguing that this leads to ‘trouble-free assimilation’ for western tourists (Lonely Planet, 2015; Rough Guides, 2019). However, the literature on western experiences in the Philippines is highly gendered and omits a key point, namely, that the vast majority of white bodies in the Philippines, whether tourists, migrants, or those travelling for business, are men.

The existence of a large US military base, a rapidly expanding Business Process Outsourcing Industry, growth in the casino and gaming industry, and the extensive migratory economy has led to increasing visibility of white men within the financial and geopolitical hub of Manila.2 Additionally, partly as a legacy of the US occupation, the Philippines has a deeply embedded sex-tourism industry, and again Manila is central (Law, 2000). Obtaining sex is the primary reason for an estimated 40% of men tourists who visit the Philippines (Attia and Edge, 2017). Being a white woman, particularly one who is young, is a rarity in Manila. I was frequently the only white woman in any situation, often I would see no others for days, leading to the local white western men population nick-naming me ‘the only blonde girl in Manila’. I was a spectacle beyond what any resources had prepared me for, not fitting preconceptions of the ‘foreigner’ in Manila.

While the whiteness of men is strongly connected to privilege and exploitation, to a lack of care, and to the perpetuation of racial stereotypes, my whiteness was less intimidating and dangerous, it was a curiosity. It provided me with an aura of trust; a woman living in my flat told me she was ‘scared of all the tall western men’ in the area but liked me. Many women would stop and talk to me, indicating that I was less intimidating than other foreigners. However, the intersections of my gender, youth, and ethnicity also conspired to construct me as a highly visible and vulnerable ‘foreigner’, one in need of care and assistance, a potential victim of those living on the streets of Manila. Men and women of all nationalities would stop me and give me advice for safely manoeuvring around the city, questioning why I was alone, and seeking to befriend me – the residents of the city cared for me. Comments such as ‘you’re so young’, and ‘travelling here alone? Be careful [of street crime]’ were common, even from those younger than myself, and from those who have lived overseas. Men sometimes caused intimidation through following, catcalling, and photographing me without permission. However, men were also amongst those who expressed care, and I never felt unsafe in the city. Indeed, the dangers of Manila, of pickpockets and unwanted attention from men seemed no greater than those of home. However, it was my ‘exposure’ or visibility combined with the implications of my ‘precarity’ for passers-by that constructed my vulnerability (Butler, 2016).

My gender and age presented me as vulnerable, in need of assistance. Expressions of care went alongside catcalls and being followed, complicating my position of privilege (Sundberg, 2005). However, I was the victim of significantly less street crime than western men and found it significantly easier to make meaningful connections. If anything, my gender afforded additional privileges making my mobilities around the city safer and easier than that of most other groups (see also Sundberg, 2005). Security guards and passers-by would quickly intervene in the face of unwanted attention; the homeless I saw and spoke to often would ‘escort’ me around my local area at dark, while taxi, jeepney and trike drivers would always stop for me. The intersections of my ethnicity, gender, and age therefore provided an additional level of protection and privilege and undoubtedly assisted in my recruitment strategies (see also Sundberg, 2005, although note that Billo and Hiemstra, 2013 found womanhood hindered recruitment).

***<b>3.2 A ‘Foreign’ Body***

My status as a white western young woman between constructions of privilege and vulnerability (although closer to the former) initiated countless caring interactions. It was also the basis for numerous valued and long-lasting friendships and aided my data collection and wider research practices. In many cases, this care-full relationship extended into research interactions with participants; for trained medical professionals, the whiteness and foreignness of my body became a source of concern and made me particularly vulnerable to sunburn, heat exposure, and insect bites. Particularly during the first few months, my ‘foreign’ body was unable to effectively handle insect bites, with affected areas swelling severely, further adding to heat exhaustion. I was provided advice, given creams and ointments, and told of local tips and tricks. Both men and women I spoke to engaged in caring practices, my vulnerability provided a moment for connection.

The failing of my body in the unfamiliar environment prompted numerous acts of care towards me. Raghuram et al. (2009) highlight that there is a need to go beyond, and disrupt, temporally and spatially linear understandings that assume care-full and responsible practices are only undertaken by the privileged, often global northern, researcher. They bring attention to the fact that ‘the directions and shape of responsibility and care are not wholly traceable, leaving room for a responsibility where who is being responsible to whom becomes less clear-cut, more labile.’ (Raghuram et al., 2009: 11). In this sense, we should turn attention to the caring and responsible practices we experience as researchers, as well as the caring practices we enact. The participants I researched and those living in Manila expressed multiple forms of care and responsibility towards me, and at many times I was in no position to respond. However, accepting this care assists in the building of mutual relationships.

***<b>3.3 Privilege and Hard Work***

Beyond issues of race and gender, visible axes of my identity, my international mobility also directly affected interactions and became something I had to negotiate. In a context where migration and international mobility are associated with a higher status, my heightened mobility often became a source of jealousy within interactions, and further gave me a status I had little experience of (see also Griffiths, 2017). Baldwin (2017) argues there is a need to confront rather than downplay privilege, and how it is racialised, if we are to engage in responsible research. During early interactions, however, I found myself frequently drawing on my precarious student status and working-class background as a way to mitigate power relations and downplay my privilege (see also Griffiths, 2017). I also relied on the notion that it was ‘lucky’ I had obtained a postgraduate scholarship that provided the opportunity for international mobility. In part, this was a result of my discomfort at being ascribed such privilege (see also Abbott, 2006), but also a naïve attempt to mitigate power imbalances.

Nicole, a nurse graduate who was retraining to be a doctor at the time of interview, questioned my narrative of luck wondering instead if hard work and the UK’s relatively healthy research environment had provided me with my opportunities. Rose, one of the many middle class Filipinos I met, tole me that the ‘power of your passport’ is the reason I travel freely, noting that despite having money for a family trip to North America, obtaining visas as a Filipino nurse is particularly difficult, even for tourist purposes. Through attempting to downplay privilege, I effectively denied it. Denying privilege can reinforce colonial discourses and power relations, further silencing the ‘subaltern’ (Kapoor, 2004). Class commonalities between myself and participants are immaterial if those from Asia are denied the same global mobilities as myself. I instead framed my presence in Manila as a combination of hard work and privilege, noting, however, my recognition and criticism of the wider global forces and hierarchies that create and maintain material inequalities between the global north and south.

Discussions of hard work revealed new commonalities between myself and participants, between academia and nursing, and further benefited the wider research process. Nursing (Walsh, 2011) and academia (Hakala, 2009) are both represented as labours of love or callings, presented as endeavours committed to for the greater good of society rather than for personal economic gain. They are also both inherently transnational occupations where international mobility is commonplace. There are countless occasions throughout interactions where my own experiences of work and study were reflected in the narratives of nurses I met. These include exploitation, the need to volunteer time, invest your own money, delay entry into paid employment, and be open to mobility for work. In a similar way to how educational experiences became a basis for shared experiences in Hopkins’ (2007) work with young Muslim men, experiences of precarity became the basis for enabling mutual understandings and shared experiences to come to the fore.

**<a>4. Strategies for Responsible and Care-Full Research**

Having examined the ways in which my status as a postgraduate, with its attendant challenges for care-full and responsible research, intersected with my gender and ethnicity as a researcher in Asia, I now move to suggest certain strategies that can aid in the quest to conduct responsible and care-full research, focusing on engaging and interviewing care-fully, and the potential of social media to enhance the research process.

***<b>4.1 Engaging Care-fully***

One of the largest dangers in travelling to the global south for research as a privileged western researcher lies in the extractive nature of data collection (Pickerill, 2009; Schuermans and Newton, 2012). Data collection, for the western researcher, is a way to enhance CVs and careers (Jazeel, 2016; Jazeel and McFarlane, 2007; Robinson, 2003). Indeed, postgraduate research is often highly extractive. It demands a written thesis that involves speaking about and for participants (see Spivak, 1988), and opening up the process of research, for example producing research questions through dialogue with subjects of research, is often beyond the possibilities of postgraduate research (Hammett and Hoogendoorn, 2012; McEwan, 2008; Raghuram and Madge, 2006; Rubin, 2012). Here I examine the relations of extraction.

Often, in Manila, my ethnicity led to expectations that I worked in the financial or business district. Revealing that my purpose was to ‘interview’ nurse graduates about the prospect of migration did nothing to quell these assumptions, and many assumed I was involved in the international recruitment of nurses. After showing a gatekeeper my initial recruitment poster, she highlighted the connotations of the word ‘interview’: ‘I thought you just wanted to talk to us about nursing and migration. I don’t know if people will have time to prepare for an interview!’Although most Filipino-trained nurses undertake research as part of their degree and train in both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, my position as a white westerner transforms the meaning of the term interview. The notion that I. as a British visitor to the Philippines, would interview nurses, even for someone who understood the scope of my research, conjured images of the job interview, a need to prepare answers and a need for formality. I therefore changed all reference of ‘interview’ to ‘conversation’ or ‘a coffee and a chat’ in recruitment materials, consent forms, and discussions with others in the city, and made a conscious decision to dress casually when meeting participants.

Disquiet with the term ‘interview’ has been noted elsewhere (see Mills, 2001), and reframing interviews as conversations aided recruitment and research interactions (discussed below). Despite these efforts, over the six-month study period I received five inquiries from those seeking overseas work assuming I was a recruiter or migration advisor. I made the decision not to pursue these people for research purposes to avoid further confusion and/or influence their migratory activities, such as liaising with legitimate recruitment agents. Changing how the research was presented was key in ensuring the research remained responsible and care-full. It also brings attention to how the position of a researcher can morph the ways research is understood. Care must be taken to responsibly represent research.

In line with this, it is important to identify the varying ways positionality can be an attraction or repellent to potential participants. Faria and Mollett (2016), for example, bring attention to the way that whiteness can be felt by those we research, noting that it can produce contradictory responses of awe and disdain, and trust and suspicion. In my case, as a white person from the global north, several participants noted that one of the reasons prompting them to contact me was an opportunity to practise their English speaking and understanding, something that could assist future migratory endeavours. The notion of ‘awe’ maps onto this.

Eva: It’s good to know that you still understand me! I was scared that I lost my English, my words! […] So it’s really a great opportunity to be interviewed by you.   
Ryugazaki:I look forward to meeting other cultures. That’s why I also agreed to the interview [laughs].

For these participants, with desires of migration and a hunger for accruing ‘cultural capital’, the chance to speak becomes an ‘opportunity’ to learn more about potential future migratory destinations. In a similar vein, some participants asked for photos, feeling that documenting and sharing their connection with me would improve their cultural capital. Indeed, some participants requested photos that were immediately shared to social media, complicating notions of anonymity. Furthermore, over 30 participants selected Starbucks, a status symbol in the Philippines, as their choice of venue, with many then choosing particularly aesthetic drinks and adding photographs to social media. Although such gains are modest, researchers must be open to being a source of cultural capital, and recognise their influence on the reasons people choose to participate in research.

Furthermore, in the context of endemic corruption in the Philippines, my outsider status separated me from an affiliation with government and hospital sources, making it safe to openly talk with me without fear of repercussions (see also Horowitz, 1986). My ethnicity identified me as non-Filipino, and this outsider status legitimised my position as a researcher and caused participants to imagine my research as more influential and important than perhaps research carried out locally would be. There is an assumption that my western status gives me a louder and more credible voice, not just on the international stage, but on the national stage in the Philippines. Jessica, for example, who had fled her rural home following a devastating typhoon was provided NGO funding to train as a nurse but was subsequently unable to find employment, said the following.

Jessica: Your research is good because it’s giving the little people with little voices a chance to speak and be heard. That’s why I approached you. I want your research to be heard by the President and the government.

Jessica reproduces the notion that research from the global north is able to be ‘heard’ more than research produced within the global south, reinforcing the superiority of white, global northerners (see Abbott, 2006). Even within the context of the Philippines, she internalises the notion that westerners or those from the global north have more power and legitimacy to speak for and represent other places (Gregory, 2004; McEwan, 2008). In this sense, neo-colonial power imbalances in the academy assisted my recruitment of participants and ascribed further privilege. This is even more evident with Donna, an undergraduate student, who ended our conversation with ‘I hope I really helped you!’ raising important ethical questions as to whom the research benefits, and to what extent Donna altered her responses to fit into the narrative she assumed I want to hear.

Additionally, Schuermans and Newton (2012: 297) found that ‘scholars from the North are often viewed with suspicion of allegedly using a country like South Africa [or the Philippines] as a site of “knowledge extraction”’. This was also replicated in my experiences and almost every participant I spoke with actively questioned and challenged my purpose and presence in the field. Louis, who involved in nursing advocacy work and was planning on applying for PhD programmes, for example, quite bluntly asked me, ‘What’s your purpose in doing this research?’ He was unsatisfied with my initial answer when I restated the research aims and continued, ‘But why Filipino nurses?’ My answer has no theoretical or conceptual nature and does not satisfy funding body requirements – my interest in Filipino nurses is a result of my mother working as a nurse in a small institution staffed almost entirely (excluding two nurses) by a Filipino community of migrants. Four years previously, I was an undergraduate student in need of a dissertation idea. She suggested meeting her new friends and colleagues, and here I am. The first time the words left my mouth, they felt weak and flimsy, yet the honest sharing of a personal connection did not just satisfy those I spoke to, but became the basis for the sharing of family stories, many of which are central to understanding my key research aims. As I discuss below, sharing is vital to enact more care-full and responsible research.

In this sense, there is a need not just to consider how we speak about ourselves, but how we speak about our connections to our research. This brings attention back to the key ethical issues characterising western researchers ‘travelling south’. It speaks to wider debates on the extractive and neo-colonial nature of researchers from the global north ‘mining’ data for personal advancement (Pickerill, 2009; Robinson, 2003). Participants are wary of this, and there is a need to demonstrate our passion and connections to research. Postgraduate researchers in many, cases have freedom to choose and shape their topics of research, research, sometimes more than those at later stages of their career who must adapt to ever changing research agendas and forms of measurement. In as far as interest is a form of care, research is inherently care-full and postgraduate researchers are uniquely placed to demonstrate this. There is therefore an opportunity to demonstrate to those being researched the inherent care-full nature of the research.

***<b>4.2 Interviewing Care-fully***

My commitment to caring and sharing led me to further question the ‘interview’ as a research method. As shown above, participants had concerns about ‘interviews’ which in other contexts (for jobs, qualifications, in journalistic, therapeutic, religious, and criminal contexts) are predicated on the interviewer’s position of power and authority and where interviewees commonly feel pressure to comply with expected roles and responses (see also Mills, 2001). Often, interviewers are presented as tough, intimidating, and untrustworthy; seen to edit narratives to meet their own agendas. Therefore, more than merely altering ‘semi-structured interviews’ to ‘conversations’ to aid recruitment, I actively employed conversational techniques such as compassion, rapport, and agreement throughout interactions (see Mills, 2001; Rubin and Rubin, 2011).

DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006: 317) argue that sharing experiences with participants is a vital element in creating mutual trust and respect as ‘finding out about people and establishing trust is best achieved by reducing the hierarchy between informants and researchers’. Sharing creates a more equitable relationship where neither person solely occupies the role of interviewee. Most participants felt comfortable asking me intimate questions concerning age, family, education, and relationship status, and I obliged and shared details of my own life, at times reversing the interview interviewee dynamic. The example below with Nicole, the medical student, demonstrates this well.

Nicole: Why did you take up geography? Now I’m the one who’s interviewing you!

Maddy: Yeah, do it! I really, um, I’m fascinated by different places and different cultures. But then I also got very interested in nurses, and I tried to find a way to bring them together […]

Other participants were curious why as a British geographer I was studying nurses in the Philippines, how I felt about the Philippines, and how life is in the UK and other places I had travelled. Indeed, my international mobility was a topic of great interest, much in the same way theirs was to me. As a native Briton, many participants desired to ‘test’ some of the imaginations they had gleaned from elsewhere – ‘are there really homeless people?’ (Angelica), ‘what religion is practised?’ (Nicholas), ‘are people there racist?’ (Rose). Undoubtedly, my answers have helped participants form understandings and aspirations of elsewhere, providing them access to ‘insider’ knowledge.

My commitment to sharing and caring means in many cases participants have gained, albeit in a small way, from the research encounters. For some, the chance to vent to a sympathetic ear was key, for others, often those overworked, the opportunity to take a leisurely drink in a café was a treat. For yet more, I shared information and contacts, and continue, several years after data collection, to be called on by participants for assistance and advice relating to migration and academic study. While for postgraduates, sustaining commitments to the field from afar can be difficult, as I demonstrate below, social media has facilitated my continued engagements with participants and with the field more broadly. These gains are small and should not be overstated or romanticised, in part as this would further naturalise the superiority of global north researchers (Kapoor, 2004). However, these small-scale ethical and responsible actions are examples of how scholars can ‘postcolonialise’ their practices (Robinson, 2003) in meaningful ways. Commitments to care-full and responsible research need not be extensive (see also Gready, 2014).

***<b>4.3 Potential of Social Media to be Care-full***

As noted, social media proved central in creating more equitable relations and facilitating care-full encounters. I used a Facebook Page as the primary recruitment method for the research, after other more traditional methods proved unsuitable. Becoming Facebook ‘friends’, or engaging on other forms of social media, gives both researcher and participant significantly more information about the other that other forms of recruitment (Fileborn, 2016). This was important in making me less intimidating, breaking down some of the potential preconceptions people may have about researchers, and showing me as a real person engaging in similar activities to the people I was contacting.

Using social media platforms to recruit participants has the potential to transform researcher-participant power relations. For example, conversations with participants who contacted me via email or text were noticeably different to the Facebook participants. Contact via phone or email tended to consist of polite, formal queries relating to the practicalities of research. Contact with participants via Facebook, conversely, resulted in more personable conversations. While contact would initially begin formally, it appears that being on Facebook, a *social* media platform with its own norms of communication including abbreviated language, colloquialisms, emojis, and stickers (Evans, 2017) quickly led to a friendly informality emerging with participants. Indeed, Kelly and Watts (2015) suggest that emojis have the potential to contribute to ‘relationally meaningful behaviours’ online. The following extract from a Facebook conversation held with Isabel, a rarity in that she had paid employment as a nurse, demonstrates this rapid transformation in communication.

Isabel: Hello, I have read your post and I am interested in taking part in your research […] When will the best time for you?

Maddy: Hello Isabel, many thanks for your message […]

[… 1 week later after various messages]

Isabel: Hello, […] I'm still uncertain. I'll check my sched and the weather forecast for this month (pref on the 3rd or 4th week) especially now that it really is a monsoon month.

Maddy: Thanks. No problems. The 3rd or 4th week is good for me. Yeah, the monsoon season seems to have really started now!

Isabel: Haha, how do you feel about it?

Maddy: Ok... at the moment! Hope it's not too bad where you are?

Isabel: You might change that statement soon enough if you go and about around the Metro in this kind of weather. Thanks. There's no storm signal (that I know of hehe) […] How about where you're at?

Maddy: I'm in Ermita, lots of rain, but no serious warnings also

Isabel: Oh... good luck with floods. I hope you're staying on a high-rise bldg.

Maddy: I am! 27th floor! Are you?

Isabel: Haha, nice 😀 I'm on the 3rd floor. Not as high as you I'm afraid 😀

By breaking with the formality and attendant power-relationships of traditional recruitment, we created the space to attend to each other’s well-being in care-full interactions.

Moreover, Facebook ‘friending’ of participants leads to a new and novel form of data collection through a form of ‘netnography’ or online/virtual ethnography (Nind et al., 2013). Facebook and other forms of social media offer a window into someone’s life, without having to physically, or indeed virtually, communicate with them. People share photos, statuses, life events, videos, memes, and media articles. For example, I share Rose’s frustration at the lack of improvement in nursing pay, watch and interact as Sofia expands her friendship group since moving to Perth as a student nurse, and follow the progress of Ian’s business ventures. Despite my inability to return to the field, social media allows sustained engagement and continued expressions of ‘care’ for participants and the wider field.

Finally, Jazeel (2016) briefly notes the ‘potentials of social media’ and blogging as relatively new forms of communication able to aid in the endeavour to share research and to disrupt and ‘re-orient totality of one’s organized field’ (see also Browne and Moffett, 2014). The Facebook Page and new ‘friends’ facilitated dissemination activities after leaving the field, allowing engagement from a distance. I share updates on my research, including copies of journal articles and reports, directly with participants and other interested nurses in the Philippines. Social media has relieved some of the constraints of postgraduate research, and, while not a replacement for face-to-face contact, offers a medium to share and connect. Additionally, with a view to environmental care-fullness, it is perhaps most responsible to limit how often we fly, and turn to virtual means to maintain communication beyond fieldwork, especially given the Philippines and Southeast Asia are some of the world’s most vulnerable places to the effects of climate change. As social media can facilitate ongoing, meaningful and altogether more responsible relationships across distance, there is perhaps a need for the wider academy to turn to the postgraduate model of long and extended fieldwork to better care for our planet.

**<a>5. Conclusions**

This chapter has demonstrated how through travelling ‘south’ to conduct research in Manila, the intersections of my gender, ethnicity, age, and status constructed me as simultaneously privileged and vulnerable. In many cases, my gender allowed me to escape some of the assumptions associated with my whiteness affording me additional privileges, while in others, it heightened my vulnerability. This brings attention to the need to examine local contexts, in this instance Manila and the Philippines, to fully appreciate the ways our identities are understood by others. The colonial history of the Philippines and contemporary expectations of whiteness that exist in Manila are central in determining the ways I was understood and able to move around and form connections in the field.

Despite the need to carefully consider local contexts and recognise that there is ‘no formula for responsibility’ (Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010: 113), the points discussed may have relevance to postgraduates and other inexperienced researchers in their first experiences of going south. I would therefore encourage scholars from the global north researching Asia to:

1. Move beyond examining positionality in terms of ethnicity and status and *examine other intersections of gender, age, ethnicity, and experiences of precarity and how these may transform in Asian locations*. Understand the points of commonality you may share and use this as a basis for more meaningful interactions.
2. Think about and practise *speaking about yourself, your research, and your connection to your research*. Do not downplay, avoid or deny your privilege as this silences the oppression others experience, further perpetuating colonial hierarchies. Consider more keenly how your research and research methods have the potential to be misunderstood.
3. *Share and care.* Postgraduate and early career researchers often begin their research journeys from a position of care, and this should be clearly shared and articulated with participants. Furthermore, the tiniest of interactions can lead to responsible, care-full and meaningful engagement – sharing personal stories and advice can have wider effects. Allow yourself to become a resource for those you research without overstating potential gains.
4. *Engage with the field from afar using social media.* This can overcome some of the limitations with postgraduate work whilst providing a more responsible and care-full way to maintain connections in the field.

**<a>6. Post-script**

Since writing this chapter, the author’s personal Facebook profile was hacked. Facebook permanently disabled the profile and the associated Page set up for research discussed in this chapter, meaning all contacts were lost. Facebook would not respond to requests to reinstate the profile or Page until Times Higher Education contacted them on the author’s behalf and published an article. While reflections in the latter half of this chapter remain useful for those who have used social media, the author strongly advises against using Facebook and Facebook-owned social media (Instagram has also been deleted) for research purposes without backing up contacts/data. Although her page was reinstated, many others she spoke with have not been as fortunate.

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**<a>Notes**

1. I am 170 cm, average height for a woman in the UK, yet 8 cm taller than the average height for men in the Philippines (Lasco, 2017).
2. There is very little data concerning the numbers of migrants in the Philippines, however it is increasingly rising in lists of desirable ‘expat’ locations (Dumlao-Abadilla, 2015) and has a large white expat community online and off.**<a>References**

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