

The Boundaries of Love and Community in the Age of Global Care: Care and Membership in Israel

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In recent decades, the Israeli welfare state has increasingly relied on the globalization of care, under which foreign caregivers provide the basic care needs of Israeli society. Through the care they provide, foreign caregivers maintain a rich fabric of relationships with the families, the community and Israeli society, but legally they are not seen as community members to whose welfare Israeli society has a commitment. In light of this gap between the social reality and the legal reality, the article first examines how Israeli law addresses foreign caregivers' requests to stay in Israel after their working visa has expired, either due to their need to receive medical services or due to their desire to settle in Israel. I show that, while the realization seems to be growing that there is a difficulty with the current legal reality that ignores the unique connection of foreign caregivers to Israeli society, the current legal arrangement fails to surmount the traditional view that these caregivers are primarily foreign workers, who do not belong to Israeli society. Second, the article proposes a novel theoretical framework that offers a different way of addressing the phenomenon of care globalization, based on the uniqueness of care work in creating a special kind of connection between those who provide the care and the community that has received and enjoyed it. The starting point of this theory is the multidimensional nature of care work as an activity that sustains nonmarket values central to social interaction. The article argues that these nonmarket attributes, such as love, compassion, and concern for the needs of others, are responsible for the construction of our human identity and the social fabric that sustains the welfare state. In order to preserve the nonmarket elements of care, and to avoid the commodification of the basic value of social solidarity, the article develops the notion of reciprocity—as opposed to exchange—as a means of supporting and preserving the nonmarket characteristics of care work on the personal, family, and social axes. Reciprocity makes it possible to identify and attribute actual value—in non-market terms—to these characteristics of care work. Nevertheless, care often involves nonreciprocal relationships. Therefore, the article argues that in order to preserve the nonmarket characteristics of care work, mechanisms of reciprocity must be established and reinforced at the community and social levels, to compensate for the lack of reciprocity inherent in care relations at the interpersonal level. Finally, the article proposes “membership” and granting citizenship rights as a mechanism of reciprocity at the level of social relations. Membership is a way to balance nonreciprocal care relationships by providing equal respect and voice to caregivers who maintain and preserve our basic identity as a human society. The proposed paradigm promotes a new way of thinking about cross-border care and its significance to the fabric of the community in the era of the waning welfare state.