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FOUR YEARS, THREE MONTHS: MIGRANT CAREGIVERS
IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE

by

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ABSTRACT

Four Years, Three Months: Migrant Caregivers in Israel/Palestine

by

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Advisor: Joe Rollins

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Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation explores the relationship between migrant caregivers and their employers in Israel. Based on interviews I conducted with migrant caregivers from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and India, and their Jewish-Israeli citizen-employers, I illustrate how the daily glances and exchanges comprising this relationship are shaped by the transnational racialized, gendered, and sexualized division of labor and ethno-racially hierarchical citizenship law. I also examine the many ways migrant caregivers navigate debt bondage, Israeli laws and policies legally “binding” them to their employers, and de jure exclusion from the body politic. I therefore contextualize the reproductive labor done by migrant caregivers within Israel’s broader ethno-racial Zionist project of nation-building, and the ongoing occupation and colonization of Palestinian land. Throughout my
dissertation, I highlight how networks of mutual aid, service provision, and community-building unfold at the local and transnational levels, considering the implications for transnational feminist solidarity.

I thus treat Israel/Palestine as a case study for rethinking how the segmentation of transnational labor markets and the privatization of labor recruitment under neoliberal forms of governance intersect in particular ways with a de jure ethno-racially hierarchical citizenship regime. In undertaking this analysis, I foreground the affective, relational components of migrant labor and citizenship in addition to the political and legal. This project contributes to transnational feminist scholarship on migration and the racialization of labor and to empirically grounded theories of transnational care migration. It also intervenes in debates about nationalism, occupation, and settler colonialism in Israel/Palestine by providing an intersectional analysis of legal exclusions and state violence as they differentially unfold across lines of gender, ethnicity, race, class, religion, nationalism, and citizenship status.

The introduction situates the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship in Israel/Palestine within the broader context of domestic and care migration transnationally, and the neoliberal turn to labor outsourcing in Israel. It also addresses the mutually constitutive relationship between citizenship and labor as it has unfolded within the context of Israeli settler colonialism, and considers the impact of Israel’s perpetual state of emergency on the daily lives of migrant caregivers. Finally, I examine the racialized, gendered, and sexualized construction of migrant caregivers by migrant-sending countries, private recruitment agencies, and Israeli employers.
Chapter one explores migrant caregivers’ political orientations towards the Israeli government, looking in particular at interviewees’ narratives about the government’s treatment of Palestinians and Eritrean and Sudanese refugees. I argue that the support migrant caregivers demonstrate for the Israeli government and the Zionist project are partially explained by the high cost of political dissent in Israel. I also examine how migrant networks of service provision and community organizing publicly represent themselves so as to appear, out of necessity, non-threatening to the Jewish body politic.

Chapter two addresses migrant caregivers’ experiences working inside Jewish-Israeli homes, and their strategies for navigating debt bondage, Israel’s “Slavery Law,” and for gaining greater control over the work process. In doing so I treat the household as a site of race, class, and gender conflict that reflects, perpetuates, and contests hierarchical social relations in Israel/Palestine. I illustrate how migrant caregivers are at once treated as intimate members of the family and as “foreign” interlopers, a pattern reflecting the state’s legal classification of migrant caregivers more broadly. While their treatment as workers performing an exceptionally intimate form of labor creates the conditions for task expansion and under-compensation, their constitution as threats to the ethno-racial state justifies surveillance practices within the home.

Chapter three examines the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship through the narratives of Jewish-Israeli citizen-employers, focusing upon two of the most common tropes arising within my interviews. The first, what I term the “kinship trope,” portrays migrant caregivers as “one of the family,” while the second trope depicts migrant caregivers as individual agents of economic development. I illustrate how both of these discourses naturalize the division between citizen and non-citizen labor, and reinforce
social ideologies about domestic and carework as a racialized and gendered form of labor. I also argue that both discourses depoliticize live-in migrant carework by obscuring relations of power within the home.

In chapter four I delineate the ways migrant caregivers use Internet Communication Technology (ICT) to contest and navigate the gendered and racialized naturalization of their work. I argue that within the asymmetrical migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship, they use ICT for self-expression, to fortify relationships of support with family and friends, and to strengthen community networks of mutual aid and solidarity. I suggest how each of these strategies can inform our understanding of state power and illuminate some of the potentials of virtual mobility.

In the conclusion, I suggest how the narratives of migrant caregivers and their employers in Israel/Palestine can inform transnational feminist solidarity efforts aimed at supporting migrant caregivers’ rights and the Palestinian right to self-determination and liberation from occupation. Finally, I propose future lines of inquiry that can further illuminate the intersection between neoliberalism, gendered and racialized forms of labor, citizenship and national belonging in Israel/Palestine.
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Introduction

Permanently Temporary Inside the Home

- “Why do mitaplot (caregivers) come from all over the world?”

- “The local people prefer to be unemployed rather than care for the infirm. They feel that it’s a stigma…

- “Do you think they should have a right to citizenship?”

- “No, not to citizenship.”

- “What makes a good mitapelet?”

- “It happened to me that I fell down two months ago on the floor. I couldn’t get up…I saw I can not do anything. I phoned her. I told her, ‘I fell down, please come home.’ In ten minutes she took a taxi and she came and then she took me back here, picked me up, put me on the chair and didn’t go out. She stayed all the day because she was afraid it would happen again. Not everyone would do it. Because it was her hofesh (vacation) she could have come, got me up and gone away. She didn’t. I appreciate it.”

-Leah, Jewish-Israeli employer, Tel Aviv

Leah, a Jewish-Israeli woman in her nineties, has lived in her Tel Aviv apartment with Jennifer, a caregiver and trained nurse from the Philippines, for eight years. Jennifer lives in one room of Leah’s apartment, and spends much of the day cleaning, cooking, tending to Leah’s medical needs, and maintaining an active network of friends through social media. A portion of the monthly salary Jennifer earns for her work in Leah’s home goes to the construction of her family’s new house in the Philippines. Leah was also once new to Israel, having come from Bulgaria in the 1950s to escape the economic, political, and social persecution of Bulgarian Jews during and after World War II. Yet neither
through law nor in Israeli popular discourse is her presence as a non-indigenous inhabitant deemed exceptional or out-of-place as it is for Jennifer. The institutions and national mythologies solidifying Israel’s designation as the Jewish homeland have facilitated Leah’s unquestioningly permanent stay and reinforced her ethno-racial and religious “right” to citizenship.\(^3\) In contrast, the bedroom allotted to Jennifer inside Leah’s home is a spatial symbol of her permanent temporariness and the ways laws and social practices of citizenship prioritize Leah’s sense of feeling “at home”—in her house, in her community, in the nation—over that of Jennifer (Ahmed 2006). As describing Jennifer, the term “migrant” is readily associated with a form of labor that is racialized, gendered and sexualized, and the “stigma” Leah references, with the construction of citizens as managers and employers. Such social ideologies configuring some forms of work as stigmatic and others as the acceptable realm of citizen labor reveal how the racial, gender and sexual segmentation of labor markets permeate daily conversations inside the home. In Israel as in every “migrant-receiving” country, these ideologies carry with them particular “ethical exclusions” that justify the hierarchical allocation of social resources and the differential investment in lives along lines of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, class/caste and citizenship status (Ong 2006, 208). In the Israeli context, the stigmatization Leah references reflects not only the transnational division of labor and its concomitant ethical exclusions, but also the discourses, policies, and laws relegating non-Jewish populations to a second-class or non-citizen status (Kook 2002; Lijnders 2013; Rouhana 1997; Yiftachel 2011).\(^4\)

The institutional and social privilege Leah enjoys as a Jewish-Israeli citizen inflects her descriptions of the “good” caregiver in the story she tells. Though Leah
attributes Jennifer’s decision to forego her vacation to Jennifer’s good will (“not everyone would do it”), her anecdote hints at the extant gap between citizens’ perceptions of “foreign” labor and the reality of their precarious positions in Israel, which demand they take all precautions to ensure their employers remain alive and healthy. Because Jennifer has been in Israel beyond the four years and three months allotted by her visa, she must either work without documentation when Leah passes away, voluntarily deport herself, or continue living in Israel under the constant threat of deportation. Under the “binding arrangement,” commonly known as the Slavery Law by migrant rights advocates, Jennifer can only remain in Israel as long as she is employed (ACRI 2011). This law also constricts the geographical areas within which she can look for work, limits the number of times she can switch employers to no more than two in two years, even under abusive circumstances, and only allows migrants from the Philippines, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, and Moldova to seek employment in the nursing sector (ACRI 2011, HCJ 2006).\(^5\) These regulations imposed by the Slavery Law apply regardless of a caregiver’s financial status and whether or not they have paid off any high-interest loans they accrue as a result of the exorbitant “recruitment” fees they are charged by private agencies. More pressingly, were Leah to become ill or injure herself while Jennifer is on vacation, Jennifer could face accusations of patient neglect, which would likewise lead to the subsequent loss of her job, the right to reside in Israel, and her ability to build a new family home. The health and well-being of elderly citizen-employers such as Leah are thus inextricably tied to a migrant caregiver’s livelihood, and in many cases, to that of their extended family. Each of these factors impacts the words Leah and Jennifer exchange and the spaces they inhabit within Leah’s small apartment.
This dissertation explores how the daily glances, gestures, and passing words between migrant caregivers and their Jewish-Israeli employers are shaped by ideologies about citizenship, ethno-racial nationalism and the transnational division of reproductive labor. It inquires into the politics of these interactions by exploring how the very categories “migrant caregiver” and “citizen-employer” are constituted and reconstituted on a daily basis. This dissertation also interrogates how migrant caregivers regularly contest intimate and asymmetrical power relations and negotiate for their rights in the face of securitization, state and household-level disciplining, and commodification. Navigation of the demands of live-in carework can take the form of direct refusal to engage in work beyond the terms of the contract, reporting abusive employers to legal authorities, quitting, and engaging in subtle forms of resistance that unfold within the “hidden transcripts” of this contradictory relationship (Scott 1990). Finally, this dissertation asks how employers’ understanding of their own position as citizen-employers, or “citizen-consumers,” shifts in relation to the “worker-producers” living in their homes (Mohanty 2003, 141).

Precisely because the emotional terrain of the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship does not stand in isolation from Israel’s broader securitization of non-Jewish populations, including Palestinians, Bedouin, Druze, Eritrean and Sudanese refugees, and migrant laborers in all sectors; nor can it be understood independently of Israel’s occupation and colonization of Palestinian land, I also foreground the social collectives and networks of support and solidarity that migrant caregivers form locally and transnationally. I therefore highlight in each chapter how survival, resistance, and activism unfold in the household and across the Internet, and how mutual aid and the sharing of legal knowledge are integral to community survival. I center these modes of contestation
to move away from literature that presents migrant caregivers as either victims of global
capitalism with no ability to shape their own lives and futures, or free entrepreneurial
agents of development whose “choice” to leave home is decontextualized from
constraining social and economic factors (Raghuram 2007). In different ways both of
these narratives rest upon the premise that migration from the global South to the global
North is necessarily a progressive trajectory that leads to greater freedom and economic
security for individual migrants, and an alleviation of the burdens of poverty for migrant-
sending countries (Faist 2008; Wise, Covarrubias, and Puentes 2013). I thus highlight the
complex and shifting processes of subject-formation among caregivers and citizens alike,
yet as they are rooted in transnational systems of inequality that are perpetuated by
neoliberal labor policies, and colonial histories of labor expropriation that take particular
forms in Israel/Palestine.

By making visible these ideologies about non-Jewish, migrant labor and the social
reproduction of citizenship, I aim to show how “migrant caregivers” and “citizen-
employers” have been “made” as if they were a priori worker-subjects (Ahmed 2004,
171). To “unmake” the concept of the migrant caregiver and the citizen-employer is to
politicize these relationships and the taken-for-granted concepts, ideologies, and logics
that uphold them (Ahmed 2004, 182). Whether inside a chat room, a living room in Tel
Aviv, or at a West Bank checkpoint, historical constructions of labor continually morph
and take new forms in service of the “dirty work of boundary maintenance” (Yuval-Davis
2007, 93, as quoting Favell 1999).

I focus on the Jewish-Israeli home as a site of inquiry for several reasons. Firstly, I
am interested in how the house, itself, becomes a site of race, class, and gender conflict
that mirrors and contests broader social relationships of power, reproducing ideologies about citizen and non-citizen labor. As Ahmed argues, the instability of national identity requires us to see “the process of negotiation between identity and strangerness as ongoing,” and as unfolding not only within the territorial borders of the state, but across multiple spatial arrangements, including the body, the home, and the globe (Ahmed 2000, 101). Through an exploration of the household, I therefore investigate how laws and policies around race, citizenship, and labor become embodied ideologies through everyday practices and interactions (Yuval-Davis 1989, 1997). Migrant caregivers play a key role in the maintenance of the Jewish-Israeli household through the reproductive labor they undertake, particularly as the number of households with an elderly family member in need of full-time care grows, a point to which I will return below.7 Missing from existing theorizations of migrant labor in Israel is an in-depth analysis of the social processes by which citizens come to embody their legal role as employers, producing and reinforcing through daily interactions the segmentation and racialization of labor markets. Equally important is how laws governing migrant labor signal to citizens what treatments are and are not permissible. Secondly, because laws in Israel grant disproportionate power to citizens over the working conditions of migrants, citizens are in effect the main purveyors and administrators of law, a phenomenon requiring an examination of the site where these laws are enacted, abused, and contested. Thirdly, I center the home as a means of repoliticizing a sector of labor that has long been treated in political theory and in contemporary state practices as apolitical, as part of an imagined separate sphere of necessity, and as cordoned off from the “real” realm of political contestation.
In many ways, the daily interactions comprising the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship in Israel/Palestine are indistinguishable from those in states that outsource labor to migrants transnationally. Accounts of employer/domestic worker relationships in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and the Gulf States emphasize many common themes: the asymmetry, contradiction, intimacy that characterize this employment relationship; the strategic performances of deference required on a daily basis, and the pressure placed upon care and domestic workers to be their employers’ emotional confidantes; and the ways race, class, and gender conflict play out inside the home (Anderson 2000, Bakan and Stasiulis 1997, Constable 1997, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2006, Rollins 1989, Romero 1992). Many of these dynamics arise within migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationships in Israel/Palestine. I therefore do not present all of these dynamics as they unfold inside Jewish-Israeli homes as the exclusive result of the specific political conditions arising within Israel as a settler colonial state. However, neither are these dynamics extricable from Israel’s treatment of its Palestinian minority, and particular elements of this relationship are shaped by the broader system of apartheid laws that differentially value Palestinian and Jewish life. 

Further, though many elements of the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship may arise in care and domestic worker/employer relations transnationally, how and to whom governments choose to allocate reproductive labor deemed undesirable to citizens has effects that are specific to the politics, ideologies, and the legal atmosphere of a given “host” country. I therefore trace the implications of the outsourcing of carework to migrants, largely from the global South, as they unfold within an environment of nation-building, occupation, and land annexation that is specific to Israel as a settler colonial state.
Situating Israel: Neoliberalism, Settler Colonialism, and Ethno-Racial Exclusions

Neoliberalism and the Turn to Migrant Labor

Migrant domestic workers from Eastern Europe and South and Southeast Asia first came to Israel to work as caregivers for the elderly and disabled in the mid-1990s. The initial impetus to grant visas to migrant laborers came in response to the first intifada, wherein the government deemed Palestinian workers too great a threat to security to enter Israel.\(^9\) As a result, the government began granting visas to workers from Thailand, Romania, Bulgaria, and China to replace Palestinian workers, largely in the construction industry (Beinin 1998; Farsakh 2002). Together with the increase in checkpoints, the initiation of a permit system, and the “cantonization” of the West Bank into disparate segments, each tightly controlled by the Israeli military, the number of Palestinian laborers earning a living in Israel dropped from 115,000 in 1992, to 33,200 in 1996 (Beinin 1998; Leuenberger and El-Atrash 2015). This drop in Palestinian employment stands in marked contrast to the thirty percent of Palestinians employed by Israel during the 1970s and 1980s (Leuenberger and El-Atrash 2015).\(^10\) Under pressure from the ruling Labor party to promote a policy of “separation” between Israel and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, the outcome of the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords was a series of “disconnected Palestinian labor reserves” that made migrant labor seem more attractive to the government (Beinin 1998; Farsakh 2002). From the start, then, migrant laborers were brought into Israel as a “politically palatable alternative” to the Palestinian work force (Bartram 1998; Willen 2010, 263). Hiring migrant laborers thus furthered the “peace process” in the eyes of the Israeli government by maintaining separation between Israelis
and Palestinians through dependence upon “cheap noncitizen labor” (Bartram 1998, 204). Though migrant caregivers were not the first migrant laborers to work in Israel, the outsourcing of construction and agricultural work functioned as an entry point that permitted further recruitment of non-citizen labor in the nursing industry.

Developing alongside this securitization of Israel’s borders was a turn towards neoliberal economic policies that emphasized export-led growth over the collectivist economies that the labor Zionist movement had historically promoted (Beinin 1998, 23). Under pressure from the Washington Consensus in the 1980s, the government began adopting policies aimed at fiscal austerity, a shrinking of the public sector payroll, wage freezes, and minimization of social security and health care costs (Beinin 1998; Orly 2008). The notable growth in Israel’s elderly population thus arose at a time when the government already began to turn towards secondary labor markets that consisted of temporary migrant workers. By relying upon labor from these markets, Israel could minimize public spending on health care by shrinking funding for public eldercare services and by ceding the responsibility of social security employee benefits to private recruitment agencies (Orly 2008). Simultaneously, the turn towards migrant labor reinforced the strategic separation of Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza that underlay the broader government agenda.

Within the nursing sector, the transference of eldercare from public assistance programs to privately managed in-home care has been managed under the letter of the Long Term Care Insurance Law and the 1991 Foreign Workers Law. This transition has been presented as a way for citizens to save money by paying migrant worker rather than citizen wages, and simultaneously, as “freeing” citizens from a form of reproductive labor
that would otherwise prevent their full participation in the Israeli labor force. Taken together, both laws have created a permanently temporary, non-citizen labor force of non-Jewish migrants. At present, fifty percent of live-in caregivers migrate from the Philippines, fifteen percent from Nepal, ten percent from India, ten percent from Sri Lanka, ten percent from Moldova, and five percent from Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, and Hungary. Eighty percent of migrant caregivers are women and twenty percent men, which follows the transnational ratio of 83 percent women to seventeen percent men (ILO 2013, Kav Laoved 2012). As in many other “host” countries, neoliberal economic policies supporting the privatization and outsourcing of labor have further entrenched the racialized and gendered division of reproductive labor, creating an “international transfer of caretaking;” according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), between 53 and 100 million workers were employed in domestic labor as of 2010 (Parreñas 2000, ILO 2013). The disproportionate number of this total that are women has led some scholars to label the out migration of domestic workers an example of the “feminization of labor” (ILO 2013, Standing 1989).

Since it began granting visas to migrants, the Israeli government has been able to save a formidable amount by promoting aging-in-place over publicly administered eldercare. In 1985 alone, a year when 5,500 elderly Israelis aged at home under the care of full-time migrant workers, the total public expenditure on eldercare for this population was US$5.5 million per year, as compared to US$40 million per year for elderly Israelis who chose to age in public institutions. Citizens have also benefitted financially from the introduction of secondary labor markets in Israel; under the Long Term Care Insurance Law, citizens working as live-out caregivers earn the same amount of money for forty-
three hours of work per week as migrant caregivers earn over six days of live-in, round-the-clock labor (Asiskovitch 2013; Iecovich 2012).

Legally, migrant caregivers in Israel have relatively little power to hold abusive employers accountable. Under the Slavery Law, caregivers’ right to remain in Israel is dependent upon their employment status. As a result, migrant domestic workers risk being arrested or deported if they have leave an abusive or exploitative employer and have already switched employers more than the allotted two times (Ayalon 2012, Kav LaOved 2010). In effect, the Slavery Law binds migrant caregivers to their employers by predicking their ability to remain in Israel upon their employment status, thereby severely hampering their freedom of movement and association. Particularly for migrant caregivers who have already stayed beyond the four years and three months allotted on their visas, the death of an employer means the threat of impending deportation. While the Israeli High Court of Justice (HCJ) ruled the Slavery Law unconstitutional in 2006, after a successful amendment passed in 2011, the law has again been on the books. Taken together with the large amounts of debt migrants accrue from financing recruitment fees, the Slavery Law creates a situation of indentured servitude wherein the health, well-being, legal, and financial status of the caregiver is dependent upon the survival and good will of the employer.

Due to the widespread socioeconomic and ethno-racial/national stratification of Israeli society, the elderly citizens benefitting from in-home care and those whose families are “freed” from the burden of full-time eldercare are overwhelmingly Jewish-Israeli. Because hiring a migrant caregiver is an option generally only affordable to Israelis falling under the top three income brackets, Jewish-Israelis have benefitted almost exclusively
from the introduction of migrant caregivers into the Israeli labor force.\textsuperscript{14} Further, as Jewish-Israelis are overwhelmingly the employers of migrant caregivers, the introduction of this secondary labor market has positioned them as the new managerial class with disproportionate legal power over migrant workers. Meanwhile, migrant caregivers have become an integral part of both the reproduction of Jewish-Israeli households where there is an elderly family member, and of the physical survival of a sizable portion of the Jewish body politic (Azaiza and Brodsky 2003; Suleiman and Walter-Ginzburg 2010). In contrast to Jewish-Israeli citizens, most Palestinian citizens of Israel either allocate the duty of eldercare to other members of the family, thereby limiting the ability of that family member to participate in the “formal” labor market, or they enroll their elderly family member in a public hospital (Aziza and Brodsky 2003; Taub Center 2015).\textsuperscript{15} As the elderly Israeli population grows, migrant caregivers are thus a focal part of ensuring that Jewish-Israeli households can collectively be shielded from dependence upon, and fluctuations within the Palestinian labor market, and that they can benefit, as managers and as “citizen-consumers,” from the neoliberal turn to privatized labor sources. Further, the presence of migrant caregivers inside Jewish-Israeli homes helps ensure that Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza remain “spatially segregated” from Jewish-Israeli citizens (Portugali 1993, 14 as quoted in Shapiro 2014, 184). The labor undertaken by migrant caregivers in Israel is thus part of “a dynamic, multidimensional biopolitical framework within which different groups are relegated to different forms of status…defining and monitoring the boundaries of the national body and body politic” (Willen 2010, 267).
Israel’s turn to neoliberal forms of governance has thus led to new forms of labor market segmentation along lines of ethnicity, race, class, and gender, and new social constructions of labor as they relate to citizenship and the maintenance of national borders. Yet these constructions are also deeply rooted in broader ideologies about the citizen/non-citizen that characterize reproductive labor as being the “natural” domain of women, and of non-white women in particular. As many feminist and critical race critiques of citizenship and the Aristotelian public/private divide underscore, the conceptual opposition between citizen and laborer corresponds to gendered dichotomies such as masculine/feminine and rational/irrational, as well as the distinction between those presumed to be capable and those incapable of political self-determination (Okin 1991; Pateman 1988; Young 1989). Also mapping onto this dichotomy is, as Mills argues, an equally present racial division between “civilized” white Europeans and non-European, indigenous “savages” (Mills 1999, 2011). Tellingly, as Román highlights, Aristotle characterizes the citizen as “master of the labor of others,” for one could “not consider those to be citizens who are necessary to the existence of the state” (Aristotle, as quoted in Román 2010). The co-constitution of citizenship and labor also derives from the fundamental paradox inhering in citizenship as a concept, which at once invokes the universal norms of inclusion and equality while predicating membership within the body politic itself upon “exclusionary particularism” (Román 2010; Mills 1997).

The resultant devaluing of reproductive labor, and particularly those forms of household labor done by non-citizen women, both produces and is produced by perceptions of non-citizen female migrants as “natural” domestic workers and caretakers who are presumed to lack political agency. As Ong posits, precisely “because they are
mobile women” presumed to possess a particular “tradable competence,” migrant domestic workers “are not considered attachable to moral economies despite their role in reproductive labor” (Ong 2006, 199, 7). Within Israel, these moral economies to which some individuals and collectivities are attached, and others not, are deeply enmeshed within Israel’s broader project of ethno-racially exclusive nationalism.

Citizenship, Labor, and Settler Colonialism

Contextualizing the position of migrant caregivers in Israel requires first examining how the relationship between citizenship and labor has taken shape within the particular conditions of the Zionist settler colonial project. Principally, it demands understanding Israel’s turn to migrant labor not only in relation to neoliberalism, but also as a legacy of early Zionist attempts to establish an exclusionary Jewish homeland through the strategic segmentation of the labor market (Lloyd 2012; Shafir 1989; Pappe 2012). These early strategies for increasing Jewish control over the land that helped pave the way for ethno-national separatism have morphed into a two-tiered system of apartheid laws in Israel; one for Jewish-Israelis, and another for Palestinian citizens of Israel, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, Bedouin, and Druze. This system has allowed for the continual “Judaziation” of Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank, through which daily practices of land dispossession, house demolitions, and annexation increase the territory falling under Israeli control (Pappe 2006, Shafir 1989; Yiftachel 2006).

The ideological underpinnings of the European Zionist national project are best understood through the movement’s own description of Palestine as “a land without a people for a people without a land” (Khalidi 1997). As Lloyd has argued, the “permanent
appropriation” of indigenous land was seen as a means of resolving the landless status of European Jews who had been persecuted, excluded, and subjected to genocide (Lloyd 2012, 66). From the purview of the World Zionist Organization (WZO) and the Jewish National Fund (JNF), the indigenous Palestinian population was the primary obstacle preventing the “final liberation from the exilic existence symbolized by the Shtetl,” and obstructing the establishment of a Jewish homeland (Pappe 2012, 44). Crucially, as Pappe asserts, that European Zionists undertaking this settler colonial project were responding to their own oppression and victimization in Europe has allowed Israel to benefit from a certain international immunity made possible by its presumed *sui generis* status (Pappe 2012).

The “conquest of labor” movement that began in 1905 under the leadership of Zionist labor organization Hapoel Hatzair (The Young Workers) was one of the first manifestations of this settler colonial legacy, and an early means of establishing Israel’s *de jure* ethno-racial hierarchy through control of the labor market. Starting with the *Second Aliyah*, this “conquest” was based upon the organization’s belief that “a necessary condition for the realization of Zionism is the control of all branches of work in *Eretz Israel* by Jews” (Shafir 1989, 60). Through the international subsidization of Jewish wages and the allocation of high-paying, skilled jobs exclusively to Jews, Hapoel Hatzair thus helped create an “ethnic caste” system that ensured Jewish ownership of land and Jewish control over the labor process on *moshavot*, effectively laying the foundations for the development of competing Jewish and Palestinian national movements (Shafir 1989, 65; Shafir and Peled 2002). The transferring of manual labor from Palestinian workers and land ownership to the “loyal hands” of Jews was thus a central strategy for realizing
the “maximalist view of Jewish ‘demographic interests,’” with the broader goal of establishing “demographic ‘purity’ at best and [a] demographic majority at worst” (Shafir 1989, 89; Pappe 2012, 47).

This desire for an ethno-racially exclusive homeland has likewise led in both the early Yishuv and in contemporary Israel to the replacement of Palestinian workers with populations deemed by the Zionist elite to be less of a “demographic threat” to the Jewish body politic. Just as Palestinians in the agriculture and construction sectors have largely been replaced by migrant laborers in the wake of the first intifada, so, too were Palestinian manual laborers on Jewish-owned plantations at the beginning of the twentieth century supplanted by Yemenite-Jewish migrants whom the Ashkenazi elite believed would add to the “quantity” of the Jewish population, without requiring that plantation owners pay more than “Arab wages” (Shafir 1989, 99-100). The description of the Yemenite Jew by Aharon Eisenberg, general director of the largest planter’s society, as “capable of being a loyal Hebrew worker” and bringing “hope to ridding us of the Arab worker” are revealing of this strategy (Shafir 1989, 99-100). Through such colonialist attitudes, the Zionist elite thus created a distinction between Palestinian Arabs and Jewish Yemenite Arabs, portraying the former as more threatening to the Jewish body politic than they were economically beneficial, and the latter as economically beneficial, if less racially desirable, than Ashkenazi workers. Tellingly, while Agadut Netivim, the largest Jewish planter’s society at the time, characterized Yemenite Jews as “natural workers,” they believed European Jews to be “idealistic” and “civilized” builders of the nation capable of civic responsibility; the “bearers of republican virtue” (Shafir and Peled 2002, 76, as citing Druyan 1981, 134; Shafir 1990). Much like the contemporary construction of migrant
caregivers as “natural” workers fit for eldercare but incapable of contributing civically to the body politic, the “ethnic caste construction” of indigenous Palestinian Arabs and Yemenite Jews served as a justification for their exclusion from the European-Jewish nation-building project.

The present-day construction of migrant caregivers as both necessary to the survival of elderly Israeli citizens, and yet latent “demographic threats” to the Jewish body politic, is thus not only an outgrowth of neoliberal economic policies, but also a contemporary articulation of the delimiting of ethno-racial boundaries through the “conquest of labor,” albeit under different territorial circumstances (Lloyd 2012; Shafir and Peled 2002). Significantly, in the hundred years since the first Yemenite Jewish migration to Palestine, domestic work has largely been undertaken by other groups of Mizrahi Jewish-Israelis, as well as by immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and to much a lesser extent, Palestinian women citizens of Israel (Benjamin, Bernstein and Motzafi-Haller 2010). Though the specific strategies of labor market control in service of Israel’s de jure ethno-racial hierarchy have morphed over time, the social and legal construction of labor has served to reinforce ideologies about which bodies are and are not worthy of state protection. Just as the WZO “refused to spend much of the very limited budgets” on the welfare of Yemenite Jewish workers beyond what was “commensurate with their ‘value’ for the overall colonization goal of the Zionist movement,” the Israeli government since 1993 has deemed the well-being of migrant caregivers worthy of investment only to the extent that their overall economic benefits outweigh the racial threat they pose to the Jewish body politic (Shafir 1989, 106).
Ultimately, government policies towards migrant caregivers, and towards migrant laborers more broadly, are part of “the broader biopolitical framework via which otherness is articulated and given expression in Israel” (Willen 2010, 263). As Willen usefully argues, Palestinians are thus the “‘Real’ Others,” while migrant laborers are the “‘Other’ Others” (Willen 2010). Once caregivers, and migrants at large, cease to be individual workers within homes and attempt to act collectively, they, too become a threat to the demographic security of the state. Government policies forbidding migrant caregivers from marrying and requiring that they send their newborn children abroad before they are three months of age are indicative of the state’s belief that “there are no migrants but only workers” (Kemp and Raijman 2004, 27; Ben-Israel 2013). Efforts to deport migrants who have lost their jobs or who are undocumented were especially pronounced in 2002 and 2009, when the government commissioned a task force charged with patrolling the Neve Sha’anaan neighborhood of Tel Aviv, conducting apartment raids, targeting migrant community leaders and imprisoning and deporting workers without advanced warning (Willen 2010). Over the last decade, the government’s simultaneous policies of privatization and deportation have further entrenched the racial division of labor in Israel; while the former imposes a cost-saving logic upon health outcomes for the elderly, the latter securitizes and controls Israel’s physical and symbolic borders (Kemp 2004).

_Citizenship, Labor, and Permanent Temporariness_

Rather than emerging as a _de facto_ contradiction of a constitutionally guaranteed entitlement to equality, the exclusion of non-Jewish indigenous populations from equal social, political, and civil rights in Israel is expressed overtly in the Declaration of
Independence and the Israeli Basic Laws (Kook 2002). Because Israeli citizenship law is based largely, though not exclusively, upon *jus sanguinis*, or the law of blood, rather than *jus soli*, or the law of territory, Jews from anywhere in the world are entitled to receive citizenship in Israel through the Law of Return, while non-Jews born inside Israel are not automatically granted citizenship. These laws mean citizenship is unattainable, except under exceptional conditions, for non-Jews born outside of Israel, and for Palestinian refugees born in the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and across the Palestinian diaspora. Further, the children of undocumented, non-Jewish and non-Israeli migrant workers born in Israel are also not entitled to citizenship. Those non-Jews who do attain access to citizenship as a result of being born inside Israel must convert to Judaism and undergo an arduous and bureaucratic process that does not necessarily guarantee citizenship (Drori 2009). In conjunction with government policies affecting non-Jewish citizens’ rights to legal protection, land ownership, cultural expression, and collective identity, the Law of Return renders citizenship a necessary though not sufficient condition for equal treatment by the state (Kook 2002; Shafir and Peled 2002).

The most significant impact of Israeli citizenship law on migrant caregivers is their relegation to a permanently temporary status that, except in rare cases, predicates their right to remain inside Israel exclusively upon their labor. While Bedouin, Druze, and Palestinians born inside Israel are granted a form of “ghetto citizenship,” migrant laborers are excluded from the right to citizenship altogether (Yiftachel 2009). By limiting migrant caregivers’ legal status to a permanently temporary condition, the government effectively hindes their ability to collectively bargain through formal political channels and hinges their worth upon their utility and their labor value to individual citizens. This permanent
exclusion from the right to citizenship drastically increases their already precarious legal status, making more difficult their ability to hold abusive employers accountable, to gain access to due process of law, to receive adequate health care, and to provide health care and an education for their Israeli-born children. The legal impossibility of ever gaining citizenship thus inscribes in law their vulnerability as workers and their exclusive role as laborers.

As Lloyd and others have argued, the formal nature of Israel’s ethno-racial hierarchy also has the effect of making the exclusion of non-Jews from full membership seem natural, and a logical extension of the state’s raison d’être, rather than a noteworthy exclusion that blatantly contradicts an originary claim to universal equality (Yiftachel 2008; Lloyd 2012). The persistent focus upon the topic of demography within government rhetoric, the mainstream media, and Israeli public discourse further naturalizes state-sanctioned inequality, as well as the racial segmentation of labor markets more broadly (Willen 2010). Finally, as I will address in subsequent chapters, migrant caregivers’ permanent temporariness inside Israel heightens their legal dependence upon citizen-employers in what is effectively a legally sanctioned relationship of paternalism. Within the household, this arrangement impacts migrant caregivers’ ability to leverage the few legal protections that do exist without the approval or accompaniment of an Israeli citizen.

_Citizenship, Labor, and the State of Emergency_

Also impacting the legal positioning and social location of migrant caregivers in Israel is the government’s perpetual declaration of a state of emergency. First declared by the Knesset in 1967 as a continuation of the “Emergency Regulations” that existed under
British colonial rule of Palestine, Israel’s state of emergency has been renewed annually until the present. This emergency status creates a legal framework of permanent exception that has served as the government’s justification for disregarding international law and creating extra- and quasi-legal security measures under the pretext of defense from immanent threat (Lloyd 2012). More broadly, the perpetual invocation of emergency effectively constructs anyone who opposes the Zionist underpinnings of the state as a threat to the immediate security of citizens (Pappe 2012, Yiftachel 2006). As Pappe has argued, this perpetual enunciation of immanent danger renders all non-Jewish bodies perilous interlopers that threaten the health of the Jewish body politic (1994). The laws, policies, and protocol that naturally follow from this defensive stance have served as the justification for house demolitions, the prevention of Palestinian family reunification, extra-judicial killings of Palestinians, the administrative detention of Palestinians without trial, expropriation of Bedouin land in the Negev, censoring of Palestinians’ right to free speech, the mass killing of Palestinians in Gaza in 2009 and 2014, and the continuation of Israel’s forty-eight year occupation (Gordon 2008, Lloyd 2012, Rouhana 1997, Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009, Yiftachel 2006).

The most direct effect of Israel’s perpetual state of emergency on migrant caregivers is the culture of immunity and disregard for international law it allows. Indeed, it is through the construction of the non-Jew as a latent threat that Israel is able to justify its suspension of a regular state of legal affairs and the non-enforcement of treaties and conventions intended to protect vulnerable populations. Such treaties include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 189 on the protection
of domestic workers. Contributing profoundly to this precedent is Israel’s refusal to abide by UN Resolutions 242 and 191, which call on the Israeli government to return to its 1967 borders, and to allow Palestinian refugees to return to their homes within pre-1948 Israel, respectively. By drawing upon the legal language of emergency, Israel has argued that it is bound to the Law of Armed Conflict rather than international human rights law, and accordingly, can not be expected to implement particular norms and treaties aimed at protecting its minority population from discrimination. To date it has rejected annual recommendations by the CEDAW committee calling upon the government to protect Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza, and to implement CEDAW recommendation No. 26 on the rights of women migrant workers. In its 48th session in 2011, for example, the CEDAW Committee made direct reference to the situation of migrant caregivers in Israel, recommending that the government specifically address its polices of cancelling work visas for pregnant migrant workers, yet the government argued that because of its emergency status, it did not have to implement these recommendations (Lebovitch and Friedman 2013). Taken together with the deregulation of migrant labor markets, and of the nursing sector in particular, the impunity Israel leverages through the logic of emergency leaves not only Palestinian women, but also migrant caregivers outside the ambit of the law as far as legal protection is concerned, but well within the law when securitization is desired (Kemp 2004).

These attempts to build a culture of legal immunity using the rationale of emergency also impact the work of activists pressuring Israel to ratify conventions that could benefit women migrant caregivers. Much effort has been made in recent years, for example, to pressure Israel to ratify ILO Convention 189, which reaffirms migrant

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domestic workers’ right to free association and to freedom from debt bondage. Israel’s suspension of its international legal obligations with regards to Palestinians thus severely hampers advocacy efforts across all issue areas, including those affecting temporary workers.

Finally, the atmosphere of imminent threat that justifies Israel’s perpetual state of emergency at the social level impacts the strategies migrant caregivers adopt in negotiating different forms of state surveillance. As Israel’s non-Jewish minority has continued to grow, a phenomenon famously labeled by Prime Minister Netanyahu as a “demographic threat” to Israel as a Jewish state, the government has adopted shifting tactics to justify its treatment of all non-Jewish inhabitants (Alon and Benn 2003). Most recently this targeted form of state violence has led to the imprisonment and denial of asylum to Eritrean and Sudanese refugees. Amidst these securitizing policies, migrant caregivers inhabit a particularly unique space, as they are instrumentally important to the state’s cost-saving agenda within the health care industry, yet when visible at the collective level, they play into racist fears of a growing “demographic threat”. This reality shapes the discursive and material ways they challenge, navigate, contest, and maintain the symbolic boundaries of Jewish body politic within and outside the home.

**Constructing the Migrant Caregiver, Marketizing the “Worker-Producer”**

“It’s kind of a business...Israelis don’t actually need a caregiver, they need a mate.”
-Ravi, migrant caregiver, Tel Aviv

Compounding the effects of the Slavery Law are the high fees migrant caregivers must pay recruitment agencies in order to receive entry visas. In 2012, male caregivers
paid roughly 10,400 USD for visa processing, while women paid approximately 7,000 USD. Also in 2012, Nepalese, Sri Lankan, and Indian migrants paid 9,500 USD, despite that Filipino migrants paid $7,000USD. In financing these exorbitant fees, many migrants must sell their land or jewelry, or take out high-interest loans, which take upwards of a year and a half to pay back (Lebovitch and Friedman 2013). The debt bondage resulting from this arrangement has in the past been exacerbated by the “flying visa” scam, a complex scheme wherein recruitment agents pay either elderly Israeli citizens or their children to file an application with the national insurance administration for permission to hire a migrant caregiver. Under normal circumstances, once the national insurance agency grants this permission to an elderly citizen, private agencies are allotted one visa by the government for the purpose of “recruiting” a migrant from abroad. It is during this phase of the “matching” process that private agencies charge exorbitant fees to migrants for the “processing” of their visa. Under the flying visa scheme, private agencies encourage Israelis to reject the caregiver assigned to them so they can then apply for a “replacement” caregiver, thereby generating more money for the private recruitment agent through the fees they will charge the “replacement” migrant. Kiran, a teacher from Darjeeling, India working as a caregiver in the town of Bat Yam, explains how the “flying visa” scheme operates:

“I came here on a flying visa, a fake employer…It hurt me because once I landed in Israel my agency took me to the work and I stayed for a night and the next day they told me, ‘my father doesn’t need you, you need to find another job.’ I came to know that this is their business. Suppose tomorrow early in the morning I leave my job. (The agency) will give a visa to someone (else) in India, or in the Philippines…Somebody from India or Sri Lanka comes here and after that, one or two days, the person has to leave because the employer will say he doesn’t want the mitapelet (caregiver). Then after a few days he will ask the agency for another caregiver…In my case, the son was doing the business. The father was bedridden.
He was taking care of his father but he made a reason why his father didn’t need me. And he got money from the agency.”

Though the scheme Kiran describes has since been made illegal, agencies continue to commodify migrant caregivers through highly secretive processes of “price-setting,” by which agents determine how much money they can charge migrants according to country, gender, and their degree of economic need. While women caregivers from the Philippines tend to pay the lowest prices, men from India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal usually pay among the highest, a financial hierarchy reflective of both employers’ preferences for Filipina women caregivers, as well as agencies’ sinister assumption that the migrants most desperate to work abroad will be willing to pay any fee for a visa. As Lebovitch and Friedman highlight in their comprehensive study of migrant caregiver fees, it is often migrants whose situations are economically the most precarious that paradoxically pay the highest fees to come to Israel (Lebovitch and Friedman 2013).

In addition to the unprecedented power private agencies have to determine a caregiver’s degree of debt bondage, the transferring of responsibility for “the legal-normative failures” of Israeli labor policy to private agencies means they are rarely held accountable for their exploitative treatment of migrants (Drori 2009, 29; Raijman and Kemp 2011). According to Abigail, caregiver from the Philippines who paid 7,000 USD for her visa, agencies are deeply secretive about the processes by which they set these prices, so as to avoid accountability:

“You’re not going to see who you pay your money to because you’re going to pay it to one agent then they pay it to another agent—if there’s a conflict about this and that, they don’t know which agencies to point to, and then the agencies are not going to accept (responsibility)…the agency will just say, ‘no, we didn’t accept any (payment) from you! Why did you pay the money?’…even when I paid I asked, ‘can I have a receipt?’ ‘No, we’re not giving any receipt and you’re not going to tell that you paid me like this. Because they know it’s illegal…those
agencies, they have connections with the Knesset...they’re even using dead people’s visas.

This lack of transparency Abigail describes is further enabled by the government’s hands-off approach to agency fees. Another impact of this lack of transparency and the broader deregulation of migrant labor recruitment is the absence of adequate mechanisms for enforcing labor protections. Although anyone who works in Israel is formally entitled to labor protections, these protections do not adequately safeguard migrant workers’ rights due to weak enforcement mechanisms (Drori 2009). As a result, attempts at securing legal rights are ad hoc and dependent upon a caregiver’s ability to strategically negotiate with private agencies. This informal approach to legal enforcement creates a precarious situation for migrants who already shoulder high-interest debts, further weakening their bargaining power with employers.

The increased racial segmentation of the Israeli labor market also intersects in particular ways with the transnational division of reproductive labor and the income-generating policies of migrant-sending countries. In the Philippines, for instance, women overseas foreign workers (OFWs) in the nursing industry have been hailed by the Filipino government as “national heroines” for the “sacrifices” they make for the sake of their country’s economic future (Liebelt 2011). This framing of Filipina migrants as heroines traces back to colonial control of the labor market taking shape during the American military occupation of the Philippines, and is evident today in the far-reaching influence of privatized recruitment agencies and corporations (Bonacich et al. 2008; Enloe 2000). Such forms of labor market segmentation require an examination of racialized, gendered, and sexualized constructions of work shaping employers’ opinions about the “good” worker and policies restricting particular forms of labor to particular populations (Mohanty 2003,
Several caregivers I interviewed expressed employers’ preferences for Filipina caregivers; though part of this preference may be due to their general proficiency in English, it is undoubtedly also shaped by perceptions of Filipinos as naturally “caring” and “sweet,” a stereotype that consistently arose in interviews. One Filipina caregiver noted that a recruitment agent once told her, “you are so spoiled because you are choosing work!” The implication, she explained, was that caregivers from Sri Lanka, India, and Nepal are not valued as highly by employers, and they thus have less flexibility to reject employment opportunities that arise.

Gender preferences among employers also impact the agency fees charged to migrants; some women paid two to three thousand dollars less than their male co-nationals. Employer preferences tended to vary greatly depending upon the elderly employer’s physical condition and level of religious observance. Elderly citizens who are immobile, for example, often require a “lifter” to carry them around the house, a job that is typically assigned to men. In keeping with religious modesty laws, some ultra-orthodox employers also prefer hiring men since caregivers must help with such intimate tasks as getting dressed and showering. Outside of these particular instances, caregivers and employers alike expressed the view that women were “naturally” more suited to carework than men. As one male caregiver explained, women “can do the housekeeping well, they can take care well, they can cook well. The women’s nature is to do these things, whereas they consider the men a little unhygienic.”

Other caregivers I interviewed also shed light upon the sexualized nature of carework and the blurred line between caregiving and companionship, particularly for women caregivers. As one interviewee articulated, male employers “don’t actually need a
Another caregiver explained that his former employer wanted a woman caregiver “because when they are old they like to go to the park and the coffee shop to meet friends and they are happy to be with a young lady…if a young girl goes with him, they like. They think, ‘I’ll get married.’” Indeed, women caregivers told stories of romantic advances from male employers, and two in particular spoke of direct sexual advances that deeply impacted their sense of safety within their employers’ home. These experiences are telling of the ways racism, sexism, class, and citizenship status intersect to construct the caregiver as a racially other migrant woman expected to provide not only skilled care of the elderly and disabled, but also sexualized companionship rooted in colonialist and Orientalist images of Asian women in particular. This fetishizing of migrant caregivers from South and Southeast Asia was especially evident in the personals sections at the back of Filipino community magazines, where Jewish-Israeli divorcés placed ads for caregivers, companions, and wives. Employers’ expectations of caregivers are thus shaped by the “ideological construction of work” along lines of race, class, sexuality, and gender, even before migrant caregivers begin working (Mohanty 2003,141).

Two of the male caregivers with whom I spoke also expressed a sense of embarrassment at the work they were doing, which they perceived in some way to be “women’s work.” One Nepali caregiver described having to bear his family’s disapproval for leaving home to become a caregiver. “They said, ‘if you go, we will not talk to you,’” he explained. Similarly, an Indian caregiver from Jaipur, noted, “In my house, sometimes if I wanted to help my mother or sister, if my father saw me, he’s kidding with me, ‘he’s behaving like a woman, he’s doing a woman’s work.’ They don’t know what I’m doing here. If they knew, they would call me right now.” Overall, the male domestic workers I
interviewed expressed mixed feelings about being caregivers, ranging from embarrassment, to indifference, to pride.

As a result of the racialized, gendered and sexualized construction of carework, caregivers must regularly contend with employers’ demands that they complete work not delineated in their contract. Racist assumptions about caregivers’ “natural” ability to care or domestic work can exacerbate the undervaluing of carework as a sector and the demonetization of care and domestic labor. The exclusion of domestic workers from the Israeli Work and Rest Hours Law, and the mandate they live within their employers’ homes, further obscures the division between work and rest (Kav Laoved 2010). As David explains,

You live in a house, so it’s different because even if we have laws like in our contracts, even if we have a ten hour work day, if you’re sleeping and he needs something at night, you’re not going to ignore him…the time and the work hours are not really strictly observed…it’s kind of murky.

Although caregivers are entitled to a two-hour rest period each day, and thirty-six hours off per week, many caregivers assert that they can not take time off without express permission from their employers. The laws and policies prohibiting domestic workers from visiting friends, leaving the house of their own accord and spending time away from their employers accounts for the high incidents of isolation, anxiety and depression among caregivers (Ayalon 2012; Kav Laoved 2010).

**Theoretical Framework**

In analyzing the ways caregivers navigate the nexus of neoliberal policies, citizenship laws, and social ideologies that converge in Israel/Palestine, I use a materialist, postcolonial feminist lens to highlight how racialized, gendered, and class-based
constructions of labor play out at the transnational and household levels. I draw in particular from Chandra Mohanty’s (2003) discussion of “capitalist scripts” to highlight the structural constraints and systemic violence that shape caregivers’ lives and the ways they create networks of support, contestation, and resistance in response. I also draw from literature on reproductive labor and carework that illustrates how the household becomes a site of class, race, sexual, and gender conflict, and the ways social ideologies shape employers’ expectations about how a “good” caregiver “should” act (Anderson 2000; Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Chang and Ling 2000; Constable 1997; Nakano-Glenn 2002; Rollins 1989; Romero 1992; Yuval-Davis 1989, 2007). In drawing out the subtleties of the gendered relationship between caregivers and their employers, I build upon empirical and theoretical literature underscoring the fundamental asymmetries that inhere in the domestic worker/employer relationship (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Pratt 1997; Rollins 1989; Tronto 2002). To situate my analysis of reproductive labor in Israel, I take cue from the work of Bercovitch (1997) and Yuval-Davis (1989, 1997), who explore how state-sanctioned ideologies around birth, work, and the role of women reinforce the boundaries of the Jewish-Israeli collectivity.29 Relatedly, a rich and extensive body of literature falling within the ambit of feminist care ethics asks how various moral frameworks can address the “injustices” that arise when carework is allocated to “other women” (Bosniak 2009; Folbre 1982; Kittay 1999, 2009; Robinson 1999; Tronto 1990, 2002, 47). Within this literature are discussions of the “right to give care,” the “right to receive care,” and the concept of care both as it denotes “taking care of” and “caring about” (Kittay 2009; Tronto 2002; Yuval-Davis 2007). In this study I draw upon the concept of care denoting a “taking care of” as it relates to the racial and gendered politics
of reproductive labor and “‘the dirty work of boundary maintenance’” within the broader nationalist project (Yuval-Davis 2007, 93, as quoting Favell 1999). Other scholars of care ethics have extended the parental model of care to the global level, suggesting how it can be a framework for engaging in political relationships of reciprocity, and for better understanding international relations and expanding forms of democratic life (Gould 2004; Robinson 1999). Each of these approaches offers useful frameworks for addressing how care can be re-envisioned as a collective rather than an individual responsibility.

I also build upon the proliferation of literature that has arisen in response to Arlie Russell Hochschild’s initial conceptualization of a “global care chain” (Hochschild 2000). This body of empirical and theoretical literature has illustrated the multiple circuits caregivers travel beyond a one-directional flow of labor (Escriva 2005; Kofman and Raghuram 2012); the various forms of carework migrants undertake besides nannying, such as eldercare, nursing, formal and informal forms of teaching, and clergy work (Yeates 2009, 2004); the range of caring roles migrants play over a lifetime beyond that of mother or father (Escriva 2005); and the “diversity and dynamism” of migration patterns beyond the binaries of North/South, domination/dependency, and rich/poor (Kofman and Raghuram 2012; Yeates 2004).

I also draw from scholarship highlighting the complex ways transnational relationships and family life change in response to migration, building upon Hochschild’s (2001, 2008) and, to a lesser extent, Kittay’s (2009) formulation that the family separation caused by migration is always necessarily negative. Many scholars argue that although migration changes the nature of family relationships, these transformations are not always necessarily negative, nor is physical proximity the only way a parent can adequately
perform his or her parental duties (Baldassar and Merla 2014; Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; McKay 2007; Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2012; Tungohan 2013). In particular, the proliferation of Internet communication technology (ICT) enabling these relationships to transform in multiple ways underlines the need for an account of transnational relationships and ICT within theories of carework and moral harm (Madianou and Miller 2012). Approaches to migration and carework emphasizing the multiple networks of support, mutual aid, and service provision that migrants generate centers them as knowledge-producers, rather than painting them as either “victim-subjects” of global capitalism or free economic agents (Kapur 2004; Tungohan 2013, 2016). I therefore draw from literature on carework and migration that centers migrants as nodes within vibrant networks of biological and chosen family, and as members of many overlapping communities based upon national affinity, activist agendas, political orientations, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical region. In doing so I also aim to show the many factors that both contribute to and mitigate harms beyond individual, biological relationships that posit the migrant as a mother (Diminescu 2008; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Liebelt 2011; McKay 2007; Parreñas 2008; Tungohan 2013, 2016).

In my framing of citizenship and nationalism and their intersection with neoliberalism, migration, and labor, I take cue from feminist and critical race critiques of citizenship as they arise in the Western liberal tradition (Mills 1997, 2011; Pateman 1988; Román 2010). Specifically, I consider how exclusionary formulations of citizenship within contractarian liberalism construct non-citizen laborers, presumed either explicitly or by omission to be women and non-European, as morally and cognitively less capable of political agency, and thus “naturally” more suitable to manual and household labor (see
e.g. Mehta 1999; Mills 1999; Okin 1992, Pateman 1978; Young 1989). As Mills has articulated, it is based upon the implicit and explicit premises of these dichotomies that the body politic becomes “intercorporeally” shaped in a “continuous ‘contractual’ exchange” between similarly raced bodies that at once reinforces their full citizenship and the racialized boundaries of the polity (Mills 2011, 590-94). The “intercorporeally constructed beings” comprising the body politic thus benefit from the full rights afforded by the status of citizenship as a system of economic, political and social rewards (Román 2010).

My analyses of migrant carework in Israel/Palestine are also informed by scholarship on “creeping apartheid” and settler colonialism in Israel (Pappe 2006, 2012; Pieterberg 2008; Yiftachel 1998, 2006). They are equally informed by analyses of multi-layered citizenship and democratic exclusions in Israel (Kimmerling 2010; Kook 2002; Peled 1992; Rouhana 1997; Shafir and Peled 2002). I also consider the view that citizenship encompasses increasingly cosmopolitan modes of membership that are neither exclusively delimited nor defined by the territorial boundaries of the nation-state (Carens 1992; Benhabib 2004; Honig 2003; Soysal 1994), focusing in particular upon intersectional approaches to citizenship (Bosniak 2009; Herzog 2004; Lister 2003; Swirski 2000). Critical citizenship literature and Sara Ahmed’s work on “affective economies” have been particularly useful in exploring the formation of political subjectivities and relations of difference, irregularity, and contingency (Ahmed 2004; Isin 2002; Nyers 2011; Ong 2006).

Though care migration in Israel is relatively understudied in comparison to the broader focus on Israel’s treatment of Palestinians, in the last fifteen years there has been a proliferation of scholarship on labor migration to Israel/Palestine that significantly informs
my project. I build upon Kemp’s and Raijman’s theorization of the racialization of migrant labor in Israel, Bartram’s historical account of labor migration to Israel, and Rosenblatt’s study of the paradoxical relationship of closeness and distance within caregiver/employer relationships (Bartram 1998; Kemp 2004; Liebelt 2011; Raijman 2007; Rosenthal 2007). Each of these studies helpfully historicizes the presence of migrant laborers in Israel within the broader trajectory of the state’s treatment of Palestinians. Willen does so to the greatest extent, using the concept of biopolitics to connect the treatment of migrant laborers to that of Palestinians (2005, 2010). Building upon each of these approaches, I aim to make this connection the focal point of my inquiry, looking specifically at the caregiving sector and at the home as a site of inquiry.

**Methods**

*Interviews, Observation and Recruitment*

This research is based upon thirty-six semi-structured interviews with migrant caregivers and fifteen semi-structured interviews with Jewish-Israeli employers conducted throughout Israel intermittently between December 2013 and January 2015. During this period I also took part in hundreds of informal conversations with migrants working as caregivers, housecleaners, and informal clergy. Additionally, I engaged in many conversations with Jewish-Israeli friends and acquaintances about how they perceive the relationships between migrant caregivers and their own family members.

The second component of my research involved conducting observations in public spaces, private homes, and the Central Bus Station in the Neve Sha’an an neighborhood of Tel Aviv where many migrant communities gather on their days off from work. At the
beginning of my field research these observations consisted of sitting in public parks in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem where migrant caregivers regularly take their Israeli charges and enjoy the rare chance to socialize with one another. I noted during these observations how spaces were differently occupied by Jewish-Israelis, Palestinian citizens of Israel, young soldiers with M-16s, Ethiopian Jewish-Israelis, migrant women, migrant men, African refugees, and American tourists on Birthright. Particularly in the Central Bus Station, where immigration police notoriously stop migrants and ask to see their passports, the spatial dynamics of race, class, gender, and religion were often clearly pronounced. My analyses are thus informed by much time spent writing, reading, relaxing, sitting, eating and watching from within the many shops of the Central Bus Station, with specific attention to who was running various remittance business, supermarkets, and recruitment agencies. The extent to which uniformed soldiers, Eritrean asylum seekers, and migrant caregivers shared small, crowded spaces without necessarily interacting revealed the complex dynamics of spatial securitization and separation in south Tel Aviv.

Upon invitation I also went regularly to religious services and festivals organized by members of migrant communities, birthday parties, group dinners, hangouts in weekend flats, group trips during caregivers’ vacation days, beauty pageants, and fundraisers. To identify migrant caregiver interviewees I used a snowball sampling method and began introducing myself to interviewees through friends of friends. I also visited the Nepali, Indian, and Sri Lankan embassies in Tel Aviv as a means of contacting migrant community leaders. Many of the leaders I came to know introduced me to their friends and friends-of-friends, which allowed me to interview caregivers with a range of
orientations towards community and political involvement. I also met with clergy who
serve the Filipino, Indian, and Sri Lankan communities.

I used a similar method to make contact with Jewish-Israeli employers, asking
friends whether they could put me in touch with their friends and family members. During
certain periods of my research, I encountered greater difficulties recruiting Jewish-Israeli
interviewees than I initially expected for a number of reasons. Firstly, because many
elderly were not eligible for my study due to dementia, I widened my recruitment criteria
to include the adult children of the elderly, since often they are the family members
charged with hiring and paying caregivers, communicating with placement agencies, and
navigating challenges in the caregiver/employer relationship. Further, adult children often
spend significant amounts of time in their parents’ household, visiting every weekend and
often at other points during the work week. One limitation of broadening my criteria is
that adult children were not necessarily able to provide as nuanced, rich, and
representative a depiction of the intimate relationships between the elderly and their
caregivers. At the same time, by interviewing both elderly employers and their adult
children, I was able to understand the caregiver/employer relationship from a multi-
generational perspective, and from different standpoints across the hiring process.

Another difficulty in recruiting Jewish-Israeli interviewees was the occasional
mistrust and skepticism they would express towards my project. While many Israelis
welcomed me into their home, insisted on feeding me or introducing me to their grandson,
and generously shared their lives and stories with me, others were wary of being
interviewed by a stranger who could potentially present their relationship with caregivers
in a negative light. Even amongst friends I would occasionally encounter a hesitance to
contact relatives on my behalf. Among citizen-employers who did agree to speak with me, one of the first questions they often asked was whether I was Jewish and why I was so focused on studying Israel when care migration is a transnational phenomenon. Their immediate inquiry into my status as a Jew is revealing of the ways religion, race, and ethnicity informed their degree of trust. More broadly, it begs questioning how my answering “yes, I’m a Jew” impacted their level of comfort during our interview. What did this answer assure them about my presence in their home? What did they believe it signaled about the political bent of my project? What knowledges and beliefs did they now assume we now shared? These questions underlie my own attempts to locate myself as a researcher while analyzing my interviews.

The interviews themselves took place largely inside employers’ homes and caregivers’ weekend flats. Interviews lasted roughly two hours. I conducted formal follow-up interviews with three caregivers, and have kept in touch with many.

Sample Characteristics

Among migrant caregiver interviewees, roughly twenty percent were men and eighty percent women, a ratio that is slightly higher than the ratio of twenty percent men to eighty percent women within the migrant caregiver population at large (Kav Laoved 2012). I was thus able to explore particular themes or differences in experience that may have arisen due to gender self-identification. Collecting stories from both men and women was also useful in exploring how perceptions of their own work within a highly feminized sector may have differed. A limitation of my sample is its lack of queer-identifying and transgender-identifying interviewees. Though two interviewees identified as gay or queer,
I was otherwise unable to discern through interviews how migrant caregivers’ experiences were shaped by their identification as non-heteronormative. Through community magazines and social events, however, I was able to learn general information about the activities of various gay and queer Filipino community organizations.

The countries that caregiver interviewees came from included the Philippines, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and India. The largest number of caregivers I interviewed came from the Philippines, followed by Nepal, a trend reflecting the broader distribution of caregivers by country within Israel. Though I spoke with one citizen-employer who hired a caregiver from Romania, I had great difficulty recruiting interviewees from Eastern Europe, as they tended to live in separate geographical locations and socialize separately from other migrant caregiver communities. Whereas caregivers from the Philippines, Nepal, India, and Sri Lanka tended to travel to Tel Aviv on their days off to live in shared flats with sixteen to twenty other friends, this was not primarily true for those from Romania, Moldova, and Bulgaria. Moreover, their disconnectedness with caregivers from other regions meant that a snowballs sampling method was less effective for this population. Another limitation of my sample is therefore the lack of representation of Eastern European caregivers across the narratives I collected; at the same time, their social separation from South and Southeast Asian caregivers is in and of itself revealing of the racial dynamics among migrant laborers, and of Eastern European caregivers’ ability to “pass” as European Jewish-Israelis.

So as to understand the impact of geographical remoteness on the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship, I conducted in the three major cities of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa; smaller cities such as Holon and Afula; sub-urban municipalities
such as Petakh Tikvah and Binyamina; and in a remote northern kibbutz. Because most caregivers I interviewed had been previously employed in other geographical regions of Israel, I was able to gather information about the experience of caregiving in places I was unable to visit. So, for instance, within Tel Aviv alone I interviewed caregivers who had worked in kibbutzim bordering Gaza and in towns along the West Bank.

Many caregivers I interviewed had also received some form of college education and had been trained in their home countries in other professions such as nursing, paramedics, teaching, and business. Others had worked in factories or for airlines, and some had been political activists. Their stories are thus mostly representative of the broader pool of migrant caregivers to Israel from middle-class backgrounds, inasmuch as strategies for financing migration, paying debt, and sending remittances are generalizable by socioeconomic group. Approximately one quarter of interviewees had not attended college. However, because statistical information on migrant caregivers’ education levels is extremely difficult to obtain, I am unable to discern how representative the narratives of interviewees are of the broader migrant population, when separated according to education level.

So as not to make interviewees uncomfortable, I never directly asked about their legal status unless they first offered this information. For this reason it is difficult to know how many interviewees were undocumented. Given how easily one’s status can change from documented to undocumented, it is likely that several of the experiences caregivers shared with me were shaped at some level by the specter of “illegality” and the constant threat of deportation.
Among citizen interviewees, I was able to speak with Jewish-Israelis who employed caregivers both legally and illegally. There was also a fairly even spread of men and women employers. The two main limitations of my sample of citizen interviewees are the dearth of religious employers and the similar lack of employers who are Palestinian citizens of Israel. The vast majority of my interviewees were secular, impacting my ability to draw conclusions about the caregiver/employer relationship within religious households that follow very particular laws around food preparation, ritual observance, and the differential allocation of tasks between Jews and non-Jews. Though I learned about the particularities of the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship in religious homes from the perspective of caregivers who had worked for religious Jews, I was unable to do so sufficiently from the perspective of citizens, due to time and resource limitations, as well as the largely secular composition of my own network of acquaintances.

A second shortcoming of my sample is the absence of any interviews with employers who were Palestinian citizens of Israel. This difficulty arose because there are far fewer Palestinian citizens of Israel employing caregivers, a disparity representative in part of broader trends in health and economic inequality in Israel. Though exceptions to this stratification do exist, their irregularity made recruiting employers who are Palestinian citizens of Israel more difficult given the limited timespan of my field work and the demographics of my own network of contacts, which tended to be comprised of secular Jewish-Israelis. One way of contacting employers who are Palestinian citizens of Israel would be through recruitment agencies; however, due to their highly secretive nature, I was not granted an interview with representatives from any agencies.
As a result of these limitations, my study addresses citizenship exclusively from the perspective of migrant caregivers and Jewish-Israeli citizens, without providing narrative data from Palestinian citizens of Israel. For this reason I have explicitly delineated the scope my project to an exploration of the relationship between migrant caregivers and Jewish-Israelis. Future research addressing the hierarchical nature of Israeli citizenship from a non-hegemonic perspective would require interviews with Palestinian citizens of Israel.

*Interpretive Approaches*

In interpreting my interviews I use a range of qualitative approaches drawn from feminist research methods. Following the methodology of Groves and Chang (1999) in their ethnographic study of Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong, Naples (2003) on discourse analysis and feminist activist research, and Hawkesworth (2006) on the feminist politics of knowledge-production, I analyze the role my presence as a researcher plays in the information I collect from caregivers and citizens. In interviews with migrant caregivers, this involved a close examination of my own positionality as a white, Jewish-American, cisgendered woman academic interpreting meanings and generating knowledges about subjects whose access to institutional power and experiences of socioeconomic and racial privilege in Israel are vastly different from my own. That I have a perpetual claim to citizenship in Israel despite the small amount of time I have spent inside the country in comparison to migrants and Palestinians further inflects this power dynamic. There were moments when my positionality resulted in mistrust, as for example when one caregiver asked to see my student identification card during an interview. In
other ways, my positionality as a single woman in her thirties allowed for the creation of bonds with women caregivers of a similar age and led to hours spent discussing dating, friendships, and family.

At other moments, my positionality impacted the elements of stories interviewees chose to share with me and those they did not. Some caregivers, for instance, made a point to highlight their love for “the Jewish people” during the course of our interview, or their admiration for Israel. Among citizens, this more often manifested in Jewish exceptionalism—the sense that it was “safe” to make racist statements about non-Jews, or an assumption that we shared political views about Israeli politics. As a researcher I often found myself conflicted in these situations, wanting to distance and estrange myself from the interviewee while also feeling somehow indebted to them for agreeing to meet with me. Internal conflicts also manifested among caregivers I met at some religious events. In one instance, at the same time that I spoke with caregivers in a church following a service to which they had invited me, they encouraged me to join Bible studies in hopes that I would express interest in conversion. These affective dynamics between researcher and interviewee influenced the words we chose to use, the information we shared and withheld and the substantive information I collected.

**Chapter Layout**

In chapter one I contextualize the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship by analyzing the political views and orientations of migrant caregivers, including attitudes towards Israel as a Zionist state; Palestinians and Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers; and whether or not they consider themselves to be political. The second half of chapter
one examines how migrant caregivers navigate political marginalization and Israel’s exclusionary citizenship regime, looking in particular at their strategies for collective survival and solidarity. I highlight the seeming contradiction between caregivers’ generally pro-Israel political stances and their articulation of the difficulties of working in Israel, suggesting what this gap reveals about the high cost of being politically active as a precarious laborer in Israel.

Chapters two and three examine the caregiver/employer relationship as it unfolds within the home, from overt discussions about labor and citizenship law to the manifestations of nationalism, ethno-racial supremacy and solidarity that underlie daily interactions. I illustrate in both chapters how this relationship is a site of class, gender, and racial struggle that takes place in households transnationally, and at the same time, a manifestation of the “ethical exclusions” specific to Israel as a settler colonial state with a de jure racial citizenship regime. Chapter two addresses this relationship from the perspective of migrant caregivers, looking at how Israel’s contradictory treatment of migrant caregivers as proximate intimates and foreign aliens is reproduced in the home through claims to closeness and techniques of surveillance. I examine how this treatment results in securitization and commodification, and consider the tactics caregivers adopt to increase their control over the work process and their job security.

In chapter three I consider this relationship from the perspective of Jewish-Israeli citizen-employers, examining the various tropes they use to understand and describe their interactions with the non-Jewish, non-citizen migrants laboring in their homes. I focus upon two substantive areas of citizen-employer narratives: their depictions of their relationships with migrant caregivers, namely through the claim that caregivers are “one
of the family,” and discourses situating Israel as “modern” and migrant caregivers as individual agents of economic development. I argue that both of these tropes depoliticize migrant carework by representing as natural the division between non-citizen and citizen labor.

Chapter four explores how migrant caregivers in Israel use Internet Communication Technology (ICT) to contest and navigate the gendered and racialized naturalization of their work and social and legal discrimination. I argue that within the asymmetrical migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship caregivers use ICT as a coping mechanism, for self-expression, to strengthen relationships of care and support with family and friends, and to fortify networks of community support and activism. I conclude by suggesting how each of these strategies can inform analyses of power attuned to both structural violence and daily forms of contestation and resistance.

In the conclusion, I expand upon the implications of my interviews for intersectional analyses of Israeli/Palestinian politics, and for practical applications of transnational feminist solidarity. In drawing out these implications, I connect the location of migrant caregivers in Israel to the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the apartheid system of laws that uphold it. I conclude by suggesting future areas of research that can expand and build upon the questions I explore in this study.

NOTES
1 Mitaplot is the commonly used Hebrew word for “caregiver” in its feminine and plural form. The term is also used by employers to refer to a housekeeper, a maid, or a therapist. The word comes from the Hebrew verb litapel, which literally means, “to care for.”
2 To retain anonymity and confidentiality I have changed the names of all interviewees.
3 I use the term “ethno-racial” so as to connote exclusions perpetuated by the State of Israel along ethnic lines, racial lines, and at times, on the basis of both ethnicity and race. I follow Paschel (2016) in using the term as a means of not collapsing “ethnicity” and “race” as two distinct analytic categories. At moments, exclusions unfold simultaneously along racial and ethnic lines, and in other cases, against particular groups.
for whom ethnicity and race are more difficult to extricate from one another. At the root of the de jure exclusion of Palestinians from equal civil and political rights, for example, is the historical racialization of Palestinians—by the British during the Mandate period from 1917-1948, and through Orientalist depictions of the indigenous Palestinian population within the settler colonial Zionist movement, both of which contributed to the “racialization of the ‘native’” (Zuriek 2011, 7; see also Shohat 1998; Shafir 1989); and through the continued “social sorting” of Palestinian citizens of Israel, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and those in the Palestinian diaspora through continued occupation, land dispossession, administrative detention, military siege, and racial profiling (Abu-Laban and Bakan 2011; Goldberg 2009; Lloyd 2012; Pappe 2006; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009). The racialization of Palestinians also continues to take new forms in relation to the broader securitizing of Muslims in Israel, Europe, and the United States, and the conflation of the categories Palestinian/Arab/Muslim within representations of “terrorists” across Western media outlets (Abu-Laban and Bakan 2011, 283, as referencing Said 1994). Racial exclusions are also enacted upon migrant laborers, Eritrean and Sudanese refugees, and indigenous Bedouin and Druze communities on the basis of their phenotypical distinctiveness from the European Jewish population. At the same time, other exclusions in Israel are exacted on the basis of ethnicity, such as those against Mizrahi or Middle Eastern Jews, who largely originate from Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, and Tunisia (Lavie 2014). Arguably, these exclusions have also taken place along racial lines, particularly in relation to the treatment of Mizrahi Jews by early European Zionist settlers, beginning in roughly 1904. Though treated more favorably than the indigenous Palestinian population, they were nevertheless racialized as “uncivilized” immigrants from “the Orient” who could help increase the Jewish “quantity” of Palestine despite their presumed inferiority to European Jews (see Druyan 1981; Shafir 1989; Shohat 1998). I also use the term “ethno-racial” to connote the multiple ways that social constructions of both ethnicity and race, as Alcoff argues, “come from below as well as from above,” and carry “divergent and positive in-group meanings” for the groups these terms are meant to describe (Alcoff 2009, 121, as drawing from Omi and Winant 1986). Rather than use the term “ethnorace,” however, which Alcoff applies to Latinos in the U.S., and could arguably also be applied to Mizrahi Jews in Israel, I retain the hyphen, as the groups most excluded by the Israeli government, and those upon whom I will largely focus, fall less easily into the category of “ethnorace.” Finally, I retain the hyphen as much of the time I use the term “ethno-racial” to describe ideologies and borders, both ideational and territorial, rather than people. When drawing upon Mills’ characterization of “the racial contract” and its applicability to Israel, however, I exclusively use the term “racial” in describing state-level exclusions.

Depending upon the context, I use the terms “Israel,” “Israel/Palestine” and “Palestine.” When I wish to emphasize actions taken and laws and policies passed by the Israeli government, I use the term “Israel” so as to draw a distinction between the Israeli government and the laws and policies of the Palestinian Authority. More broadly, I use the term to emphasize actions taken by the state as delineated by its 1967 borders. In other instances I use the term “Palestine,” when emphasizing the entirety of the territory upon which Palestinians lived prior to the 1948 declaration of Israeli statehood, and continue to live today. In these instances I refer to not only the territory included within Israel’s 1948 borders, but also the West Bank, Gaza, and occupied East Jerusalem. In these particular contexts, I wish to emphasize not the actions of the Israeli government, nor the territory called “the state of Israel” from the perspective of international organizations and institutions, but rather the historic Palestinian homeland as it is still so-called by Palestinian citizens of Israel, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and Palestinians constituting a transnational diaspora. Finally, I use the term Israel/Palestine when I wish to denote both the territory known by Palestinians as “Palestine,” as well as the territory over which the Israeli government enacts laws, policies, and protocol on a daily basis. For this reason, I distinguish between the 1948 borders of the Israeli state and the West Bank and Gaza throughout, as my project focuses on migrant caregiver/employer relationships exclusively within Israeli proper, and does not address the dynamics of this relationship within Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

A very small number of Filipinas who were wives of Israelis or employed by diplomats or businessmen migrated during the 1970s (see Liebelt 2011: 107). Relatedly, an exception to the ‘binding arrangement’ is such that those who marry Israelis may be permitted to run small business.

In my use of this term I draw from the work of Rhacel Salazar Parreñas on the “international division of reproductive labor,” which she uses to refer to the outsourcing of the reproductive work necessary to maintain the labor force to largely women from poorer countries (see Parreñas 2005, 560-1). This division refers to both the racial division of labor and the gendered division of labor as they constitute one another. While Parreñas uses this term interchangeably with the term “the international transfer of caretaking,” I treat...
the two concepts as analytically distinct so as not to collapse the many forms of reproductive labor done by migrants under the banner of caregiving, and to emphasize the multidirectional routes, directions, and circuits migrants travel to do many forms of racialized and gendered labor beyond caregiving.

8 In using the word “apartheid,” I refer to the nexus of laws, policies, and protocol that create a system of ethno-racial segregation between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinian citizens of Israel, and between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Following Adiv (2010) and Yiftachel (2006) I treat this system of apartheid policies as both “formal and informal,” including both the de jure ethno-racial segregation as enacted through the Law of Return, giving Jews worldwide citizenship right; the denial of the Right of Return for Palestinians; the 1964 Yerdor case, which stated as a “constitutional given” the “Jewishness of Israel”; revisions to Israel’s Basic Laws preventing parties from running that do not support Israel’s definition as a Jewish state; land and planning policies reinforcing segregation between Palestinians and Jews; the transfer of control over land to Jews; capital flows such as the system of taxation; and the continual military and paramilitary presence in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza (Adiv 2010, 26; Yiftachel 2006, 102-7). It also includes the “creeping but inescapable annexation by Israel” of East Jerusalem, Bedouin villages in the Negev, and major portions of the West Bank (Adiv 2010, 26).

Other scholars and organizations have referred to various practices within Israel as “apartheid practices,” especially in reference to the building of Jewish-only roads in the West Bank (see B’Tselem 2004), the wall separating Israel from the West Bank along the 1967 Green Line, and the diversion of eighty percent of water resources in the West Bank to Jewish-Israeli settlements. Recent laws and Knesset bills have also been proposed that, as Yiftachel argues, “(create) a structure whereby any democratic struggle to change the state’s Zionist character would be almost impossible” (105). Such bills include the proposed December 2013 and March 2014 “Anti-NGO Bill,” which would impose heavy taxes upon NGOs critiquing mainstream Zionist ideology (see ACRI 2016); and the “Nakba Bill,” which proposed that local authorities allowing public commemoration of the Palestinian Nakba be fined (Stoil 2011). As Israeli human rights organizations have argued, such proposals create a differential system of laws for Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian citizens of Israel. These recent proposals are merely two legal manifestations of this system of apartheid laws; ongoing administrative detentions, killings of Palestinians, imposition of new roadblocks and checkpoints, and continued apportioning of resources to Israeli settlers in the West Bank reinforce this apartheid on a daily basis.

9 The first intifada (struggle) refers to the Palestinian popular uprising, which took place from 1987-1993. The second intifada took place between 2000 and 2005.

10 Though the flow of Palestinian laborers to Israel increased again after this period, reaching a new peak in 1997, these flows were volatile and subject to ebbs and flows. In contrast, employment of Palestinians in Israeli settlements in the West Bank increased (Farsakh 2002).

11 Elderly citizens aged 65 and above comprise roughly ten percent of the overall population. This percentage is estimated to increase to over fourteen percent over the next two decades (Asiskovitch 2013).

12 According to Liat Ayalon, thirty-five percent of Filipino home caregivers in a study on employee abuse and social support reported “exposure to some type of abuse within their home/work environment” (See Ayalon 2012 and Ben Israel 2007).

13 Also known as the restrictive employment arrangement, this law limits the number of times a caregiver can switch employers, even under abusive circumstances; geographically restricts the areas within which they can work; and requires that they be deported after four years and three months, unless their current employer is alive. In 2002, Israeli human rights organization Kav Laoved filed a petition contesting the binding arrangement as a violation of migrant caregivers’ freedom of occupation ultra vires. In its landmark 2006 decision reaffirming the human rights of the migrant caregiver and ruling unconstitutional the Slavery
recognize the presence of colonized people” (Pappe 2012, 42; Piterberg 2008).

Law, the HCJ ruled this arrangement unconstitutional, on the grounds that it denied their freedom of occupation, and disproportionately punished migrant workers for the vulnerabilities of elderly citizens (see HCJ 2006). Despite this ruling, a 2011 amendment to the Israel Law of Entry, which came into effect in 2014, has reinstated this policy.

Under the Long Term Care Act, also known as the Long-Term Care Insurance Program, elderly or disabled Israeli citizens can receive financial assistance from the national social security administration for purchasing “hours” of in-home care assistance. The amount to which a citizen is entitled depends upon the status of their health and their income. With the “voucher” allotted to them by the government, they can either “purchase” a limited number of in-home care assistance from an Israeli caregiver, or roughly three times as many hours from a migrant caregiver, who unlike Israeli citizens, is also required by law to live inside Israeli homes (see Asiskovitch 2013; Iecovitch 2012). However, according to an eldercare advocate and former government health insurance I interviewed in January, 2014, because of socio-economic inequality, which overwhelmingly corresponds to ethno-racial/national identity, Palestinian citizens of Israel have a much more difficult time hiring full-time, in-home care aids. According to this source, families within the top income bracket hiring migrant caregivers will typically pay entirely out-of-pocket to avoid dealing with the bureaucratic and often lengthy process of getting a “voucher” for a set number of in-home care hours through the national social security agency. In contrast, families falling within the second and third highest income brackets will pay the salary of a migrant caregiver through a combination of an allotted government voucher and their own income. For families within the two lowest income brackets, which are disproportionately comprised of Palestinian citizens of Israel, hiring a migrant caregiver, even with a government subsidy, is financially unfeasible. Palestinian citizens of Israel, and to a lesser extent, working-class Mizrahi Jewish-Israelis, must therefore choose between allocating eldercare to a member of the family, or hospitalizing their elderly family member in a public institution (see also Aziza and Brodsky 2003; Suleiman and Walter-Ginzburg 2010; Taub Center 2015).

In addition to disparities in health outcomes between Jewish-Israeli citizens and Palestinian citizens of Israel, there is also a general underutilization of health care services by the latter group (see Baron-Epel, Garty, and Green 2007). As Baron-Epel highlights, this underutilization could be due in part to the rural location of many Palestinian citizens of Israel in relation to accessible hospitals. At the same time, however, given the highly segregated nature of Israeli society—spatially, economically, socially, and ethno-racially—there is also likely a correlation between this underutilization and mistrust of Israeli institutions by Palestinian citizens of Israel, who are overwhelmingly underrepresented in all Israeli public institutions (Rouhana 1997). A study by Keshet, Popper-Giveon, and Liberman, for example, illustrates the high underrepresentation of Palestinian citizens of Israel within the medical profession (2015). Combined with the widespread discriminatory treatment of Palestinian citizens of Israel who make use of medical services (see e.g. Remmenick 2010), Palestinian citizens of Israel are therefore less likely to make use of public health services options, even when they are able to access them. The lack of eldercare options for Palestinian citizens of Israel thus places a double burden upon family members, largely women, who must address a broader range of negative health outcomes with fewer resources than those available to Jewish-Israeli citizens.

As Nakano Glenn argues, drawing upon dichotomies inherent in Lockean liberalism such as independent/dependent and public/private, the Western liberal tradition has tended to characterize the citizen as an economically self-sufficient “independent producer” who, by virtue of his status as a citizen, possesses control over the work process, and the labor of the non-citizen (see Glenn 2002).

In using the term “body politic,” I follow Charles Mills (2011, 1997), who uses the Hobbesian metaphor of the “Artificial Man” who is “made up of other artificial men” to emphasize the socio-political constructedness of the modern state, whose political body is both naturalized as an organic structure and as one that is racialized. He also asserts that “if the role of the state is to control and protect the body,” then it is equally to guard against “alien nonwhite bodies, bodies impolitic” that lie within and threaten from without (Mills 2011, 583-4).

In using the term settler colonial, I draw upon the definitions elaborated by Ilan Pappe and Gabriel Piterberg, who emphasize the following elements of a settler colonialist state: “its attitudes in the past towards the native population, its territorial expansionism, its establishment of an ethnocratic regime,” as well as “an emphasis on (its) exceptionality, the exclusiveness of the settlers’ subjectivity, and the refusal to recognize the presence of colonized people” (Pappe 2012, 42; Piterberg 2008).
During a second HCJ hearing, this decision was originally made in the 1980s. According to the court, the health regime (102).

The second aliya refers to the second of five waves of immigration (aliya) to Palestine, corresponding to the period from 1904-1914 (see Shafir, 1989). Eretz Israel is the biblical term for “the land of Israel,” in distinction to the “State of Israel,” which connotes the modern political project in its self-defined secular iteration.

Moshav is the modern Hebrew term for an Israeli settlement, usually based around individual farms or agricultural plots apportioned per family.

Yishuv is the collective term for the Jewish settlements in Palestine during the last decades of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century.

The term Mizrahi in common usage refers to Jews of Middle Eastern and North African origin. However, the term is also used to include all Jews who are non-European, including those from Central Asia, Ethiopia, and South Asia. The term has a distinctively political connotation, arising within the context of the modern Israeli state and its project of Zionist nationalism, as a means of denoting a “hybrid identity” that is “neither simply ‘Arab’ nor simply ‘Jewish’” (Shohat 2006, 336; Lavie 2014).

The earnings gap, socioeconomic inequality, and state and societal racism separating Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jewish-Israelis has a disproportionate effect upon Mizrahi women (see Cohen and Haberfeld 2007, Motzafi-Haller 2001). Of a lower socioeconomic and political position than Mizrahi women are Palestinian women citizens of Israel, followed by Palestinian women citizens in the West Bank and Gaza (see Rhonda Kanaaneh 2002, Sa’ar 2007, Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009). Where the exclusions of individual citizens from protection under the law in the United States, for instance, starkly foil the Lockean principles of equality and liberty made explicit in the Constitution, omission of non-Jews in Israel from equal protection are consistent with the founding principles of the Basic Laws that function as Israel’s constitution. Though the drafters of the Israeli Declaration of Independence invoke equal social and political rights in the document’s language, they do so in service of the “Ingathering of Exiles” and the “establishment of a Jewish state,” a contradiction that has in many ways defined the tension between Israel’s de jure racial contract and its self-portrayal as a state that is democratic.

Jus sanguinis (Latin: “right of blood”) is the principle of granting citizenship based upon the nationality of one’s parents. In contrast, jus soli (Latin: “right of soil”), also known as “birthright citizenship,” is the granting of citizenship based upon the territory within which one is born. Although these two categories are ideal types that do not necessarily account for all forms of citizenship law, most countries adopt a combination of jus soli and jus sanguinis. See also Scott (1930) and Weil (2001).

The only way a migrant caregiver can transcend Israel’s citizenship laws is under the exceptionally rare circumstance that he or she converts to Judaism and marries a Jewish-Israeli. However, due to bureaucratic procedures discouraging these marriages, as well as the power of the Orthodox Rabbinate, which possesses a stronghold over interpretation of Jewish conversion laws, this process becomes highly unlikely. The process is even more unfeasible for undocumented migrants, who must avoid subjecting themselves to bureaucratic processes that could make them more susceptible to deportation.

The 1951 Work and Rest Hours Law protecting workers from wage theft and unpaid overtime applies to citizen workers and migrant workers alike; however, the one group excluded from the law is migrant caregivers. This exclusion, which was upheld by the HCJ in 2006, is based upon the premise that the elderly Israeli citizens attended to by migrant caregivers are in a prohibitively vulnerable position that would cause undue harm to their well-being were migrant caregivers able to have greater control over their work hours. This decision was originally made in Yolanda Gluten v. National Labor Court, and was upheld in 2013 during a second HCJ hearing (see Kav LaOved 2016).
In her formulation of the right to give and receive care, Kittay acknowledges that there are “second-order motivations” for wanting to care for someone, one of which is having “acquired the virtue of acting to attend to another’s interests for that person’s sake” (2009, 67). Though this begins to address the performative demands placed upon migrant women in caregiver roles, it does not contextualize these “second-order motivations” within the broader political framework of labor market racialization as do Bakan and Stasiulis (1997), Romero (1992), and Rollins (1989).

For instance, as Gould argues (2004), the concept of care can be expanded to address relations of mutuality and reciprocity within the context of democratic communities. One particular element of this broader application of care, “a type of political and social care,” entails making greater investments in vulnerable populations, including the elderly, through support for programs aimed at increasing their welfare (45). Fiona Robinson also addresses the concept of care beyond its conceptualization within interpersonal relationships, arguing that a “critical ethics of care” as developed out of feminist care ethics can be expanded into an international ethics of care that demands individuals take responsibility for their interrelatedness with others on a global scale (1999).

According to Hochschild’s analysis, when a migrant mother leaves her children to become a nanny in the “First World” the “First World” child receives a “surplus” of care that would otherwise have been given to her own child. Several scholars of critical migration studies have critiqued this model, arguing that while it is the case that many migrants have children in their home countries, the assumption that all migrant caregivers are women and mothers obscures the diversity of sexual identities migrants possess (Manalansan 2008).

Other critics argue that by exclusively focusing on the biological mother and presenting care as a transferrable object of finite quality, the care chain model reifies the biological mother as the only person who can dole out the appropriate kind and amount of care necessary for a child to adequately develop (see Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2012; Madianou and Miller 2012; Manalansan 2008; Tungohan 2013).

Whereas Hochschild in her 2001 elaboration of the “care chain model” highlights the one-way transfer of care from “Third World” to “First World,” Kittay (2009) situates this discussion within the broader politics of global inequality as they relate to the after-effects of structural adjustment programs. She usefully points out that the poverty that can sometimes cause a woman to migrate is itself a result of externally imposed stabilization and structural adjustment programs, and the resultant shrinking of public services in migrant-sending countries. Further, taxes imposed on the remittances migrants send back are used to pay back debt owed to wealthier nations, thereby transferring the wealth generated from this extracted labor back to the global North. Kittay’s account of migrant carework complicates Hochschild’s original theorization of the care chain model, as she reframes the “global heart transplant” as a “moral harm” inflicted upon the children of migrants as bearers of the right to receive care, and upon migrants themselves, as bearers of the right to give care (2009). This account helps illustrate the agency migrants possess in choosing to leave their home countries, conditioned as their “choices” are by structural constraints such as poverty and a lack of social security benefits.

Beginning in the late 1980s, Palestinians living inside Israel who possess Israeli citizenship, as distinct from Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, began adopting the term “Palestinian citizens of Israel” as a means of affirming a national and cultural identity. Whereas terms such as “Arab Israeli” or “Israeli-Arab” erases the specific social, cultural, and historical presence of Palestinian people in the historic land of Palestine, the term “Palestinian citizens of Israel” centers the double identity of Palestinians as indigenous to the land constituting present-day Israel, and as distinct from those Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza, and the Palestinian diaspora (see Rosenhek 1998). Another commonly used term in place of “Arab Israeli” or “Israeli-Palestinian” is “1948 Palestinians,” which acknowledges that Palestinians who presently live inside the borders of Israel possessing citizenship were indigenous to the land before Israel’s declaration of statehood in 1948 (see Shoughry 2012). When referring to Palestinian women who have lived (or whose families have lived) inside Israel’s borders prior to 1948 statehood, I follow Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and use the term “Palestinian woman citizens of Israel” (see Adalah 1997).
“Fairytale Triumphs” and the Threat of Collectivity

In January, 2014, before a nation of Israeli television consumers, Rose “Osang” Fostanes became the first migrant caregiver to win Israeli singing competition X-Factor. In what was described by the popular press as a “fairytale triumph,” Rose quickly became the central character in the mainstream media’s rags-to-riches narrative of a hopeful Filipina migrant realizing her dreams in a land of greater opportunity (Viva Sarah Press 2014). In the final competition, Rose sang Frank Sinatra’s “My Way” as Israeli supermodel-cum-judge Bar Rafaeli looked on encouragingly. The audience applauded, and confetti fell from the ceiling in what would become a regularly re-played segment on Israeli national television. Rose’s openly gay identity featured heavily in these accounts.

The same night Rose won, the Ministry of Interior released new protocol for the renewed enforcement of the Slavery Law. Under these guidelines, the geographical locations within which migrant caregivers can work became more restrictive and the Ministry doubled down on enforcement measures for ensuring that a caregiver’s visa is tied to her employment status, irrespective of the conditions under which she works (Lebovitch 2014).

Though Rose had won the competition, she could not earn an income as the singer she proved herself to be, but was instead restricted to employment in the nursing sector.
Immediately after her victory, she was required to return to her employer’s home. As if in anticipation of the backlash this timing might incite, shortly after, Interior Minister Gideon Sa’ar ordered the Population and Immigration Authority to make an exception for Fostanes and grant her an artist’s visa that would allow her to legally earn an income outside of the caregiving sector (Boker 2014). Months later, the record company that initially sponsored Rose’s artist’s visa withdrew their sponsorship, and Rose became undocumented.

Immediately after her initial victory, Rose told a news reporter, “It’s a big change in my life because before nobody recognized me, nobody knew me. But now everybody, I think everybody in Israel knows my name” (The Associated Press 2014). In an interview with Humans of Tel Aviv, a media project with a traveling exhibition aimed at showing the “true face of Israel” to campuses with an active Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) movement in the U.S., Rose stated,

“Winning the X factor was a dream come true. Besides my personal achievement, I feel I’ve managed to change the perspective of Israelis concerning the Philippines community. We’re not only functioning only as a nursing aids [sic]. We have dreams, ambitions and hopes. Now Israelis can see the Humans behind, and I am proud of that” (Humans of Tel Aviv 2014).

Significantly, Erez Kaganovitz, the founder of Humans of Tel Aviv, commented after this interview with Rose, “if I can show the world the real people who live here, they will realize that there are no war crimes and apartheid but a multicultural society that respects human rights” (Eichner 2015). In an interview with Haaretz a year later, Rose stated,

“I’m disappointed…I thought my dream would really come true and I’d have a music career. The thing that really makes me sad is that when I went on stage for the first time I was totally insecure and I thought I had no chance, but then things started to change and I started to believe in myself. It was a wonderful feeling, to be given an opportunity. But then things turned out the way they did and I feel terrible again” (Stern 2015).
Rose’s story began as a narrative about the inclusivity and opportunity afforded an openly gay, non-Jewish Filipina migrant by the state of Israel. Within this account, Rose became the symbol of Israel’s benevolent treatment of migrant domestic workers who are afforded economic and professional opportunities by virtue of migrating, and whose presence as non-Jews is welcomed into a cosmopolitan fold (Goldberg 2009). The mainstream media’s construction of Rose as a migrant lesbian rising to the heights of Israeli stardom plays upon broader tropes of Israel as a nation whose celebration of LGBTQ individuals is indicative of its broader tolerance towards all minorities, and its status as “the only democracy in the Middle East” (Puar 2007; Sadowski 1993; Solomon 2003).

Indeed, the exceptional status granted Rose by the Ministry of Interior was portrayed in popular news sources as a benevolent gesture of tolerance on the part of the government, rather than an exception to the Slavery Law granted on an individual basis. By publicly allowing Rose the opportunity to sing, the government appeared to celebrate the many talents and aspirations of the non-Jewish migrants tending to Israel’s elderly population. In quietly tightening restrictions on the freedom of occupation and freedom of movement for all other migrant caregivers in Israel immediately after Rose’s victory, the government implicitly acknowledged the threat non-Jewish migrants pose to the Jewish body politic when they publicly assert their ambitions to be more than workers. Rose’s story underscores a fundamental tension in Israel’s treatment of migrant caregivers: they are tolerated by the state so long as they represent themselves as individualized workers who have no expressed interest in taking root beyond their existence as “benign if excluded others” (Willen 2010, 263). So long as they prove to be economically valuable workers uninterested in creating a life outside of the nursing industry, they are worth the
“risk” they pose to Israel’s demographic balance; however, when they become legible as collectivities with aspirations beyond that of caregiving, they become a threat to the Jewish body politic. Under the policies and laws permitting debt bondage and linking caregivers’ visas to their employment status, migrant caregivers shoulder the burden of proving that their instrumental value outweighs the existential threat they pose as racialized collectivities.\(^4\) This reality holds profound implications for the strategies migrant caregivers adopt to secure their livelihoods, and to survive at the individual and communal level. Simultaneously, it influences their expressions of political affinity and their articulations of political indifference.

This chapter explores how Israel’s treatment of migrant caregivers as both indispensible to the health of the Jewish-Israeli body politic and latent demographic threats impacts the ways they define themselves politically, view themselves in relation to other non-Jewish populations, and ensure their individual and collective survival. Based upon my discussions with migrant caregiver interviewees about Israeli-Palestinian politics and forms of organizing within various migrant communities, I argue that the survival of migrant caregivers hinges upon distancing themselves from overt forms of political activism. By avoiding political discussions, reaffirming the ideologies and viewpoints of the mainstream Zionist establishment, and abstaining from collective organizing centered around an agenda that is antagonistic towards Israeli policies, migrant caregivers can better secure their livelihoods, augment their control over the work process, find ways to create meaning out of an inherently asymmetrical employment relationship, and mitigate the impact of permanent temporariness on their daily lives. Avoidance of political discussions and political organizing is also a means of guarding the extremely limited free
time caregivers have to emotionally recuperate from a mentally exacting job, to attend to physical health, and to communicate with family and loved ones. Paradoxically, by avoiding overt contestation with the state, migrant caregivers are better able to strengthen networks of support and solidarity that the state attempts to thwart. In strengthening community networks that, by virtue of their existence as vibrant non-Jewish collectivities, are racially threatening to the state, they undermine the goals of restrictive laws aimed at preventing a meaningful and rooted collective existence.

To explore the high stakes of “seeming political” in the eyes of the state, and the impact of these risks upon migrant caregivers’ survival strategies, I first consider interviewees’ political attitudes and orientations towards the Jewish state and Zionist ideology. I draw in particular upon Khader’s articulation of the “social recognition self-subordination paradox,” which highlights the many strategies individuals, and women in particular, living under multiple forms of oppression adopt for increasing their welfare, even as these tactics may seem to endorse the very ideologies leading to their oppression (Khader 2014, 224). In subsequent sections I examine the trend among interviewees to identify as apolitical, to express feelings of patriotism towards Israel and the Zionist project, and to disavow any political connection with Palestinians and with Sudanese and Eritrean refugees. I then turn to the many ways migrant caregivers create networks of survival and support, focusing on the collective pooling of resources and the fostering of mutual aid, both of which tie the well-being and welfare of the individual to that of broader migrant communities.

Importantly, by highlighting the distance many interviewees expressed as existing between themselves and the contentious world of Israeli politics, I do not suggest that their
presence in Israel is somehow apolitical. Along these lines, I do not wish to reinforce a
distinction between an imagined public world of politics and a household sphere existing
in separation from the political world. Migrant caregivers’ capacity to survive the “many
forms of antilife” aimed at preventing them from thriving as more-than caregivers are
deeply embedded in political struggle. Rather, I argue that the pervasiveness of state-
sanctioned antilife demands a distancing from explicit critiques of the state (Lorde 1988,
130). A key element of subverting state-sanctioned policies of debt bondage, worker
exploitation, poor social safety nets, and societal racism and sexism is representing oneself
as firmly rooted within an imagined body impolitic.

**Being Political in Israel: Attitudes Towards Zionism, “Other Others” and “Real
Others”**

Among the migrant caregivers I interviewed, surviving permanent temporariness
means making daily calculations about how to best increase control over the work process
and ensure a baseline degree of emotional and physical well-being. Navigating the web of
laws, policies, and ideologies influencing the spaces they inhabit and the relationships
they forge entails choosing when to participate in political conversations with employers
and perceived outsiders and when to engage in or abstain from making critiques of Israel.
It means preserving the little free time they receive—at best twenty-six hours a week and
at worst, twenty-four hours a month—for recuperating emotionally and physically. It also
involves creating meaning in work that friends and family may consider to be degrading
or indicative of downward mobility, and coping with their subordinate position in a
fundamentally asymmetrical employment relationship (Benjamin, Bernstein, and Motzafi-
Ultimately, it requires ensuring that Jewish-Israelis as the hegemonic social group in Israel view them as unthreatening to the Jewish character of the state. Within this context, identifying oneself as apolitical, expressing patriotic feelings towards Israel, and rejecting the possibility of a shared political affinity with Palestinians and East African asylum seekers is a means of mitigating one's precariousness as a worker and as a non-Jewish, temporary inhabitants. These strategies play out on two levels: that of complying or appearing to comply with norms that either directly or indirectly oppress them, what Khader calls the “self-subordination social recognition paradox”; and by internalizing some of these oppressive norms to make meaning of their experiences and establish a sense of self-coherence within a fundamentally asymmetrical relationship (Khader 2014, 224). As Khader argues, under conditions of extreme oppression, by complying with rather than overtly contesting the violent norms constricting one’s social position, women can better increase their “welfare agency” and improve the daily conditions shaping their lives.”

Under extreme forms patriarchy and sexism, for instance, overtly contesting the ideologies of a hegemonic group that controls the material resources required to survive can lead to a diminution rather than an improvement in one’s own welfare. At the same time, internalizing oppressive norms can facilitate a sense of self-coherence that helps reconcile the contradictory experiences of living under oppressive structures while simultaneously being aware that the best way of navigating these structures is to subordinate oneself to a hegemonic oppressor (Khader 2014, 231). Khader’s argument offers a useful way of understanding the complex dynamics of domestic worker/employer relationships, which disproportionately take shape in accordance with the emotional needs, preferences, and desires of the employer (Anderson
2000; Constable 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). In her ethnographic study of domestic worker/employer relationships in the United States, for instance, Rollins demonstrates how achieving “social recognition” and engaging in “self-subordination” can lead to an improvement in one’s living circumstances. Based upon her observation of these tendencies among domestic workers in her study, she notes that “part of being a domestic was acting like the person her employer wanted her to be. The better this performance, the greater the probability of the domestic receiving more than the minimum in material and emotional rewards” (Rollins 1987, 147). Indeed, in different manifestations, “acting like the person her employer (wants) her to be” is also an integral part of a migrant caregiver’s job in Israel. The tendency of many caregivers I interviewed to avoid political confrontation, and among several interviewees, to express support for state ideologies that are oppressive towards non-Jews, are thus intertwined with their need and desire to receive more than “the minimum in material and emotional rewards.” Equally at play is the need to internalize—or to exhibit support for—Zionist nationalist rhetoric that positions Jewish-Israelis as inherently superior to Palestinians and East African refugees.

Importantly, gender identity plays a crucial role in determining the form of oppression migrant caregivers face and the ways they navigate oppressive norms; though all caregivers must contend with being permanently temporary laborers who are racially securitized under Israeli law, women in particular experience a sexualized form of racial othering that renders them especially vulnerable to the abuses of employers. Similarly, a migrant caregiver’s perceived ethnicity, race and nationality equally influence the forms of oppression he or she faces and the negotiation strategies he or she adopts. I therefore do not wish to suggest that all migrant caregivers increase their welfare agency using
identical strategies, nor that the forms of oppression they face under Israeli law or inside Israeli households is uniform. Rather, I argue that the general trend among interviewees to express support for the state legally promoting their subordination is part of a broader attempt to survive and make sense of their positions. The tenor of their resistance, and the strategies they adopt, vary according to gender identity, sexual orientation, race, class, religion, ability and legal status.

*Talking Politics, Confronting Zionist Ideology*

Many interviewees said they avoided political discussions with their employers and involvement in any activities that involved visibly or publicly critiquing the state. This avoidance took the form of direct expressions of their distaste for “politics,” strategic avoidance of arguments about Israeli politics and migrant labor policies and the representation of their own presence in Israel as apolitical. The frequent assertion of Rina, a caregiver from the Philippines, that she is “not into politics,” was relayed in different iterations by many interviewees.

Indeed, the widespread avoidance—and in many ways, infeasibility—of public demonstrations of dissent among migrant caregivers is evident in the lack of protests that have been organized around migrant caregivers’ rights. To date, only one rally has been organized around issues migrant caregivers face, a January 2014 protest calling upon Israel to ratify ILO Convention 189 on the rights of migrant domestic workers transnationally. When I asked interviewees whether they had participated in this protest, only one interviewee answered that she had been involved. Rina states, for example, that “the rally was cool but people were scared that their employers would see them.”
Similarly, when I asked Brian, a caregiver from the Philippines, about the small number of migrant caregivers attending the protest, he explained: “mostly you will see the Filipino community here, we are concentrated on our work. During their occupancy, the Filipinos, they go to church, they are in their flats, that’s all. We don’t join Israeli protests.” Equally a part of this calculus are the widespread stories circulated among migrant caregivers about the deportation and imprisonment of politically active migrants more broadly. A Ghanaian migrant worker interviewed in a 2003 study on migrant organizing in Israel notes, for example, “We were invited to join the Histadruth, [the Israeli Trade Union] but it’s too dangerous: A Filipino worker and a South American each tried to create a union for foreign workers, but each was sentenced to deportation” (Ellman and Laacher 2003). Such instances, and the stories they generate, become part of the calculus of how to maximally increase one’s welfare agency without becoming visible to the state.

For other interviewees, the hesitation to become publicly involved with caregivers’ rights campaigns was described as a necessary outcome of the demanding nature of carework, which leaves many migrant caregivers with twenty-six hours of free time each week to emotionally recuperate, visit with friends, stand in long post office lines waiting to send remittances, and attend social gatherings. Amita, a caregiver from Sri Lanka involved in various Sri Lankan community organizations, explains that migrant caregivers “don’t have time to think about the politics, and they want only to save their country.” Notably, Amita talked at length about the “very big political problems” in Sri Lanka, the violence that ensued over a period of six years during the Sri Lankan civil war, and the fighting that results each time there are national elections. Later in our conversation, her husband revealed that their property outside Colombo was destroyed as a result of fighting
between the Sri Lankan military and the Tamil Tigers. Amita also asserts that upon returning to Sri Lanka, “I will have to come into politics because my friend works in politics for the party and I want to help him.” Memories and discussions of political struggle in Sri Lanka thus play an integral role in the life of Amita and her husband, and their very decision to come to Israel was intertwined with the “very big political problems” in Sri Lanka. Yet when not undertaking her round-the-clock caregiving duties, she prioritizes “(wanting) only to save (her) country,” and running various mutual aid initiatives amongst the Sri Lankan community, leaving little time for engaging with Israeli politics and contesting oppressive ideologies, even as these ideologies may directly impact her rights. Similarly, Patricia, who is using her salary to build a small family business in the Philippines, explains: “I don’t like politics. I’m not concerning. Rules about our salary and everything, the rules, that’s all we’re concerned.” These common answers to my questions about involvement in political struggle reveal how the emotional energy required of caregiving and the effort demanded of caregivers to maintain positive relationships with their employers leave little time and emotional space for engaging in broader political campaigns.

For other caregivers, avoiding direct discussions about politics means choosing not to challenge employers using the legal language of rights discourse, even if in different circumstances they might wish to directly contest their employers’ assumptions, biases, and lack of knowledge. Sana, a caregiver, writer, and active community member from Nepal, suggests that the best approach to mitigating a hostile work environment in her employer’s home is to avoid confrontation altogether. When I ask whether she discusses migrant caregivers’ rights with her employers, she responds:
“They don’t like to talk (about it). I only talk with my agency if I need something because I don’t want to fight and I don’t want some problems. I don’t talk in front of them ever in case they don’t like it. So many of my friends are like this—if employers mind the law, they can give us rights, but if they don’t like, we can’t force them. So what law they can give us we can manage and that’s it.”

Rather than directly confronting her employer when he abuses the law, she chooses to rely upon his good will, and at opportune moments, to covertly complain to employment agencies about breaches in the work contract. Especially because Sana has already been in Israel for four years and three months, and is now undocumented, angering her employers by “(forcing) them” to obey the law could lead to job loss and a forfeiture of income that she needs to “help (her) children for the future.” She thus best increases her long-term welfare agency by mitigating the risk of a permanent strain on the employment relationship. In this way she safeguards her ability to provide for her children by choosing when to remain silent in the face of poor working conditions:

“If something happens, it’s so frightening. What to do? We need money and want a job so we need to keep quiet. We are without family, without nothing, so of course it’s a challenge. We do everything here. What we do they don’t like, and sometimes they can scold us. Sometimes we think, ‘I can’t live, I can’t go on,’ but when we came here we thought we could do it. That’s why we accepted these challenges.”

For Sana, the decision to “keep quiet” figures prominently into her long-term calculus for how to finance her nineteen-year-old son’s engineering school education. She says that she plans to stay for at least two more years in Israel to pay his tuition, and hopes to remain with her current employer until her son graduates. After he finishes his education, she wishes to return home to Nepal.

More pronounced than the tendency to avoid public forms of political contestation and direct confrontation were interviewees’ highly positive estimations of Israel as a
Jewish state. With few exceptions, interviewees expressed support for Israel as a Jewish state, and except in two instances, did not express criticisms. Relatedly, their feelings towards Palestinians ranged from apathy to fear and antipathy. Here the need for “social recognition” plays prominently into migrant caregivers’ strategies for increasing their welfare agency; replicating and internalizing the attitudes of Jewish-Israelis as the hegemonic social group not only places them within their employers’ good graces and increases their control over their working conditions; it also helps to make meaning of their subordinate roles and establish a sense of self-coherence. As I will address in subsequent sections, other factors also impact their political attitudes towards Israel, such as their experiences of political violence in Israel, the stories of employer abuse they hear from co-nationals working in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and the economic and social opportunities that their earning potential in Israel affords.  

Of all the interviewees I spoke to about Israeli politics, most ardent in his support for Israel was Sam, a mathematics teacher from Nepal working in a small city outside of Tel Aviv. Throughout our conversation he portrayed Israel as a beacon of democracy, human rights, and civility in a region besieged by its anti-democratic Arab neighbors. Towards the start of our conversation, he remarked: “in my language, they say bread and meat do not come together, but here, it comes together.” In his description of how he chose to migrate to Israel, Sam relies upon tropes often deployed by Israeli government officials on the far-right end of the political spectrum:  

“I studied in Google what is the condition here, is this an Arab country? I looked in the encyclopedia and it is not a Gulf country and it is not an Arab country... it is democratic and developed, but from time to time there is milchama (war), fights with the neighbors, but Israel is a very powerful country and no need to worry.”
Notably, Sam’s description of Israel as “developed” and “not an Arab country” closely replicates portrayals of Israel in the Western mainstream media as “the only democracy in the middle east,” and an emblem of modernity and economic opportunity in an otherwise hostile, Arab-majority region (Sadowski 1993; Said 1981). Following this description, Sam expresses his enthusiasm for Israelis and for Zionist nationalist culture:

“Nepalese caregivers love Israel and Israeli people and Israeli culture. I am almost five years in Israel and now I am enjoying Israeli food and Israeli culture. Chag ha’atzmaut (Independence Day), and kookim (firecrackers). They celebrate it and every house puts the degel (flag) on the top of their houses and also this feeling unites the Jewish people. They feel that Israel is our house and we are the single family and our enemies are surrounding us and we are between the Arab countries and that’s why we need to be strong…we don’t need to fear any terrorists.”

Sam’s depiction of Yom Ha’atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day, is equally as striking in its replication of the Zionist narrative of the “birth” of Israel.7 In describing “Israelis,” by whom he presumably means Jewish-Israelis, as a “single family,” he demonstrates a willingness to adopt this rhetoric in interpreting his own role as a caregiver for “the Jewish people.” As I address in subsequent chapters, nationalist depictions of Israel as “one big family” fighting to survive amidst a sea of Arab enemies have been invoked during various moments of national crisis as a means of naturalizing a racial distinction between Jews and Palestinians and justifying laws and policies of apartheid. Such distinctions not only construct Israel’s racially and ethnically diverse Jewish citizenry as unified; they also portray “the” Jewish-Israeli body politic as necessarily European, erasing the presence of non-European Mizrahi Jews who comprise over half of Israel’s Jewish population (Lavie 2014; Shohat 2006).

Other caregivers expressed similar admiration for Israeli patriotism, attributing Israel’s “developed” economic status to its nationalistic ardor. Sana explains:
“Here people are so for country they live, they don’t care about anything as much, they love country...that’s why it’s so developed...because here for their country they contribute, they do anything. I like people here, they are devoted.”

Sana then notes that her admiration for Israel has inspired the book she is writing “about Nepali people who work here and how we can learn from here for our country.” Like other caregivers I interviewed, both Sam and Sana attribute their admiration for Israel to what they perceive to be Israel’s relative level of development. The widespread examples of Zionist nationalism they observe in Israel thus become a way of explaining Israel’s relative economic power in comparison with Nepal. Despite these positive estimations of Israel, however, later in our conversation, Sana describes Israel as being “like a prison.” She bases her assertion on the comparative treatment of migrant caregivers in Canada, who are granted permanent residency after two years of working as caregivers. Whereas in Canada “you can go wherever you like” and “you have freedom,” Sana explains that in Israel you are confined to the home and prevented from taking root. This ambiguity reveals a more general ambivalence that many migrant caregivers articulated towards Israel and towards the process of migration, feeling at once “lucky” for the chance to provide for their families, while at the same time feeling trapped by Israeli law, downward social mobility, and continual subordination to their employers.

For Sana and Sam, internalizing and replicating Zionist attitudes about Israel allows them to navigate this sense of ambivalence and the many contradictory experiences that characterize migration more broadly (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). Demonstrating support for Israel and adopting various Zionist tropes allows caregivers to ingratiate themselves into Jewish-Israeli families and to create a sense of self-coherence through which they can make sense of their continual subordination to Israeli employers.
Ingratiating oneself into Jewish-Israeli households and into Jewish society can increase the chances that employers will pay their caregivers on time, respect their rest hours, grant them time off to visit their families and friends, and help them navigate Israeli legal bureaucracy when their visas expire.

Crucially, the adoption of Zionist tropes and expressions of appreciation for Israel that Sana and Sam illustrate are also reinforced by the negative stories many migrant caregivers hear from friends and recruitment agents about abusive working conditions in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Cyprus, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Alice, a caregiver from the Philippines, explains that among agencies in Manila, Israel is viewed as “very good in terms of human rights and the salary and the nature of job.” She notes, “the money is easy here…even though it’s depressing on the individual, in general it’s a good job because you can practice your rights. In other countries like in Hong Kong, Singapore, Cyprus, you can not.” Many interviewees regularly referenced the deplorable working conditions within the Gulf states where caregivers receive “very small salaries” and “are treated very bad.” The complex economic, social, political, and legal restrictions shaping caregivers’ decisions about where to migrate continue to change and transform as they navigate working conditions in their new “host country” (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). The ambivalent and contradictory feelings of appreciation, depression, excitement, and boredom characterizing migration also influence their strategies for making the most of limiting situations.

“The Palestinian Issue”: Apathy and Fear
The general hesitance among migrant caregivers to avoid contentious political discussion about Israel manifested in their hesitance to talk at length about Israeli-Palestinian politics. What I was able to glean about their political orientations towards Palestinians was therefore through our broader conversations about their first-hand experiences of violence while living in Israel. For some interviewees, these experiences shaped their positive estimations of the Israeli government. Two interviewees said they vividly remembered working along border towns during the second intifada, seeking shelter during long nights of rocket attacks, and living in kibbutzim along the Gazan border. Patricia describes the inescapable feeling of war that she experienced for the first time in Israel:

“All the time there is a war, there is a problem. First time in my life I experience war was here in Israel, never in the Philippines. When I finished my second job, I went to Haifa, in Haifa there is a war! So I go look for a job there, there is a beit avot (elderly home). In one month, the missiles and the warnings started. I shook. I’m nervous, really! I think I will be dead or I think the missiles will come to us in our place, so I decide to go to another place, to find another job.”

Patricia’s description illustrates the centrality of war and violence to some caregivers’ experiences of Israel, and the ways it shapes their conceptions of what it means to be Jewish-Israeli. Similarly, June, a migrant caregiver from the Philippines working near the border with Gaza, describes her experiences living under rocket fire:

“Before November last year, you are here? You can see up there the katush! (rocket)...When you’re scared like that, you don’t know if it falls what we’re gonna do... Kol yom yesh (it was there every day)...You can feel the shake from adama (ground), you can feel it all. Last year a few aravim (Arabs) entered into the kibbutz, and we hear they killed soldiers. You can see all of Gaza. You see the trees, the light. We are in a danger zone. You get used it to there. All day, all night.”

June’s description illuminates the constant fear and anxiety that has characterized her experience of Israel; working in “a danger zone” along the border with Gaza has been a
focal part of her experience as a caregiver. At the same, her description of “aravim” as a menacing and looming presence perpetually waiting to attack demonstrates how particular narratives about the danger and threat of Palestinians get reproduced on a daily basis. Her portrayal of “aravim” is also influenced by her Jewish-Israeli boyfriend, a former Israeli soldier who was stationed in Gaza during Israel’s 2005 military disengagement from illegal settlements. That military conscription is mandatory for all Jewish citizens means that much of what migrant caregivers hear about Palestinians is through similarly militarized perspectives.

Of course, there were also observable exceptions to these expressions of solidarity with Jewish-Israelis. The most notable was from David, a caregiver from the Philippines working in Jerusalem, who regularly visits the West Bank to spend time with Palestinian friends, an experience he says is “like being in a different country.” During our interview he remarked upon the disparities between Israel and the West Bank, noting that “they’re very poor there, they’re miserable, and here you see that, yeah, they’re kind of rich.” In contrast to other interviewees, David had considerable exposure to Palestinian narratives beyond those offered by employers and the Zionist mainstream media. David even noted that the political discussions he has had with his Palestinian friends have informed his decision to reject a position as a caregiver in an Israeli settlement. Tellingly, at the same time that David possesses a humanizing and sympathetic view of Palestinians, like many other caregivers, he says that he avoids political conflict with his employer by keeping secret his visits to the West Bank. When I ask whether he discusses Israeli-Palestinian politics with his employer, he answered, “not that much, because his daughter and all of his grandchildren by his daughter live in settlements, which I don’t really like.”
Undoubtedly there are multiple other examples of such views; I was told by a few caregivers about romantic relationships between caregivers and Palestinians, and was asked several times to share my own opinions about Israel’s treatment of Palestinians.

Finally, my own position as a researcher also plays into the strategic decision of interviewees to reveal or withhold particular opinions and beliefs about Israel, Jewish-Israelis, and Palestinians. As an Ashkenazi Jewish-American, I was inextricably linked to the Israeli establishment during our conversations, irrespective of my own political beliefs. My own linkage with the American and Israeli governments, my unrestricted ability to traveling throughout Israel/Palestine, my right to “claim” citizenship, and my effective immunity from deportation suffused our interactions. My position as a member of the American academy and within a broader network of Israeli colleagues, activists, and friends connected to human rights lawyers, civil society organizations, and UN workers further placed me within a position of power and influence. Each of these associations affected the extent to which interviewees understood me in relation to their own employers, and the degree to which they expressed solidarity with Jewish-Israelis and Jews more broadly.

*Attitudes Towards Eritrean and Sudanese Refugees*

While migrant domestic workers I interviewed expressed attitudes of apathy and fear towards Palestinians, their attitudes towards the presence of Eritrean and Sudanese refugees revealed much greater animosity. Their decidedly more pronounced articulations of suspicion and enmity reflect, in part, the physical, social, and legal proximity of migrant caregivers and Eritrean and Sudanese refugees in Israel.
Living alongside migrant caregivers in the south Tel Aviv neighborhood of Neve Sha’anan, East African refugees have significantly transformed the demographic makeup of the area since first arriving in 2006. While Sudanese refugees originally came to Israel to escape violence in Darfur, Eritreans began migrating to avoid forced conscription and death orders by the state militia. Since their arrival the Israeli government has adopted a combined policy of extended incarceration without trial, sweeping harassment, and forced deportation. Because they are often not granted work permits, most refugees are forced to work illegally, earning income under poor working conditions and many times being forced to take shelter on the streets of south Tel Aviv (Shani et. al. 2014; Fezehai 2015; Yaron, Hashimshony-Yaffe, and Campbell 2013; Yacobi 2011). Attempts on the part of right-wing members of the Knesset to thoroughly stigmatize asylum seekers have incited citizen-orchestrated hate crimes against Eritrean and Sudanese communities, such as the firebombing of asylum seekers’ apartments, and of a kindergarten created for the children refugees (Matar 2012, Simpson 2014). Such incidents are, in the words of former Deputy Prime Minister Eli Yishai, part of an attempt “to make their lives miserable” until they voluntarily deport themselves (Fezehai 2015). In efforts to stigmatize refugees as racialized sexual predators, Yishai has even alleged that asylum seekers are guilty of raping Israeli women, whom he says “do not complain out of fear of being stigmatized as having contracted AIDS” (Haaretz 2012). Such tropes draw upon notions of Jewish female sexuality as the “vessel of reproduction” of the Jewish body politic, and a marker of racial continuity and purity, and asylum seekers as the “alien bodies” who wish to enter the body politic “from without” (Mills 2011, 602). Tellingly, Yishai has publicly declared Eritrean
and Sudanese refugees to be “infiltrators, (who) along with Palestinians, will bring a quick end to the Zionist dream” (Fisher-Ilan 2016).

Such racist rhetoric frames the public discourse around Eritrean and Sudanese refugees, influencing the views migrant caregivers adopt and the strategic ways they represent themselves as non-threatening, non-Jewish others. As one interviewee remarked, employers “always see blacks as a negative sign—they don’t care what they are facing.”

For several migrant caregivers I interviewed, many of whom have long considered Neve Sha’an and the surrounding neighborhoods home, the presence of refugees has brought an increased presence of law enforcement in an area already flooded with deportation police, and the transformation of Levinsky Park, the central area of communal gathering for residents of Neve Sha’an, into a meeting place of public political activism. Whereas migrant caregivers tend to avoid publicly identifying with political causes, asylum seekers regularly organize protests that adopt sharp critiques of their treatment by the state. While interviewees depicted their own presence in Israel as “legal” and uncontroversial, they viewed that of asylum seekers as “illegal” and contentious.

Interviewees tended to fault asylum seekers directly for the increase in crime in south Tel Aviv, which has risen as a result of unemployment, poverty, overcrowding and a lack of government resources across all populations in the area. They thus ignored the rise in crimes committed by Israelis, and remained largely uncritical of the government’s response to refugees more broadly (McDonnell 2013).

When I asked Sana whether migrant caregivers and asylum seekers ever engage in joint political action, she responded:
“We are not joined. Refugees have their own life and caregivers have their own life. It is Israelis’ country and their rules they can follow as they like. When we come, we come only for five years, not seven, nine, ten.”

She then adds that while migrant caregivers pay money to work in Israel, asylum seekers “come for free.” Notably, Sana contrasts the position of migrant caregivers with that of asylum seekers by emphasizing her own desire to be permanently temporary. According to this portrayal, whereas migrant caregivers wish to remain in Israel only long enough to earn a specified amount of money, asylum seekers advocate for a permanent incorporation into the state that would fundamentally alter the composition of the Jewish body politic.

Interviewees’ opinions were also a result of a marked shift in the gender composition of Neve Sha’anan. The disproportionate percentage of men within Eritrean and Sudanese communities, and women within migrant caregiver communities, has led to a heightened sense of fear among women migrant caregivers, some of whom regularly experience sexual harassment (McDonnell 2013; Shani et. al. 2014). Yet their descriptions of these incidents tended to manifest themselves in anti-African and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Amita explains:

“Before they came I’d come home two, three in the night, it’s no problem. But two weeks ago I come to the park at ten at night. They are saying very bad things and following me… I think it’s not good, the Sudan people. The woman is no problem, with the children, they are innocent. But men, the Muslim, they don’t care about responsibility.”

On the one hand, Amita’s description details the very real fear of rape and robbery many caregivers have experienced living in an impoverished, high-crime neighborhood with few legal mechanisms for holding perpetrators accountable. At the same time, she echoes the rhetoric of right-wing Knesset member Eli Yishai by portraying Sudanese asylum seekers as inherently dangerous sexual threats, and as solely responsible for sexual harassment; their racialized sexualization as predators underlies the narratives she tells. Like other
interviewees, Amita also states that caregivers are vulnerable to muggings and theft, yet attributes the increase in crime solely to the presence of refugees:

“It’s a very big problem in Tel Aviv. One time they robbed my house. They know to follow us because we have money in the bags and we don’t have a place to keep it. A lot of girls they steal from, they come on the bikes and they steal, even the passport…If they want to stay Israel can put them in camp and stay inside, not in the park. If we want to rest and go to the park, we can not go to the park. They are very dirty... It’s dirty not before.”

Though not expressed in sexualized terms, Brian’s description similarly suggests a racialized anxiety about “the Africans,” whom he also perceives as making the neighborhood more dangerous:

“We don’t have a relationship…there are some Israelis who are fighting for their rights. But for us, for the Filipinos living in that area for six years, we didn’t encounter problems when they were not in the area. But now the Filipinos, they’re afraid. Caregivers walk in the evening; you’ll see how Filipina girls hold their bags.”

Brian’s articulations of fear and antagonism are representative of the general resentment interviewees expressed towards Sudanese and Eritrean refugees, whom they blamed for the poor living conditions in Neve Sha’ananan. Yet the accounts that Brian, Amita, and Sana offer also illustrate an anxiety about being associated with the migrant population most stigmatized, criminalized, and sexualized by the Israeli government. They thus differentiated between themselves and refugees as a means of establishing their own presence as less criminal, and as a means of signaling that they do not wish to make claims to permanent membership upon the state. Whereas Eritrean and Sudanese refugees draw upon the language of international human rights and refugee law to demand that the Israeli state grant them asylum, migrant caregivers adopt the language of stigmatization to distance themselves from refugees, and from the demands for permanent membership that
they make. From the purview of the Zionist establishment, such claims to asylum would translate into a permanent shift in the demographic composition of the Jewish body politic, a shift that renders the presence of refugees unequivocally political. Migrant caregivers’ affirmations of their own temporariness are thus part of a broader attempt to reassure their employers and the state that they do not wish to engage in the very political project of threatening the Jewish body politic. Non-Jewish, temporary migrants in Israel constitute a hierarchical system of threats to the Jewishness of the state. It is within the context of this hierarchy that we must locate migrant caregivers’ attempts to distance themselves from refugees, and from activities that may be read as political.

An “Act of Political Warfare:” Collective Welfare Provision and Mutual Aid

Though migrant caregivers may represent themselves as firmly rooted within an imagined body impolitic, they organize for their collective well-being and navigate oppressive laws and ideologies on a daily basis. It is precisely the role that migrant networks of support play in collective welfare provision and mutual aid—as opposed to overtly engaging in political protest—that allows them to secure their own livelihoods as individuals, safeguard the communal sending of remittances to their home countries, and ensure that their many social, cultural, national, and religious communities thrive in a state that stymies the vitality of non-Jewish collectivities.

Because the underlying ideological aim of Israeli citizenship law and migration policy is to safeguard the demographic composition of the Jewish body politic, policies and procedures emanating from these originary laws are intended to prevent the permanent rootedness of non-Jewish inhabitants. Inadequate access to health care, a
decent standard of living, education, childcare, and legal representation are the logical consequences of these laws, policies and protocols (Drori 2009; Willen 2010). By collectively pooling financial, legal, and social resources, migrant caregivers are able to resist state efforts to reduce them to individualized workers whose sole existence in Israel is predicated upon their labor. The communal pooling of resources through pre-existing national, ethnic, social, and religious networks whose missions are avowedly apolitical provides a means of decreasing their individual vulnerability as workers without imperiling their livelihoods.10

Collective welfare provisioning is particularly important for terminally ill migrant caregivers lacking comprehensive health care. The risk of becoming uninsured is especially high for unemployed and undocumented caregivers who fall ill and must pay out-of-pocket for the cost of hospitalizations. Because any attempts to access health care would require registration with the Ministry of Interior, a process that could lead to deportation, undocumented workers must rely exclusively upon the good will of employers and the mutual aid of migrant communities for health services. By ensuring the survival of individual migrants, community networks not only strengthen their own welfare and social support systems, but also increase the total amount of remittances that communities are able to send home. Interviewees thus described the communal provisioning of healthcare as a moral responsibility as well as a practical means of remitting money that could help regional and national economies.11

Saul, a caregiver working outside of Tel Aviv, organizes a mutual aid fund for Sri Lankan migrants living in Israel. In this capacity, he organizes and facilitates large sporting events, cultural celebrations, beauty pageants, and fundraisers. He also collects a
small fee from members’ monthly salaries and charges participation fees at all events with the aim of financially assisting caregivers whose insurance does not cover the excessive cost of hospitalization. The fund also provides food and shelter to undocumented migrants who cannot find work, and funds community development projects in Sri Lanka. As his wife, also a caregiver, notes, “the important thing is if someone’s sick, everyone’s working. Who helps them? Four, five, girls got cancer. It was a very bad situation. We helped them. How much we can help, we do. We raised five hundred dollars.” Saul adds, “The association was our plan when we came here and saw no one was helping. The embassy cannot help us. We had to do something if we were going out (of Sri Lanka) to Israel. We are doing this from our heart, but every time we can not do this. It’s hard in Israel.”

Both Saul and his wife portray the fund on the one hand as an obligation to their community, but also as a necessity arising out of the absence of other forms of social support. Without the association, there would be no network to fill the resource gap left by the state and by the Sri Lankan Embassy. Yet the ability of community associations to provide mutual aid and support also mitigates the degree to which migrant caregivers are dependent upon one employer for their health care needs, their salaries, their visas, and their financial stability. By helping individual migrants meet their basic needs independently of their employers, community associations such as the Welfare Fund mitigate the impacts of indentured servitude by reducing the costs of walking away from an abusive or exploitative employer.

This sense of obligation is not only a means of ensuring individuals’ survival, but also of contributing to the economy and to community-building projects in caregivers’
home countries. Collective welfare provision thus comprises a form of national support rather than an individual act of charity. Abigail, a caregiver from the Philippines working in Tel Aviv, is involved in a regional organization for Filipinos in Israel. Though the mission of the organization is to host cultural events and fundraisers that support the building of houses and schools in the Philippines, Abigail and others use the organization’s pre-existing communication structure to mobilize help for caregivers from her home region who are sick or experiencing financial crisis. When a member of her organization was recently hospitalized, Abigail raised money to help pay for her medical treatment, created a visiting and meal delivery schedule, and raised money so the ill member of her community could travel to the Philippines to see her family. Like Saul, she explains that helping those with inadequate resources in Israel is “like an obligation. If one of us is needy, we need to give.”

Abigail has also helped collect funds to alleviate the burden of debt accrued from exorbitant recruitment agency fees, asking for donations from caregivers who have already paid off their loans and pooling money for those who have recently begun working in Israel. She adds that another common form of collective debt relief is the mutual shouldering of interest payments on loans, which also enables remittances to more quickly flow home. By mitigating financial vulnerability and lowering the stakes of quitting an exploitative employment arrangement, collective debt relief also reduces the degree to which caregivers are indentured to their employers. Particularly because Israel has not signed ILO Convention 189, which prohibits recruitment agencies from charging exorbitant recruitment fees to migrant domestic workers, collective debt alleviation is essential to combatting indentured servitude more broadly. By extension, it is also crucial
to the survival of the many migrant communities in Israel that are the main sources of social and emotional support for caregivers.

The mutual aid so crucial to community and individual survival also extends to the realm of legal defense and advocacy. Through the communal pooling of legal resources across informal migrant networks, caregivers attempt to hold employers and recruitment agencies accountable to contracts and labor law, and assert their right to live and work in Israel without being bound to one employer. Under the conditions of legal dependency arising under the Slavery Law, migrant caregivers are treated as obstacles to the legal protection of citizens rather than legal subjects worthy of protection themselves. These circumstances prove especially challenging when an employer accuses a caregiver of abuse or theft. Saul’s mutual aid fund attempts to address issues that arise out of this situation of legal dependence, providing jail support and raising funds for legal services:

“When an employer has a complaint, the caregiver doesn’t have a lawyer. Last Thursday one lady had a fight with an employer and then quit. After one week, police called, (and said), ‘come to the police, we have a complaint against you.’ She went to the Jerusalem police, and they put her in jail and told her she couldn’t be let out. They told her, ‘if you want to get out, bring an Israeli man for the bailout. Any Israeli, they can sign.’ For nothing she was put in jail; she didn’t do nothing.”

Such forms of legal dependence require migrant caregivers to either hire expensive lawyers or to rely upon the limited legal services of advocacy organizations. In reality, migrant caregivers must develop ad hoc measures for defending themselves in response to the specific accusations they face. Saul explains that under such conditions, the collective pooling of money for lawyer’s fees and bail bonds is vital to legal defense efforts. Through his fund, Saul helps generate money for lawyer’s fees that would otherwise be too costly for caregivers. He and other community members also serve as points of
communication for caregivers being held in police custody. The sporting events, social gatherings, and beauty pageants his organization hosts thus serve the dual purpose of building community and raising money for contingent emergency situations that caregivers would otherwise have to navigate on their own.

Some caregivers also express the importance of sharing legal knowledge through migrant networks as a means of increasing their bargaining power with employers. The experiences of James, a migrant caregiver from West Bengal, India reflect the familiar situation of many caregivers who learn employment and immigration law in their spare time and become lawyers on their own behalf. When he first began working for his current employer, James received less than the required minimum salary. After he quit his job for a period of one month due to under-compensation, his employer’s family refused to give him the social benefits and severance pay to which he was entitled. As is commonly the case among caregivers, the recruitment agency sided with James’ employer. He remarks:

“I didn’t keep quiet…I fought with the agency and I told them the law. I quoted the law. They were not accepting the fact that it was in the law. Finally they gave me what I’m supposed to get. I fight for my rights and I got it and from that time on they obey the law.”

James adds that leveraging the language of legality is “why they respect me.” His legal knowledge has since become an asset to his broader network of friends who have migrated from the Darjeeling region of India, and he helps other friends file claims against employers who violate the Law of Severance Act through local Israeli advocacy groups. Similarly, those caregivers who have successfully navigated legal bureaucracy, particularly with regards to severance pay, often accompany other friends to the Ministry of Interior or other government offices to help them claim the salaries owed to them.
Knowledge of the law and the ability to navigate Israeli bureaucracy thus become a community resource increasing caregivers’ bargaining and legal power.

Legal defense takes other forms, such as visiting—often secretly—Kav Laoved during days off from work and attending its “Know Your Rights” seminars, taking photographs and collecting other forms of documentation that prove employers are demanding work of caregivers beyond the contract, and filing complaints with social workers at recruitment agencies. As I will discuss in chapter four, these networks of mutual aid and support are able to increase their reach through various Internet platforms. Networks of communal welfare and mutual aid are thus contingent channels through which migrant caregivers resist the many forms of antilife surrounding them. The communal provisioning of health care services, the alleviating of debt bondage, and the joint leveraging of legal power decrease migrant caregivers’ reliance upon employers for their basic needs, thereby mitigating the impacts of indentured servitude. Just as importantly, they ensure the survival and vibrancy of migrant communities in Israel without putting them at risk of appearing to be a political threat to the state.

**Conclusion: Surviving the State**

In a follow-up interview a year after her victory on *X-Factor*, Rose “Osnang” Fostanes asserts that visa restrictions have made her current situation more challenging than if she had exclusively remained a caregiver in the eyes of the state:

“I think I might have been better off altogether if I hadn’t won the show and would have continued working as a caregiver. At least that way I could keep on taking care of my family and send them money every month” (Stern 2015).
With neither an artist’s visa nor a work visa, Rose now lives as an undocumented migrant, hoping that the Ministry of Interior will make another legal exception on her behalf. In trying to be both a caregiver and an artist in Israel, Rose became legally unintelligible to the state.

It is within this restrictive legal atmosphere that we must understand migrant caregivers’ strategies for gaining greater control over the work process, representing themselves as apolitical, adopting political views that may seem to contradict their political interests as non-Jewish laborers, and forming communities based upon cultural and national identity rather than a political agenda. It is also instructive to view migrant caregivers’ acts of resistance, resilience, and survival, both individual and collective, overt and covert, as revealing of the reaches of state power. The 2002 and 2009 closures of several migrant churches and community strongholds in south Tel Aviv and the widespread deportation campaigns that resulted are illustrative of the threat that migrants pose to Israel’s demographic regime when they cease to exist as individual workers and visibly manifest their presence as members of non-Jewish collectivities.12 The influence and extent of Israel’s de jure ethno-racial hierarchy and its policies of isolating individual workers are achieved in part through the environment of fear that such targeted campaigns generate throughout entire communities (Willen 2007). To be deported is not only to lose one’s right to earn a living in Israel, but also to be removed without warning from one’s support networks that have become part of the social fabric of caregivers’ everyday lives. The fear that they can be suddenly removed from the lives and communities they have built is perhaps the greatest cause of anxiety in the day-to-day lives of migrants (Willen 2007).
Activism among migrant caregivers may therefore not take the form of public protest or worker collectives that overtly challenge the state, but such visible manifestations of collective politicization would undermine any such attempts to thwart state violence. Relatedly, the gap between migrant caregivers’ own treatment within Israel/Palestine and their expressions of support for the Israeli government are, rather than contradictory, indicative of the complex ways that daily decisions are shaped by “ethical exclusions” and the prioritization of investment in Jewish-Israeli citizen-subjects. Their negotiation strategies also reveal how the transnational division of labor—premised in turn upon the notion of a racialized, gendered “foreign” laborer—permeates individual relationships and enables worker exploitation. As I explore in chapter two, these “ethical exclusions” have far-reaching consequences for the relationships that develop inside the home between migrant caregivers and their Jewish-Israeli employers.

NOTES
1 With the exception of Haaretz and +972, mainstream news sources in Israel overwhelmingly portrayed Fostanes’ win as, in the words of the Associated Press, a “feel-good story” that was emblematic of Israel’s embrasure of diversity (Associated Press 2014). See, for example, Jeffay 2014, Jerusalem Post 2014, Viva Sarah Press 2014, Kaufman 2014, Times of Israel 2014.
2 The binding arrangement, called the “Slavery Law” by migrant rights’ activists, was ruled unconstitutional by the Israeli High Court of Justice in 2006, then reinstated by the National Labor Courts in 2011 (see HCJ 2006, ACRI 2011). According to Idit Lebovitch, director of migrant advocacy organization Kav LaOved, the restrictions passed after Fostanes’ win in 2014 provide the guidelines for the strict and swift implementation of the Slavery Law (see Lebovitch 2014).
3 Erez Kaganovitz, the founder of Humans of Tel Aviv who featured this particular interview with Rose, describes his traveling exhibition as a way to show “the true face of Israel” to the growing tide of college students supporting the Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement (Eichner 2015).
4 Willen argues, for instance, that following the intensification of deportations in 2002, migrant laborers “were regarded as a politically palatable alternative to the Palestinian workers who had been driven out of the Israeli labor market in the wake of the first intifada, or Palestinian popular uprising, in the late 1980s,” so long as “they made no efforts to gain formal membership or even to organize and demand rights” (Willen 2010).
5 In using the word “agency,” Khader refers to “the ability to enhance one’s welfare,” as distinct from usage of the term in some strands of liberal feminist theory, which employs the term in the context of “feminist agency,” or “the ability to identify and change sexist norms” (Khader 2014, 224 – 31).
Several migrant caregivers with whom I spoke relayed stories from their own experiences working in the Gulf States, or recalled the stories of their friends. Overall, they described their working and living conditions in Israel as much more preferable to those in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and, in addition, Cyprus. Yet many were compelled to choose Gulf States over Israel because the recruitment fees were much lower, even though the salary was far below those in other states.

7 *Yom Ha’atzmaut* is a widely celebrated holiday among Jewish-Israelis across Israel. It is common on *Yom Ha’atzmaut*, the most patriotic Zionist celebration of the year, to see the streets and storefronts decorated with Israeli flags and people celebrating in the streets. Another commonly circulating image is that of an inflatable hammer the color of the Israeli flag, sometimes two feet long, which is distributed widely among celebrants. It follows *Yom Hazikaron* every year, the day commemorating Israeli soldiers who have been killed through their service in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). There have also been incidents most years of Jewish-Israeli activists being arrested for publicly commemorating the Palestinian Nakba, or disaster, falling on the same date (see Matar 2012).

8 Asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan largely do work in the restaurant and sanitation sectors, sweeping boardwalks, washing dishes, and taking part in day labor construction projects (see Shani et. al. 2014).

9 In recent years, Levinsky Park has become an active meeting place for protests organized by Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers. It is the central organizing spot where leaders from the Eritrean and Sudanese communities plan actions and formulate political strategies.

10 Looking specifically at Filipina migrant caregivers in Israel, Liebelt argues that religious communities are a crucial source of support, not only providing a space for emotional support and friendships, but also providing new meaning to the experience of migration by framing it as a religious mission (Liebelt 2011).

11 As Rodriguez (2002) asserts, in the case of Filipino overseas migrants, collecting money for the purpose of supporting various community projects at home is also a result of the pressure migrants face from the Philippine government to send money back for the purpose of “development.”

12 In 2002, the Israeli Ministry of Immigration and Integration created a policy to deport 50,000 migrant workers a year; in 2002, roughly 6,000 were deported alone. Among the deportation practices reported were the holding of migrants without documents in jails for months, the “entrapment” of migrants visiting imprisoned relatives in jail; the abduction of parents who leave their children behind; and the occasional use of shackles. Due to extensive advocacy by Israeli human rights organizations, instances of these practices have diminished, though not altogether been eliminated (Ellman and Laacher 2003).
Chapter Two

Intimacy and Alienage: Migrant Caregivers Inside the Home

In this chapter I consider the relationship between migrant caregivers and their Jewish-Israeli citizen-employers as it arises within the household. Based upon interviews with migrant caregivers, I examine how the Slavery Law and debt bondage shape the daily challenges migrant caregivers face inside Jewish-Israeli homes. I also examine their strategies for resisting exploitation and garnering greater control over the work process and their employment status. Following Romero (1992), I treat the household as a site of race, class, and gender conflict that reflects, perpetuates, and at times, challenges hierarchical social relations. I argue that the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer arrangement within the Jewish-Israeli household is both a localized reproduction of the “worker-producer”/“citizen-consumer relationship present across the transnational division of reproductive labor more broadly, and simultaneously, of relations particular to Israel as a de jure ethno-racial state.¹ More specifically, the dual constitution of migrant caregivers through the Slavery Law and related policies as both “close and intimate” and “foreign and alien” is evident in household relations of commodification and securitization, respectively (Mundlak and Shamir 2008, 166).² On the one hand, migrant caregivers’ role as providers of intimate care, and their portrayal by employers as “one of the family” serve to justify their commodification. This commodification both replicates their legal objectification under Israeli law, and reproduces the role of the Jewish-Israeli citizen as the citizen-employer/citizen-consumer who, in contradistinction to the majority
of Palestinian citizens of Israel for whom eldercare is unaffordable, is entitled to greater freedom from the reproductive realm of necessity. At the same time, the treatment of migrant caregivers as “foreign and alien” interlopers serves to justify surveillance practices within the home, and in doing so, legitimates the Jewish-Israeli citizen-employer/citizen-consumer as a guardian of the Jewish body politic and its racial boundaries (Mohanty 2003, 141; Mundlak and Shamir 2008, 166).

After detailing migrant caregivers’ daily routines and the most common challenges they encounter inside Israeli households, I examine two trends characterizing the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship, both of which replicate and reproduce social relations under Israel’s de jure ethno-racial hierarchy and neoliberal economic policies: the treatment of migrant caregivers as security threats that endanger the composition of the Jewish body politic, and their subjection to a cost-saving, commodifying logic by employers, under the assumption that caregiving is of an exceptionally intimate nature, and is therefore difficult to remunerate. I then consider the ways migrant caregivers disrupt the social relations reproduced within Israeli homes, contesting and negotiating exploitative treatment in order to survive within a situation where they possess minimal power.

**Naming the Challenges: Task Expansion, Emotional Stress, and Sexual Abuse**

As I have delineated in chapters one and two, by linking migrant caregivers’ visa status to their employment status, the binding arrangement, also known by migrant rights advocates as the Slavery Law, hinders migrant caregivers’ freedom of movement and employment and severely limits their bargaining power. As a result, migrant caregivers
who have worked in Israel for more than the four years and three months visa limit or who have switched jobs more than three times must retain their current employer under any circumstance if they wish to remain legally in Israel. Migrant caregivers who have not paid off the debts incurred through exorbitant recruitment fees have especially weak bargaining power, as losing their job can cause them to default on their loans and to face deportation. For migrant caregivers who have sold land, jewelry, or other valuables to finance migration fees, defaulting on loans can incur social stigma for them and for their families. Further, migrant caregivers, unlike workers in all other labor sectors in Israel, are excluded from equal overtime pay entitlements granted under the Work and Rest Hours Law on the grounds that their labor is of an exceptionally intimate nature and therefore too difficult to remunerate per hour. As a result, their legal recourse for seeking payment for work they do beyond the contract is extremely limited. These laws and policies tying migrant caregivers’ visa status to their employment status, their lack of labor protections, and the government’s refusal to regulate the activities of recruitment agencies create a situation where employers can take advantage of migrant caregivers’ vulnerable legal positions and the general social undervaluing of their work with few, if any, formal consequences.

Task Expansion

One of the most common abuses occurring under the Slavery Law is the expansion of tasks beyond those designated in the work contract, and the resultant lack of compensation for round-the-clock labor. As I discuss in subsequent sections, task expansion is an effect of the legal and social commodification of live-in carework more broadly. Though under-compensation is common among vulnerable workers across
sectors, the intimate nature of carework and the assumption that it is inherently “women’s work,” and in particular, “migrant women’s work,” notoriously blurs the line between employer/employee and work/rest (Anderson 2000; Kav Laoved 2010). Task expansion is exacerbated by the structural segregation or “occupational ghettoization” of carework along lines of race and gender, which reinforce social constructions of work that posit particular bodies as more “innately” suited to specific kinds of labor (Lyons 2006; Mohanty 2003; Parreñas 2014; Romero 1991; Rollins 1984). Refusing to care for additional charges is made further difficult by employers’ expectations that a caregiver be, in Rollins’ words, “more than willing to undertake assigned tasks” and that she even “take pleasure in serving” (Rollins 1989, 167). The majority of interviewees said they are expected to care for multiple members of the household where they work, despite only being paid to care for one charge as designated in their contract. Linda, a caregiver from the Philippines in her early twenties, explains this phenomenon:

“In my previous job—they are the ones who took me from the Philippines—it was written in the contract that I’d be working with four people, and when I started working here I’m actually working with eight people so it’s illegal. So they wrote the wrong information in the contract so I told them it’s not fair because I’ve been working for eight people and not just my employer alone.”

Due to the lack of legal mechanisms for holding employers to the terms of the contract, many migrant caregivers see the form of task expansion Linda describes as inevitable. Ramona, a caregiver from the Philippines working for an elderly couple outside of Tel Aviv, notes: “We’re only supposed to take care of one person but we can not ignore the husband…They expect you to work for the couple.” Undoubtedly, refusing to care for the spouse of an employer is particularly difficult for migrant caregivers who have overstayed their visa or switched employers more than twice.
Another facet of task expansion results from employers’ assumption that migrant caregivers must willingly perform the role of housekeeper, despite that their contract only requires of them occasional, light cleaning. For some caregivers, these expectations contrasted starkly with the way recruitment agents presented the job to them before migrating. Rahul, a former steel factory manager from India, notes that his employer regularly asks him to clean the house thoroughly, despite the terms of his contract:

“When I came here I did work like a maid. People are not going according to law…If they follow the law they have to pay us a lot of money and they can’t pay. Before I came here I looked at the website and I read everything about how many hours I have to do, what I have to do here—they said if we see something we have to clean it, but not like cleaners. Here they say, ‘here is dust, clean it!’ Like torture!...Some people I think they are crazy. They don’t know anything about humanity.”

The sense of surprise and outrage Rahul expresses at the expectation that he also serve as his employer’s housecleaner was echoed by Stephanie, a high school teacher from the Philippines working in Jerusalem. She notes, “I had very nice expectations. I thought I’d be wearing a white gown and going to the hospital and then coming home. I didn’t know I’d have to stay twenty-four hours with the person in the house.” The image Stephanie conjures of a white gown depicts the impression many migrant caregivers have before they arrive that they will be treated as nursing professionals and respected for the specialized skills they have, rather than treated as unskilled workers who are expected to clean dirt and dust.

Like Rahul and Ramona, many other interviewees depicted the terms of the contract as a figment of the Israeli legal imagination. This portrayal was especially true where the eight-hour work day was concerned. Ramona explains:

“It’s written that after eight you’re free, but not really. It’s twenty-four hours watching the patient because usually you’re alone. You have to be in the house to
look after them. After eight you have to be sensible about what they’re doing. If they need something, offer. You can go on the Internet, do some chores you didn’t do in the day like ironing, folding, cleaning toilet… At night it’s your rest time. But if your patient isn’t really ok they sleep near the bed of the employer, or sometimes in the same room. Even when she coughs I wake up.”

Not only are migrant caregivers such as Ramona expected to care for their employers round-the-clock; some even sleep in the same bed as their charges so that they can immediately tend to them if they wake during the night. Caregivers whose charges are acutely ill or suffering from dementia said they would remain on duty throughout the night because their charges would regularly wake in pain, from a nightmare, or to go to the bathroom. Because migrant caregivers are required to live with their employers, they do not have a means of protecting their night hours unless they break the law and become live-out caregivers.

Isolation, Loneliness, and Dealing with Dying

Other effects of the round-the-clock nature of carework are the often-expressed feelings of isolation and loneliness. Many migrant caregivers described this sense of isolation and sadness over the physical separation from families and loved ones, which were both a source of pain and a motivating factor for them to continue remitting money. On average, most caregivers with whom I spoke had the chance to visit home every two to four years. Nina, a caregiver and social worker from Nepal, only sees her son every few years. She has now been away from him for so long that she says he refuses to speak with her except on rare occasions. Describing the sadness this separation has caused her, she says,

“It’s so hard. We are not living, we are surviving. We don’t have our own life. I have a baby, I have a husband. I’m only working here for the money. What will
happen tomorrow, we don’t know. When I go to restaurant, when I eat pizza, I think about my son, my daughter, if they were here, how tasty. When a child is on the road and crying, I want to pick it up and hold it because I miss them. This is what I mean by surviving.”

The distinction Nina draws between living and surviving reveals the weighty choice many caregivers must make between visiting their loved ones and losing their right to re-enter Israel, and as a consequence, their means of providing for these same loved ones. June, a caregiver who was forced under Israeli law to send her newborn child back to the Philippines at three months, depicts this sadness as all-encompassing. At the same time, leaving the country to visit her son could result in her losing her visa:

“I want to (visit him), I would love to. But now I need to wait for the visa on my passport, cuz now I have a special visa and I’m afraid to go out. I don’t want to take the risk. If they do not allow me to get in, what can I do? You know, to separate your son after two months for the first time, zeh meod, meod kasheh (it’s very, very hard), but what can I do? Some people ask me, ‘how can you cope kacha (like this)? He’s your son and he’s your first child!’ I say, ‘I need to sacrifice. How can my son live? How can I support him?’ So for the meantime, it’s like kacha.”

Both Nina and June have been in Israel longer than fifty-one months and their ability to visit their families depends upon the health of their employers; if their employers died while they were gone, they could also potentially face barriers to re-entry. For the majority of caregivers who spend the first two years of their employment paying off high-interest loans, this isolation and loneliness is compounded by the feeling of being trapped within an undesirable job. Abigail explains:

“I was a real estate manager in the Philippines, so when I arrived I didn’t know I would be working like this…it was my first time working out of the country. I was crying all the time. I called my father. I was thinking of the money I paid. If I didn’t owe the money I paid to come here, I’d want to go home.”

Like many caregivers, Abigail’s first year in Israel was the most difficult, filled with the challenges of learning a new language, determining the needs of her employer, and
adjusting from being a graduate student in the Philippines to a full-time caretaker with far less independence. As is the case for many other caregivers, compounding Abigail’s feelings of alienation was her experience of feeling trapped in one employment arrangement by enormous debt.

In addition to the daily navigation of loneliness and separation from loved ones, another major challenge many interviewees identified was the pain of continually encountering illness and death. As Maria explains, a common joke among her friends is to ask each other, “how many employers have you killed?” Treating the subject of death with humor, she says, is perhaps the only way of processing the profound pain of separation that occurs when a charge dies, sometimes one immediately after another. For caregivers who share a close bond with their charges, the process of nursing them through the end of their life and being with them during the final moments of their life can be markedly painful. Abigail describes her relationship with her current and former employer as loving and close, and remembers vividly the trauma arising in the days after she watched her employer die of cancer:

“Especially the last night, when you hear the last breath. For two nights it was like that—you can hear her breath, and suddenly it stopped. I was suffering from it for a few months because I was hearing it every night, the breathing. And then one night, it just stopped. I’m drinking wine to fall asleep… I cried more than her children. I dunno, it’s part of the job. It’s like, you get attached with the one you give care, more than your parents I think sometimes, because you know how they suffer and we see everything, even the hardship.”

Abigail’s experience of feeling closer to her charge than her charge’s own children was echoed by several interviewees, even those who simultaneously faced many challenges in their employment relationship. Even for caregivers who did not deal as consistently with death, the closeness required of the relationship and their employers’ vulnerability and
dependence upon them made it difficult to separate their pain from that of their employers. Alice, a caregiver from the Philippines who has worked for nearly a decade in Israel, describes the vicarious pain she felt as she watched her most recent employer die of cancer:

“From my experience, cancer, you’re also killing me. Because you can feel the pain. Unlike Alzheimer’s, on and off, they’re sweet. But cancer, they want to kill themselves because of pain and you the mitapelet (caregiver), you are taking care of them, you are killing yourself also.”

The difficulty Alice has detaching her employer’s pain from her own is exacerbated by her work schedule, which rarely affords her time to leave the house. Because she lives and works in central Israel, she is unable to take breaks from work and spend quality time with friends in the Filipino community that could provide support. As I will discuss in chapter four, under such physically constraining circumstances, the Internet plays a crucial role in providing a social lifeline to caregivers.

For those caring for patients with Alzheimer’s or other forms of dementia, intense feelings of frustration regularly arise. Interviewees caring for such patients described feeling tormented by their charges’ behavior, however unintentional. Such stories included being regularly woken up in the middle of the night and forced to go on five hour car rides, being made to water the front lawn in the middle of the night and angering the neighbors, and being verbally abused. Stephanie, who cares for an elderly woman with Alzheimer’s in Jerusalem, notes:

“Some days you’re not in a good mood as a caregiver. You have your own problems, so you get irritated, and all the time she asks and asks and asks so many things, and she doesn’t know sometimes what she’s saying and she’s saying bad words to you, like, ‘You’re a bitch! I don’t want you to be here! Why are you here? Leave me alone! Go! Goodbye! I don’t want any stranger in my house!’ You have to be with her twenty-four hours and you have to bear everything, the good and the bad, so it’s difficult.”
Other caregivers echo Stephanie’s sentiment, describing the intense pressure of having to maintain composure in the face of verbal abuse. Two interviewees even described instances of employers transmitting past traumas onto them, referring to them as Germans or Nazis. Similarly, an Israeli employer I interviewed said his elderly mother refers to her caregiver as “commandant,” the name for the French soldier who he believes abused his mother during her migration from Rabat, Morocco to Israel during the 1940s. Discussing the difficulty of caring round-the-clock for an Alzheimer’s patient, and the rare instances of elder abuse that this feeling of being tormented engenders, Abigail notes,

“There are caregivers abusing their employers, but they’re not showing on t.v. the abuse the employers are doing with the caregivers. Those who are taking care of Alzheimer’s patients also need some rest. She’s working twenty-four hours and she doesn’t get sleep, she’s tortured. And then they don’t let her go out, because no one will replace her because the work is hard…So what do you expect? The one who beats her employer and loses her mind, it’s because she is tortured physically and mentally. When you’re being deprived and you have problems in the Philippines and you can’t even go out, it’s difficult!”

Such pressure to exhibit composure in the face of aggression and, more broadly, to display patience and resilience as “part of the job” can lead also to feelings of apathy and detachment. Rahul explains,

“When I started the job, I thought that at the end of my job I will not be human anymore. Now also I feel I am less human than before… Now I will not help if I saw some old lady. Before when I came if I saw some people if they are carrying something I help them myself.”

This sense of indifference to the pain of others that Rahul describes underscores the effects of working round-the-clock under what is sometimes an emotionally abusive situation. What is more, much of caregiving revolves around emotional performance, and displaying the patience and good-heartedness that employers expect of their caregivers,
regardless of one’s own feelings. As quitting is the only option for avoiding such performances, most caregivers must endure severe emotional, physical, and mental hardship as a part of the job. If anything, Rohit’s social status as a former factory manager from a middle-class family better equips him to quit than most other caregivers. For the majority who are in more precarious economic and social positions, quitting is a far less feasible option.

Sexual Harassment and Abuse

Also common among migrant caregivers are reports of sexual, verbal, and other forms of physical abuse. Though only three migrant caregivers I interviewed shared that they had been sexually harassed or abused, a number likely explained by the general underreporting of sexual abuse, an anonymous study conducted by Kav Laoved on sexual abuse among migrant caregivers found that thirty-five percent of respondents had experienced some form of sexual abuse or harassment on the job. In particular, respondents noted that employers could get away with sexual harassment and abuse due to the physically intimate and isolated nature of carework (Bar-Mor et al 2012). Engaging in physically proximate activities such as bathing, showering, and dressing one’s employer in the isolated confines of the home were the cause in several reports of employer abuse.

When caregivers do attempt to hold employers accountable for sexual abuse, the burden of proof for reporting and proving one’s case rests largely upon the caregiver. Undoubtedly, the difficulty migrant caregivers have getting authorities to take seriously reports of sexual abuse is inextricable from the broader sexualization and commodification of care and domestic work that underpins the transnational division of reproductive labor (Constable 1997, Chang and Groves 2010, Enloe 1989). Portrayals of female migrants as
“sexually subservient” by governments and recruitment agencies benefitting from the “maid trade” mask their structural susceptibility to sexual abuse, focusing instead upon the economic purchasing power of Western businessmen, receiving governments, and employers (Chang and Groves 2010; Chang and Ling 2000, 37; Cheng 2006). A former Kav Laoved caseworker notes that when recruitment agencies receive complaints of sexual abuse, they sometimes respond by telling caregivers “to have ‘patience’” (Kolker 2015). These all-too-common responses demonstrate the often blurry line between the “maid trade” and other intimate forms of labor within the “desire” economy (Agathangelou 2004, 143; Lebovitch 2013).

Rina, a caregiver from the Philippines who has lived in Israel for six years, was very open about her experiences dealing with sexual harassment. She relays that merely one week after working in Israel, she was propositioned by her employer, who entered her bedroom at night with his pants down demanding that she have sex with him. For the remainder of her employment she continually feared that he would make another advance. According to Kav Laoved, migrant caregivers regularly share stories about employers who have masturbated in front of their caregivers, propositioned them regularly when they assist them in the shower, demanded they have sex with them, and made non-consensual physical advances (Weinglass 2016). In many of these cases, the large loans caregivers must pay off prohibit them from reporting abuse or quitting their jobs. As one Nepali caregiver who paid $8,000 to come to Israel explains,

“Let’s suppose the employer does not want to pay our salary, or we are sexually harassed. If that happens, then we have no choice but to change our work…I know the government thinks the new law (the Slavery Law) will be good or the employers, but we feel sure it will only be good for the manpower agencies” (Eglash 2011).
Because private recruitment agencies have a financial incentive to serve employers rather than to act as impartial arbitrators, they are unlikely to investigate the claims of migrant caregivers, which could require taking legal action against other Israeli citizens (Kolker 2015).

In addition to sexual harassment and abuse, migrant caregivers also reported other forms of physical abuse. At times this abuse comes from employers who take advantage of migrant caregivers’ weak legal status, and at other times, it may be a result of Alzheimer’s or dementia. Maria, a caregiver from the Philippines working outside Tel Aviv, relayed the many challenges she faced taking care of an elderly woman with Alzheimer’s who regularly threatened and attacked her:

“If I got close she would cry and scream. If I’d come into the house, she splashed water on me. She’s balagan (a mess). She goes without any clothes. She’s so strong, the nails so long, she will scratch me like this. She wants to kill me. I have a lot of scratches. She’s biting. But I can not leave because she gives me good salary and I am live-out…If I give her food she will kill me. She throws hot water in the morning and then goes out and cries, ‘look at me, look what she did!’ But she’s the one who threw the hot water.”

Maria adds that in at least one instance when her employer has run into the street screaming and crying, the police have approached Maria, concerned that she is abusing her employer. In two different instances, her employer told the police that Maria had in fact abused her, forcing Maria to prove her innocence.

As with other forms of worker exploitation that migrant caregivers face, in instances of sexual, verbal, and other forms of physical abuse, migrant caregivers’ ability to leave their job is made difficult not only by their financial bondage to employers, but also by threats of deportation from agencies and employers alike, and requests from family abroad that they keep their jobs and continue remitting money (Lebovitch and
Friedman 2013). Each of these factors impedes migrant caregivers’ capacity to escape abusive employment situations and to hold their employers accountable.

**Surveilling the “Foreigner” in the Home**

As Mundlak and Shamir assert, at the state level, migrant caregivers have been historically constituted through law and policy as both “intimate and alien.” On the one hand, the government “(downplays) reproductive work” and treats caregiving in particular as not “really work.” Based upon this devaluing of carework, migrant caregivers have been subject to a differential system of compensation than workers in all other sectors of labor on the grounds that remuneration per hour is too difficult to implement in a “high-trust” profession. At the same time, Israeli law also constitutes migrant caregivers as “alien” by excluding them from any form of social membership (Mundlak and Shamir 2008, 166). The present ban on migrant marriages and the requirement that migrants send abroad any children born to them within three months of their birth equally constitute migrant caregivers as alien.

My interviews suggest that the dual constitution of caregivers as both “intimate and alien” is equally present within the home. Migrant caregivers are at once the objects of citizen-employers’ suspicions and the subjects charged with the most intimate of tasks in caring for their family members. They are simultaneously treated as foreign intruders whose presence in the home must be contained, and as an economically expedient source of labor that make possible citizens’ freedom from full-time carework. Taken together, the dual constitution of migrant caregivers as both intimate and alien allows for the commodification of their labor and the simultaneous reaffirmation of their permanent
exclusion from social membership. My interviews also highlight that while citizen-employers may feel a need to conduct surveillance on the migrant caregivers inside their homes, they often attempt to conceal this mistrust so as to preserve the intimacy of the relationship and the benefits it incurs.

According to interviewees’ narratives, employers’ mistrust most often takes the form of video surveillance, accusations of theft and abuse, and the manipulative use of the threat of deportation. Fred, a farmer from the Philippines working as a caregiver in Jerusalem, recounts becoming aware of a camera placed inside the house by his employer:

“My problem was the son in law. He installed a camera. They didn’t tell me about the camera… The day we got into the house I saw a camera in the salon. A few days later I saw the camera in the door. But when I tell them the reason I want to leave is because of the camera, the son-in-law, the father, and the mother decided to take it down. If it’s for a security reason in the room of my employer, maybe. Or in the room of the wife, maybe, yeah. But in the sitting room? How could you say that it’s for security reason?”

Fred’s account reveals not only his employer’s suspicions towards him, but also his employer’s hesitation to directly communicate these suspicions. And yet Fred is keenly aware of both being under surveillance, and of his employer’s discomfort admitting to his mistrust. Paradoxically, at the same time that mistrust punctuates their interactions, Fred describes the connection he has with his employer in familial terms, suggesting how mistrust and intimacy concurrently shape the relationship:

“They treat me like a son. Even as the previous employer, they treat me as a member of the family. But of course, because of the camera, everything is...I think that they are afraid to me. They think I stole something.”

Fred’s employers at once treat him “as a member of the family,” yet also fear him and attempt to securitize his presence in their home by monitoring his activity in each room. Inasmuch as the claim to being “like family” purports to reflect a closeness, it also
reaffirms Fred’s place as a non-Jewish other within the Jewish-Israeli home. As Ahmed argues, through phrases such as “like a family,” the kinship metaphor “extends’ the family form…to produce a particular version of race and a particular version of family predicated on “likeness” (Ahmed 2006, 121). In this sense, “the familiar is ‘extended’ by differentiating itself from the strange, by making what seems strange ‘just about’ familiar,” but not comfortably so (Ahmed 2006, 117). Fred not only comes from across the world, but has “come to embody distance” himself; a racial distance, a cultural distance, a religious distance, and a class distance. This distance serves as the basis for employers’ fears around the embodiment of foreignness in the most intimate space of the Jewish-Israeli family as a site where social—and national—norms “ought” to be reproduced.

Fred offers an even more extreme example of how migrant caregivers can “come to embody distance” through a story of an employer who believed Fred was trying to poison his food:

“All the time he is afraid of me, that maybe I will do something to him. Ok, he is blind I understand; he cannot see. But he wants me to taste his food first… He didn’t say it like that, but you have to know. When times come that he wants me to taste the food first, of course what you think is that he thinks you’re gonna poison him. There was a time he changed his food for my food.”

Fred’s experience reveals that despite being “like a son” to his employer, his sense of “at homeness” is fleeting, contingent, and in many ways superficial (Ahmed 2011). Fred adds that this same employer believes him to be looking for the first opportunity to steal his valuables, a fear other caregivers said their employers harbored. He relates,

“He thinks I’m gonna steal something. He took out his necklace and he put it somewhere so I will think it was accidental or he forgot. I called the agency and pretended that I’m gonna leave. So he said, ‘don’t leave me now, I will call the police!’…He says that I stole his documents, a bag of documents…I’m here to find
a job. To think that I took the bag of documents, what should I do with a bag of documents?...The worst is he didn’t pay my salary.”

The accounts Fred provides of having to continually contest employers’ allegations and alleviate their fears highlights how the home can become laden with suspicion of “the foreigner” who embodies to the citizen-employer a certain distance—from safety, from familial likeness, from the Jewish-Israeli nation-family. Due to his employer’s fears, Fred says he makes a habit of meticulously documenting all of his activity within the home and reports his records to his agency. Crucially, as a male caregiver, the distance Fred embodies is a particularly gendered one—his presence is that of a racialized man who has infiltrated the Jewish-Israeli home, the site where social norms and racialized ideologies are reproduced. Fred may have experienced more mistrust than other caregivers with whom I spoke because employers did not ascribe to him a “natural” ability to care, love, and be subservient as they would a woman. Though he is enough “like a son” to be entrusted with his employer’s life, his “likeness” to the Jewish-Israeli family is sufficiently dissimilar that his presence must be tracked, monitored, and managed.

Like Fred, Alice, a Filipina caregiver who has been in Israel for ten years, experiences at once the intimate affections of her employers and their deep mistrust. Living in the basement apartment of her charge’s multi-generational family home, Alice describes herself as very close with her employers. She feels especially close to her charge’s adult daughter Hila, and portrays their relationship as warm and communicative. When I met Hila, she spoke admiringly and lovingly about Alice’s presence in the home and praised her skills as a caregiver, saying the family would be lost without her help. At the same time, Alice has been forced to navigate accusations of theft from her elderly employer who suffers from dementia, and has contended at various moments with Hila’s
subtle mistrust. She relays one situation where Hila and a social worker involved with her charge’s care suspected Alice of elder abuse:

“Sometimes I think my employer says to Hila that I hurt her….I don’t know if she believes her or not. Hila asked me if it’s ok to put a video in her mother’s room. She said it’s not for checking me….Hila said, ‘Anna, I’m going to tell you something. I know you’re honest…the EMS came here and they said to put a video because they saw my mother’s bruises.’ I said, ‘look, put a video, I don’t care. In the video you will see what time I go to your mother’s room and what I am doing. Do it, I’m not afraid! This is ridiculous!’…Only I am going to tell you that, you know, sometimes with the video, it only shows that you don’t trust your caregiver. It only shows.”

Alice’s description reveals both Hila’s mistrust as well as her anxiety over being perceived as mistrusting. She insists on telling Alice that she believes her to be honest, yet is not convinced enough by her own perceptions of Alice’s honesty to refuse to install the camera altogether. Hila avoids directly articulating her suspicions, as communicating them would belie the feelings of distance that Alice’s presence embodies. Such an admission would require Hila to acknowledge the inaccuracy of her claims to kinship and the structural asymmetries these claims mask. It would require an acknowledgment of the fact that those individuals Alice refers to as family are in the Philippines, receiving the remittances generated by her labor.

Like Fred, Alice also discusses a time when her employer accused her of stealing:

“My employer told Hila that I stole her jewelry and took her money…I said, ‘look, I don’t come here just to steal. If it’s a million dollars, maybe I will steal it. I’m crazy about the jewelry but I will not steal from somebody!…I told her, ‘you know, my last employer is American, they just leave their money, and he’s managing director of Mercedes Benz. I have all these letters! Recommendation letters, letters from my former employers. I work alone. I raise my family alone. I raise my children alone. I give them education alone. So why in the world I have to ruin my life?’”

As the sole provider for her children (“I raise my children alone. I give them education alone”), the thought that Alice’s employer thinks she would steal causes insult. But the
insult she feels also stems from what is revealed by the accusation—her employer’s perception that as a Filipina migrant, Alice poses a threat to the security of property and person, and that she is so desperate for material wealth that she must covet the objects in Hila’s home.

The anecdotes shared by Fred and Alice illustrate how the citizen-employer’s home can become a spatial minefield wherein migrant caregivers must demonstrate that they are non-threatening foreign bodies worthy of trust. On the one hand, their fulfillment of emotionally and physically intimate roles within the home—roles that family members either cannot or do not wish to do—necessitates considering them “like family.” Doing so also allows for the uncompensated expansion of tasks beyond those listed in the contract. On the other hand, the spaces migrant caregivers move through in doing their job and the distances they embody and represent are racialized and gendered, rendering them the objects of citizen-employers’ fear. Undoubtedly, the securitizing of migrant caregivers in the home mirrors the ways they have been policed in the neighborhoods of South Tel Aviv during their days off and monitored and managed so they may be accounted for within Israel’s broader “demographic war.” In a telling example of the replication of alienage and securitization within the home, Rina describes an instance following a fight with her employer when her employer’s wife had a friend come to their home pretending to be immigration police. She recalls her employer’s wife saying, “He’s immigration and he’ll take you back to the Philippines!” The sinister use of deportation rhetoric by employers is not merely an isolated effect of the xenophobic drawing of boundaries; rather, it plays upon official state policies of deporting, harassing, and policing migrants at the individual and collective levels.
Worker-Producers, Citizens-Consumers, and Commodification

While surveillance within the home reflects the broader constitution of migrant caregivers as alien, worker exploitation and commodification mirror wider attitudes about the intimate and “un-quantifiable” nature of domestic work. Such attitudes have the effect of blurring the line between work and rest and justifying the under-compensation of caregivers more broadly. Further, the nexus of laws and policies governing the employment, hiring, and recruitment of migrant caregivers greatly influences an employer’s sense of what constitutes acceptable treatment of a caregiver. Across several interviews, migrant caregivers described being subjected to the cost-saving, commodifying logic of their employers, which led to their employers’ prioritization of economic considerations over their dignity and well-being. Taken together, migrant caregivers’ experiences being the objects of employers’ cost-saving calculations, and policies requiring that they leave the country immediately after their employers’ death, led to a feeling of disposability among caregivers. As Alina explains, “It’s like we’re garbage…here too many people, when the contract is finished, they’re thrown like it’s garbage. It’s not nice.” Nina, a caregiver and social worker from Nepal, adds:

“If we finish our work and we work very hard and have emotional attachment, if the Israeli people don’t like, they will throw us like a dustbin. They will say ‘t’lech, lo tzarich’ (‘go, I don’t need you’)...’we don’t want you.’ The rules are very hard.”

As Nina highlights, the requirement that migrant caregivers leave the country immediately after the death of an employer suggests that the emotional attachments migrants form are insignificant given their lack of any legal basis for claims to social membership.
The commodification of migrant caregivers and their subjection to the cost-saving calculations of employers often manifest in employers’ strict rationing of their food intake and their use of basic amenities. Diana, a caregiver from the Philippines working outside Tel Aviv, explains:

“(My employer) will hide the food in her room and toothpaste and shampoo and when she leaves to go to work she closes her room. I have friends that give me food when I go for my day off, and when I go back to my work, my employer says, ‘I don’t want the food from other people.’ Sometimes I will buy and hide in my room, like biscuits and noodles.”

Similarly, at one time Alice’s employer refused to provide an adequate amount of food, prevented her from showering daily and prohibited her from using the electric fan during hot summer months because of the associated costs. When she went to the agency to complain, however, the agency was equally unsympathetic. Alice relays,

“The agency told me, ‘what, you want breakfast bacon? You want fried chicken for lunch? You want beef?’ I said, ‘look, have you been to the Philippines? Even though how poor we are, egg is not for dinner. In the Philippines egg is for breakfast and if we eat spaghetti it’s only for snack. We eat rice three times a day!’ They said, ‘one chicken you have to split.’ I said ‘this is not food!’”

Alice’s description of the agency’s response highlights the extent to which this cost-saving mentality permeates all sides of the migration industry, reinforcing the permissibility of commodification within the home. Not only does her employer refuse to give Alice the food she is used to eating; the agency charged with neutrally mediating employer/employee conflicts portrays her request for a basic diet as extravagant.

Many employers also replicate and reproduce the commodification of caregivers by attempting to extract as much unpaid labor as possible beyond the terms of the work contract. Under the 2006 ruling excluding caregivers from a right to equal overtime pay under the Work and Rest Hours Law, this form of labor extraction becomes legally
permissible. For the many caregivers whose employers require care throughout the night, the absence of a right to equal overtime pay can lead to the doubling of their workload without pay. Rahul explains:

“My employer was 107 years old...After one month he started getting up two, three times in the night so I asked them for the money and they gave me that money. But after two months he started to get up seven or eight times in the night, every hour...It was very terrible...I asked them that you hire someone else for the night and they don’t want to hire because in the night they have to pay someone more than me.”

Rahul continues to describe the ongoing tension over lack of compensation for nighttime duties:

“It happened that (my employer’s husband) fell down in the night. I asked (my employer) why she didn’t call me...once in a day is ok, just not all the time. But after she said, ‘you have to get up, this is your job,’ I said, ‘yes, this is my job, But if I get up in the night you will pay me.’ And she said, ‘no, everyone is doing it.’ And I said, ‘yes, everyone is doing, but I will not do. According to law I am giving you twelve hours instead of eight hours. In the night I want to sleep well.’ She got angry with me and she said, ‘you are not able to do this job.’ A lot of people they are not sleeping for even five hours. That is the life of caregiver.”

In addition to managing the mental anguish of sleeplessness, Rahul must contend with his employer’s expectation that waking up every night on command without adequate compensation is “part of the job.” Rahul adds that because living outside of an employer’s home is illegal, migrant caregivers whose charges expect them to work both day and night must choose between putting themselves in a precarious legal position and enduring exploitation, sleep deprivation, and the indignity of unpaid labor. As with other forms of commodification and task expansion, the failure to respond immediately to an employer’s needs at all hours of the night can be a legal liability if their employer injures himself. For Rahul, who is “never afraid to go back,” resisting commodification through direct confrontation means at worst returning to his job as the manager of an industrial metal factory where he earned a middle-class income. “It doesn’t matter how much money I’m
getting or not,” he says. “I had a business in India and it was very good.” For undocumented migrant caregivers with less economic mobility, the consequences of directly resisting commodification are significantly higher.6

The commodification of migrant caregivers within the home is thus enabled by an environment of legal permissibility that condones the extraction of unpaid labor by employers. Yet their commodification is also a reflection of the exploitative practices of private recruitment agencies and the governments of migrant-sending countries that actively promote the “tradable competence” of female migrants in particular (Ong 2006, 6-7). By depicting female migrants as “national heroines” willing to make personal sacrifices for the greater good of their country, the Government of the Philippines portrays out-migration as a form of national service that is both beneficial to the Philippines economy and to employers in households transnationally (Oishi 2005; Rodriguez 2002). In turn, privatized agencies in the Philippines and Israel conduct caregiver trainings that “teach” tailored versions of these “tradable competences” to migrants so that their qualities can be better “sold” to prospective employers in host countries. The Israeli government’s laissez-faire attitude towards migrant labor recruitment and its ceding of power to private agencies enables freelance contractors working in the labor recruitment industry to make a profit off of these various depictions of “first rate workers” through the hierarchical charging of recruitment fees (Ong 2006, 201). Speaking to these forms of privatized commodification, Abigail notes that “they give the hardest job to those who just arrive because the new ones don’t know anything and have more patience.” Private agencies thus promote particular caregivers as being more exploitable than others, signaling to employers that the purpose of hiring a migrant caregiver is not to have them
help with the various tasks delineated in the work contract, but rather to have them supplement as large a portion of the household labor as possible.\textsuperscript{7}

Not only do private recruitment agencies attempt to advertise less experienced caregivers as “good hires;” they also marketize and “sell” the racialized, sexualized, and gendered preferences of employers through the setting of migration fees. Abigail explains:

“At first the government only took workers from the Philippines and Israel…we are more aware of what we need to pay (than other caregivers). In general, Nepalese, they are more eager to come here…when they are being offered to pay $10,000 USD, they are accepting it. They are willing to pay that, while in the Philippines, we have other options…Most of the time it’s the agency who dictates, ‘Oh, we’ll give you Indians, they’re good at this, blah blah blah, they’re good at that.’ They know how to talk the talk. It happened before some Indians are stuck. No one wants to accept them. They are accepting salaries of $200 a month.”

As Abigail emphasizes, in setting recruitment fees and “selling” various qualities to employers, agents play upon the relative poverty of migrants from particular countries that may make them more willing to incur high debt to work abroad, and to hold onto a job at any cost. Indeed, the higher the debt a migrant owes, the more indentured to their employer they become. The cost-saving logic imposed upon migrant caregivers by their employers is thus inextricable from the broader commodification of migrant workers by private corporations and government officials. The images sold by various agencies and the differential prices they “set” for the processing of visas inform employers’ expectations of caregivers and the work they “should” do before they begin working. Within this context, constructions of migrant caregivers as intimate members of the household undertaking an “un-quantifiable” form of labor reproduce, reinforce, and are enabled by these broader processes of commodification.

\textit{Resistance and Subsistence: Negotiating Debt Bondage and Precarious Employment}
The nexus of laws, policies, and social ideologies placing the needs of Jewish-Israeli citizens over the rights of migrant caregivers severely constrains the working conditions of caregivers and the power they have to increase their job security. As Romero has argued, the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship is a “complex dialectic” in which both parties “construct and reconstruct the organization of housework.” While citizen-employers attempt to “constantly rationalize the work and control the labor process,” so, too, do migrant caregivers develop strategies to enhance their control over the labor process and to contest racialized and gendered forms of alienage that render them foreign interlopers in their employers’ homes (Romero 2002, 73; 123).

Creating Indispensability

One common way migrant caregivers increase their job security and mitigate the effects of commodification is by fostering a relationship of indispensability with their employers, wherein only they are able to provide the specialized care their employers require to survive. Garnering greater control over one’s employment status involves the deft, skillful, and intentional fostering of close relationships with citizen-employers, and the attuned establishment of routines that only they can facilitate. By making themselves essential to the survival of citizen-employers and the functioning of their families, migrant caregivers lessen the commodifying effects of the Slavery Law and related policies. They also lessen the impact of debt bondage on their daily lives, mitigating the extent to which every household decision becomes a high-stakes calculation about their job security. James, a teacher, kick boxer, activist, and caregiver from India, paid $12,000 USD in agency fees to come to Israel. Having only been in Israel for three years, James has just
recently paid off his debt and begun remitting money back home. To ensure that he can remit more money than the fees he was initially charged, James must retain his job for another three years. To ensure he can stay for this duration, James must understand the intellectual, emotional and physical needs of his employer, so that he can not easily be treated “like a dustbin.” He explains,

“I’ve met situations where without me it’s impossible for (my employer) to survive. I’ve created that situation with my employer…I fight for rights. I’m good with my employer. With my heart I take care of him. That’s my duty; he loves me I love him. Until early in the morning we talk about the planets, about Jupiter.”

Throughout our interview, James spoke often and with affection about his employer. At the same time that he attributes these feelings to the many memorable conversations they have shared, he also hints that they are a result of his creating a relationship wherein his employer would not remain physically and mentally healthy under the charge of any other caregiver. James explains that in the past when his employer refused to compensate him fairly, he left the job and refused to return until his employer’s daughter agreed to honor his request for a raise:

“I left the job. One-and-a-half months, I left the job. The daughter gave me a call, (saying,) ‘my father is very impossible without you, he needs you, he cries!’ Because the father was used to me. So they called me and told me, ‘whatever salary you had, we’ll give you 200 shekel more than that, but you come.’”

Other caregivers related similar stories about being approached by their employers’ families to return to jobs they had quit. Ramona discusses her employer’s reaction to her quitting her job:

“All the tasks that I finished, it wasn’t good (enough) for (my employer). I fold clothes, she’d say, ‘not like that like this!’ Then tomorrow I’d do it the way she wants and she corrects. I knew I followed what she wants but still she can’t show to me how she appreciates…After nine months I couldn’t keep patience so I told the husband I want to go to another job because this is not good… So I left, and later she always called me, saying, ‘how are you? I want you to come back to me;
I’m so sorry’…she phoned me all the time until she stayed in the hospital saying every night, ‘I love you.’”

Part of the reason her employers view her as indispensible is because of the relationship Ramona has developed with them over time. Ramona notes that ensuring her own job security is a matter of learning to anticipate an employers’ needs, the subtleties of their moods, their body language and emotions, and their physical symptoms before they arise. She has similarly created a symbiotic dynamic with her current employer:

“If I’m upstairs, I’ll hear, ‘I feel like eating fruit,’ so I have to rush and say ‘What do you want?’ like I’m next to them. If I hear the chair moving I know they’re standing up so I run and look. They’re old so they don’t want to feel like they can’t manage. So I watch my employer go to the toilet and after he sits down I come, because I know he wouldn’t like it that all the time I come and say ‘I will help you.’ That’s why they say, ‘she’s fantastic, I was about to ask but she’s here already!’”

Like Ramona, Alice has been in Israel for over four years and three months and tends to an elderly woman who suffers from dementia. Although the remittances she sends have already funded the construction of a new home and her sons’ college educations, she wishes to remain in Israel until she earns enough money to finish building a second family house. Alice spends her days continually supervising her charge, whose precarious physical condition is bound up with that of Alice’s social, legal, and financial precarity. She notes,

“If (my employer) wants to move, it’s very dangerous…I have to be aware what will happen to her…we have to be aware, we want to stay here more years! So we have to look after them very good! We have the law here that it’s only four years and three months and I’m already here for nine years.”

Accompanying Alice’s devotion to and compassion for the elderly and the genuine fondness she expresses for her employer are the economic and legal strictures that require she tend meticulously to her employer’s health. Navigating her precarious legal situation
means learning the skills of a doctor, a nurse, a physical therapist, and a psychologist, so as to anticipate her employer’s needs before they overtly surface. She explains that when she went home for one month to visit her family in the Philippines, her employer refused to let anyone else feed her or give her medicines, and spoke neither to her family nor the replacement caregiver:

“I decided to go home last March. The moment I left the house is the day also grandma doesn’t want to eat. My reliever told me, ‘Maria, she don’t want to eat. She don’t want to open her mouth. She never talks anymore.’ When I came back she talked. I said, ‘Grandma! grandma! Look at me, it’s me, it’s Maria!’ And she opened her eyes. Her daughter said, ‘Maria! It’s amazing, it’s really amazing—the connection of you and my mother is really amazing’…She was looking at me and staring like a new person.”

So close is Alice’s connection to her employer and so necessary is Maria’s presence to her employer’s physical survival that when Alice’s visa expired, her employer’s daughter Hila went to the Ministry of Interior to secure a special visa for Alice and to ensure she didn’t get deported, despite the legal consequences Hila could have faced. Commenting on Hila’s amazement at her skills, Alice adds:

“Every time I have an employer I always have the medication with me, and I know what is the problem of this lady. And they keep on asking me, ‘are you a nurse?’ And I say, ‘I don’t have to be a nurse! I will be with her twenty-four hours a day, don’t you know that? I have to be aware what will happen to her!’”

Like Alice, other interviewees described in detail the extents they have gone to learn the preferences and idiosyncrasies of their employers. Ironically, employers rely upon the same caregivers they often treat as subordinate and refer to as “girls” to care for them in their childlike state. They rely upon their caregivers to orient them when they decompensate, remind them the names of their children and grandchildren, to dress them, to help them go to the bathroom, to feed them, and to comfort them when they wake from nightmares. As the narratives of James, Ramona, and Alice demonstrate, leveraging
greater control over one’s employment status involves the skillful and intentional fostering of close relationships with citizen-employers and the attuned establishment of roles that only they can fulfill.

*Strategic Deference and Direct Confrontation*

A crucial part of developing this relationship of indispensability is knowing when to directly contest exploitation and commodification and when to engage in a strategic performance of acquiescence. At times, this acquiescence means performing the role of the loyal, patient, caring caregiver, even as this performance works to reinforce employers’ racialized and gendered stereotypes about a “good hire.” As Rollins argues, such performances of loyalty and subordination among domestic workers are as much “a part of the job” as folding clothes and cooking (Rollins 1989, 78-9). This “adoption of a mask of deference as a protective guise” guards against the culture of disposability otherwise characterizing citizen-employer/migrant caregiver relationships (Rollins 1989, 168, as quoting Cock 1980, 103). Several interviewees offered stories of acting like they were “happy to serve.” Rina shared that when her employer “tests her” by frequently calling her name to see how fast she will respond, she will tell her employer, “You need to change your attitude…if you are good to me, I am more good to you, but if you are like *that, oy,* I am more devilish than you!” At other moments, she says, “I just need to please.” Though in our conversations Rina refers to her employer as “The Pig,” she adds that when her employer asks, “‘do you like me?’ I say, ‘*betach*’ (*definitely*). I need to pretend *betach.*”
Similarly, though Sana describes her employer as “so rude” and talks about the various ways he condescends to her, she says she needs to “only do good things” for him. She adds, “if they don’t like, I don’t do another time…What he needs, I do.” Her performances of respect and deference are especially important in ensuring that she can continue to pay her daughter’s college tuition. As Ramona sums up, “we have to convince ourselves that this is our job. What can we do? Turn your back, do something else, then when you’re ok, come back and say, ‘yes, what do you want?’”

As much as deferential performances may be a part of the job, so, too is directly contesting employers’ exploitative treatment. Perhaps most outspoken about the many tactics she uses to rebuke her employer for her poor treatment is Rina. A self-described nudnik—the Yiddish word for a persistent nag—Rina characterizes her relationship with her employer as “like a rat and a cat;” when her employer screams at her, she says, “I scream right back!”

Rina says she is intentional about establishing transparent boundaries around the tasks she will and will not do early on in the relationship to avoid future exploitation. She explains that when her employer asks her to do her husband’s laundry, or to thoroughly clean the house, she responds directly with “no, it’s not part of my job.” She also directly refuses to do the housekeeping work that many employers assume a caregiver will gladly undertake:

“I say no, this is too much. And then she asks me to hand wash her clothes. I say, ‘no,’ and she says, ‘it’s only three clothes!’ I say, ‘it’s only three clothes, but you are going to do it more and more. And you are going to bring more for ironing the clothes of your daughter.’ Cleaning her house she says is part of my job. Clean the house it’s ok. But don’t do cleaning like you’re just the mitapelet (maid) of the house.”
The “rat and a cat” relationship Rina describes requires that she continually challenge and reorient her employer’s expectations about the work a migrant caregiver should be expected to do. The extent to which her employer expects her to be agreeable and “happy to serve” is evident in Rina’s observation that her employer “seems surprised I can say no.” She adds, “maybe she thinks I can do whatever she wants. She says I’m the most hard-headed caregiver she’s had…maybe the other ones wouldn’t answer her back.”

Rather than partake in a “deferential performance,” she insists upon regularly treating her employer the way her employer treats her:

“I told her last time she was rude to me, ‘you know, when you are good to me, I am more good to you.’ She said, ‘you know, you need to change your attitude!’ I said, ‘what? I need to change my attitude? You need to change your attitude…if you are good to me, I am more good than you but if are like that, oy va voy, I am more devilish than you!”

Such direct challenges, however, have consequences for Rina, who says her employer becomes “so mad” that “it seems (she) wants to kill me.” Despite the risks to her job security and legal status that direct confrontation carry, Rina insists that even in such moments of anger, “she can not pacify me.” Though at moments Rina decides to acquiesce to her employer’s expectations, at many other times, she refuses to partake in a ritual of deference, regardless of the material and symbolic benefits of doing so.

Importantly, the extent to which direct confrontation is a viable method of increasing job security and control over the work process depends greatly upon a caregiver’s financial status, the extent of their debt, the number of dependents who benefit from the remittances they send, and their desire to remain in Israel for a host of personal and professional reasons. Each of these factors informs migrant caregivers’ decisions about when to contest exploitation, commodification, racism, sexism and classism, when
to strategically perform deference, and how to foster relationships of indispensability. Finding a livable balance between these constraining options allows migrant caregivers to survive restrictive, exploitative, and asymmetrical employment arrangements while also garnering greater control over the work process to the greatest extent possible.

**Intimacy, Alienage, and Caring for the Jewish Body Politic**

Though relationships between migrant caregivers and their employers unfold inside the demarcated common space of the home, the ideologies, political orientations, and emotions giving shape to this relationship circulate through and beyond its walls. In this sense, migrant caregiver and citizen-employer alike are “nodes” in an affective economy that are shaped by the exchange of words between border police and temporary laborers, by the bodily anxiety of deportation police patrolling the Central Bus Station, the emotional reverberations that result from government statements about “infiltrators,” and stories on the nightly news about the “demographic threat” posed by Palestinians and other non-Jewish minorities. Migrant caregivers’ experiences of inclusion, exclusion, securitization, exploitation, appreciation, devaluation, and dismissal inside Jewish-Israeli homes are closely bound up with the racialized, gendered, and sexualized constructions of labor that circulate transnationally. Their constitution through Israeli law as both intimate and alien permeates their everyday negotiations with employers and signals to employers what forms of treatment are acceptable. The broader environment of legal permissibility in Israel and the state’s laissez-faire state attitude towards migrant recruitment agencies enables the commodification of migrant caregivers to permeate the home and to take new and varied forms. At the same time, migrant caregivers continually contest these patterns
of exploitation and commodification, responding in contingent ways to Israeli law and to their employers’ racialized, gendered, and sexualized expectations.

As integral members of the reproductive labor force, migrant caregivers help maintain the cohesion of Israeli families, predominantly Jewish-Israeli, by providing critical care to their loved ones. They thus play a central role in the political economy of Jewish-Israeli families, particularly as Israel’s aging population continues to grow. They enable Jewish-Israeli citizens to continue engaging in crucial aspects of their lives that, without the presence of caregivers, would require interruption. In addition to helping individual citizens save on eldercare costs, migrant caregivers’ “biopolitical availability,” as advertised and promoted by for-profit corporations, ensures that the government can save money on social security costs without “compromising” the Jewish composition of the state (Ong 2006, 201).

Migrant caregivers are thus the guardians of a growing portion of the Jewish body politic who keep alive its most vulnerable bodies, yet their daily interactions with citizen-employers also reinforce a mutually constitutive relationship between the worker-producer and the racially ideal citizen-consumer with the power to determine who embodies an internal or external threat to the ethno-racial composition of the state. Because citizen-employers possess disproportionate power over the legal status, freedom of movement, and freedom of association of migrant caregivers, they are on a day-to-day basis the main administrators and purveyors of migrant labor law. Through the power citizen-employers possess to deport, monitor, promote, imprison, pay, and fire migrant caregivers, they reinforce the role of the Jewish-Israeli citizen-employer/citizen-consumer as the gatekeeper of the body politic and its ethno-racial borders. Within the home and within the
nation, they thus act as the individual agents of border security.

Among the list of instructions for newly hired caregivers outlined in one recruitment agency’s training manual is the injunction to “have a smile in your voice” when talking to employers. Though information on the inner workings of private recruitment agencies is exceedingly difficult to obtain, these manuals, catered to employers in particular migrant-receiving countries, are often kept by migrants as they move between jobs. The imperative to “have a smile” and, more broadly, the “social obligation to be happy” about one’s role within the home underscores the coercive dimensions of migrant caregiving as they facilitate particular performances of happiness (Ahmed 2010, 130). Yet this “moral injunction” to be happy about one’s role in helping maintain the Jewish-Israeli home is not only an expectation that exists within the walls of the house. As Ahmed contends, happiness is a “form of world making” that “shapes what coheres as a world” (Ahmed 2010, 35, 2). To exhibit an unhappiness to serve as a migrant caregiver is thus to be a “killjoy” within the home, and to disrupt the various forms of boundary-maintenance that unfold within its confines (20). The political economy of which migrant caregivers are a part is thus “essential rather than incidental” to helping Jewish-Israelis realize the good life, and the maintenance of this economy depends on their fulfillment of a particular “happiness duty” (Ahmed 2010, 13, 130). To refuse to “be happy” about one’s role as a citizen-employer’s intimate proxy, or as the object of their fear, is to be a “melancholic migrant” in the home and in the nation (121). As I have illustrated, the cost of being a “melancholic migrant” is at best an unpleasant employer/employee relationship that lends itself to exploitation, and at worst, ejection from the nation. Yet such demonstrations of unhappiness are also crucial to the re-
imagining of relationships taken for granted by citizen-employers and by the state; the unhappiness and “melancholy” of migrants are also “creative responses to histories that are unfinished.” The ways migrant caregivers contest and resist various forms of exploitation as individuals and as collectives are crucial to this world making. In the next chapter, I turn to the narratives of citizen-employers, considering their own expectations of intimacy and alienage as they impact this re-imagining.

NOTES
1 By suggesting that migrant caregivers are the worker-producers upholding the gendered and racialized transnational division of reproductive labor, I do not wish to elevate capitalism as the superordinate category. Rather, I suggest that the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship is as much a site of racialized and gendered class conflict as it is the class-based and gendered racial conflict that maintains Israel’s ethno-racial exclusivity. Simultaneously, the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship reproduces the gendered construction of carework as women’s work.
2 Looking at three legal decisions, Mundlak and Shamir (2008) argue that Israeli law “concomitantly constitutes caregivers’ intimate inclusion as in-house workers and their exclusion as aliens” in order to deny them of basic human rights and to extract from them maximal labor. In this chapter I build upon their argument that Israeli law constitutes migrant caregivers as both intimate and alien in order to show how these two elements permeate the household and are reproduced, and at times contested, in the interactions between migrant caregivers and citizen-employers. I also note that, in addition to the legal cases they present, migrant caregivers are constituted as intimate through the Slavery Law, and as alien through marriage and reproductive policies aimed at preventing migrants from reproducing and from establishing long-term roots in Israel.
3 Migrant rights organization Kav LaOved has also noted that there are many cases of employers who have either withheld wages entirely or made illegal deductions from migrant caregivers’ wages, then made arrangements their deportation as a means of avoiding future payments. According to the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and the International Federation for Human Rights, as of 2003, employers were still arranging for migrant caregivers they hired to be deported as a way of avoiding payments, despite court rulings that deemed this activity illegal (see Ellman and Laacher 2003).
4 According to Kav LaOved, roughly thirty percent of migrant caregivers never take the vacations to which they are entitled (see Udell 2014).
5 The Israeli Work and Rest Hours Law (1951) states that “a working day shall not exceed eight working hours” and that “an employer shall pay an employee who is employed for over-time hours a wage not less that 1½ times the ordinary wage for the first two over-time hours in any one day, and not less than 1½ times the ordinary wage for all subsequent over-time hours” (Kan-Tor & Aco 2016).
6 Because of the heavy restrictions placed upon “legal” migrant caregivers under the Slavery Law, there are also instances of migrant caregivers who prefer to be undocumented, as this option, though exposing them to the continual threat of deportation, allowed them to work more flexible hours, and to become domestic workers for multiple families at once (see Kalir 2010). According to a case worker at Kav LaOved, there is also a benefit to employers in hiring an undocumented worker, as they can arrange payments on an individual basis, and they do not have to pay the wages of full-time caregiver for help with discrete household tasks.
7 At a 2009 Knesset Foreign Workers Committee meeting, Advocate Rebecca Makover, who was formerly charged with granting licenses to recruitment agencies under the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor, noted that “By and large, the key to bringing foreign workers is money. This means that every foreign worker arriving in Israel is charged, depending on the state of origin. It could be $5,000 or $7,000 in Europe, $10,000 in the Philippines, a bit more in Thailand but, in general, these are the brokerage fees. Now, no
foreign worker can arrive in Israel without paying these brokerage fees; it is even called judicial notice… There is no question that brokerage fees are collected from every foreign worker while still abroad. The proof is that every foreign worker pays a brokerage fee, no exception, otherwise he won't arrive in Israel" (see Lebovitch and Zehavit 2003, 2).

8 In her theorization of affective economies, Ahmed builds upon Marx’s notion of the commodity as gaining value through circulation. She suggests that affect and emotion as not belonging to a sign, subject, or object, but rather are an effect of their circulation. Building upon both Marxist and psychoanalytic frameworks, she develops the concept of “affective economies” to underscore how subjects, rather than possessing emotions, are constituted continually by their circulation as “one nodal point in the (larger) economy” of affect. Affective economies are therefore both psychic and social, forming the very boundaries of the distinction between them (Ahmed 2004, 44-5).
Chapter Three

“One of the Family:” Tropes of Kinship and Development Among Citizen-Employers

The moment I began talking with citizen-employers about their relationships with migrant caregivers, I encountered in most instances their desire to depict themselves as “good” or “benevolent bosses” (Bakan and Stasiulis 1997, 10). Conceptions of what constituted a “good” employer varied according to their political orientations and their individual relationships with caregivers, but palpably present was their desire to allay any assumptions they perceived me to have about the asymmetrical and exploitative nature of the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship. Their efforts hinted at a conscious or unconscious awareness of the power dynamics latent within this relationship. At the same time, their attempts to normalize these relationships and to conceal asymmetrical power dynamics reveal how they understand their role as Jewish-Israeli “bosses” of non-Jewish migrants in relation to their desire to appear “benevolent.” They also suggest how they reconcile their desire for ethno-racial exclusivity with their perceptions of Israel as a “modern” nation integrated into a neoliberal world order.

In this chapter I consider the two most salient tropes arising in citizen-employers’ narratives of their relationships with migrant caregivers, both of which have the effect of obscuring its asymmetrical and exploitative qualities and depoliticizing migrant carework more broadly. The first discourse, which I call the kinship trope, has the effect of masking the rootedness of this relationship within racialized, gendered, and class-based structures of power through the widely documented claim that migrant domestic workers, and
domestic workers more broadly, are “one of the family” (Anderson 2003; Bakan 1997; Rollins 1989; Romero 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001).¹ In Israel, such claims to family hold a particular irony in the context of ubiquitous Zionist discourses depicting Jewish-Israelis as “one big (racial) family.”² The second trope commonly used by citizen-employers, one depicting Jewish-Israelis as “natural” managers, portrays migrants as individual agents of economic development who, by virtue of their employment in Israel, are able to help “develop” their home countries. While the kinship trope draws upon notions of migrant caregivers as their employers’ intimate proxies, the second trope locates citizen-employers in a position of principled superiority by depicting their employment of migrants as a social good. Taken together, both tropes contribute to the depoliticization of carework; the first, by portraying caregiving as a “labor of love,” and the second, by constituting migrant caregivers’ presence in the home as an inevitable outcome of the “natural” division between global North/global South, West/East, independent/dependent, dominant/oppressed, rich/poor, modern/traditional, and developed/underdeveloped.³ At the same time, migrant caregivers find strategic ways of leveraging both of these tropes in order to negotiate their rights and improve their bargaining power within Israeli homes.

I begin by highlighting the how the kinship trope functions in migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationships, and the racial resonances this discourse holds in the context of Israel. I focus principally, though not exclusively, upon the narrative of Dina, an orthodox Jewish woman living outside Tel Aviv, whose relationship with her mother’s caregiver Sheyla is illustrative of how these familial tropes unfold within the home. I then turn to the second trope, through which employers situate themselves as
“natural” managers, and the caregivers working for them as individual agents of development doing a stigmatized form of labor. Finally, I suggest how both tropes reflect and naturalize the division of labor between Jewish citizens and “foreign workers,” symbolically reinforcing the primacy of the Jewish-Israeli family and its role in ensuring national cohesion.

Importantly, there is great variation in the ways citizen-employers described their relationships with migrant caregivers, which relate in turn to their diverse social locations and the individual dynamics of their relationships with caregivers. Though relative to migrant caregivers employers possess nearly uncontested power, in relation to each other, they come from a range of backgrounds. While some citizen-employers I interviewed were born in Israel, others immigrated from a range of countries, including Poland, Russia, Bulgaria, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, and Iraq. Some employers had narrowly escaped concentration camps, Soviet work camps, and the Jewish ghettos of Morocco and Egypt, while others had been born in the United States and had chosen to immigrate after retirement. Some interviewees were the children of elderly Israelis charged with hiring migrant caregivers for their parents, and others were the elderly charges, themselves. While some interviewees paid migrant domestic workers’ salaries entirely out-of-pocket, suggesting they enjoyed relative economic privilege, others were aided by the national social security administration. Finally, though a few employers described themselves as apolitical, and one identified herself as religious, most identified as secular, liberal Zionists. Each of these conditions, sets of experiences, and forms of self-identification influenced how citizen-employers talked about the migrant caregivers working in their
homes, and the extent to which they exhibited familiarity with their domestic workers’ intimate struggles, concerns, and interests.

II. “One of the Family:” “Benevolent Bosses” and the Limits of Kinship

As I have outlined in chapter two, in and of itself, the work caregivers do is incredibly intimate—day in and day out, they wake up multiple times a night to care for their employers, sometimes even sharing their room or bed. They bathe and dress them, feed them, comfort them, and remind them where they are when they are disoriented. Yet there is another way that the intimacy of this relationship plays out inside the home, or rather, is made use of within the home. Across interviews, citizen-employers would commonly assert that the migrants caring for them or for their family members were “like one of the family.” Whether intentional or not, this articulation of the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship had the effect of reproducing the paternalistic legal relationship established by the Slavery Law, intimately tying the rights, livelihoods, and well-being of caregivers to their citizen-employers. As scholars of domestic work have argued extensively, claims to familial relations by the employers of domestic workers mask the exploitative elements of this relationship by presenting domestic and carework exclusively as “a labor of love” (Anderson 2000; Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Rollins 1989; Romero 1992). My interviews suggest that even when an employer’s aim in describing a caregiver as “one of the family” is not a deliberate attempt to mask these power relations, the imposition of the familial paradigm onto what is fundamentally an asymmetrical employment relationship reinforces the legal dependence of caregivers.
For women migrant caregivers, failure to perform according to an employer’s expectations of, or desire for, familial intimacy carries even steeper consequences. Tellingly, among the descriptions employers used to characterize caregivers whom they felt to be “one of the family” were “devoted,” “very cooperative,” “loves a laugh,” “someone who is with you all the time,” “patient,” “a sweet girl,” “has intimate talks with my mother,” “a kind girl,” “knows how to serve us,” and “warm.” Among those used to characterize migrant caregivers whom they identified as problematic were “not so warm,” “distant,” “she minded her own things,” “she talks a lot of rubbish,” “doesn’t speak Hebrew,” “took her time to understand this relationship,” “not enough respect,” and “really busy with her family and her own stuff.” These descriptions illustrate the many racialized and gendered stereotypes shaping employers’ expectations of caregivers before they ever begin “caring;” demonstrations of such affective orientations are as much a part of the job as cooking and cleaning (Constable 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001).

The Kinship Trope and “Voluntary” Labor

Of all the citizen-employers I interviewed, Dina, an orthodox woman living outside of Tel Aviv, was perhaps the most insistent on demonstrating that her relationship with her mother’s caregiver ways familial. From the outset Dina expressed great enthusiasm for my project, telling me she was “very interested, really interested, in learning more through the caregiver’s eyes.” She also followed up with me months after our interview, eager to hear what I had learned from my interviews.

Throughout our conversation, Dina expressed profound appreciation for her mother’s caregiver Sheyla, a woman from Sri Lanka whom she hired when her mother
began requiring round-the-clock care. Like most citizen-employers, Dina also depicted Sheyla’s presence, and her insistence on doing “extra” labor, as evidence that Sheyla felt “part of the family.” Early in our conversation, Dina noted that Sheyla was “like a daughter to my father.” Dina was consistent in representing these feelings of kinship as mutual, both by describing the closeness Sheyla felt to Dina’s mother, and by providing anecdotes that demonstrated this familial connection. She stated, for example, that

“For (Sheyla) it was important to feel part of the family…(the relationship) can’t be only professional. She felt the same to my mother as her own. She would talk about how it was hard to be away from her mother and that she could not travel, and I know the situation of her mother is not good…it was also a responsibility on our side to fill this role of family because they need that.”

On the one hand, Dina’s belief that it was “important (for Sheyla) to feel part of the family” reflects a desire some caregivers may indeed possess to be treated in a familial manner. Feeling “part of the family” can be a coping mechanism for loneliness, a sign of acceptance, or assurance that a caregiver’s job is secure. At the same time, it is impossible to extricate Dina’s claim that Sheyla feels like “part of the family” from the larger performative demands of caregiving, which require that workers continually exhibit feelings of care, love, and affection towards their employers, and even gratitude for what employers perceive to be their own benevolent guidance and identity as “benevolent bosses” (Bakan and Stasiulis 1997, 10). Dina’s assertion that her relationship with Sheyla “can’t be only professional” indicates an intentional avoidance, or perhaps unawareness of the many affective obligations Sheyla must daily navigate. Were Sheyla to act strictly professionally towards Dina’s family, treating her tasks as merely professional, it is difficult to imagine Dina would praise Sheyla’s presence inside the home as “amazing.”
Tellingly, later in our conversation, Dina draws upon the kinship trope to portray work Sheyla does beyond the contract as voluntary. Alluding to the phenomenon of task expansion, Dina explains that Sheyla “was just (hired) for my mother, but naturally and spontaneously she was preparing food for my father and was taking care of the house, but this is something that she did by herself…I never asked her to.” Her depiction of this common form of task expansion as “natural,” “spontaneous,” and voluntary reveals an unwillingness to acknowledge the economic and legal strictures that require migrant caregivers, as precarious laborers, to mitigate their job precariousness in every way possible.

Similar to Dina, Orly, a self-describing liberal in her fifties, is equally intentional about projecting a sense of kinship onto her mother’s caregiver, Layla. In recounting Layla’s presence at various family functions, Orly comments,

“She would come to my brother’s on Friday nights and was of course treated like a guest, but she insisted on washing the dishes and we wanted to stop her. And then we said, ‘no, she’s like family; if she wants to do the dishes, it’s ok.’ But we didn’t want her to think she had to do it. She was really like family. I think she didn’t feel like a worker. She didn’t feel obliged; she did it really as a friend.”

Orly’s explanation of Layla doing dishes because “she’s like family” reveals a similar desire to portray any extra-contractual labor a live-in caregiver undertakes as voluntary, rather than as a manifestation of their precarious employment conditions. By representing the “extra” labor that Sheyla and Layla do as voluntary and “natural,” neither Dina nor Orly acknowledge that the failure to undertake additional labor can lead to bad recommendations, loss of employment, and even deportation. Further, they can both avoid the uncomfortable admission that they, themselves have the power to determine these outcomes.
Shmuel, a citizen-employer who hired a migrant caregiver to tend to his elderly mother, illustrates the steep consequences for failing to take on extra work. He describes the struggle between his family and his mother’s caregiver Sara as a result of her inability to act “like family:”

“Three years ago we wanted to fire Sara and some of my brothers and sisters didn’t trust her. They were afraid that she’s violent. Sarah didn’t really understand her role and we didn’t think that we had to explain our expectations because she’s very intelligent… she was really busy with her family, with her own stuff, and she didn’t really understand that her job is not just giving and preparing food. I told her, ‘you, don’t caress (my mother), you don’t sit next to her and hold her, you don’t give her the emotional support she needs. If you’re not capable we will have to replace you.’ After this discussion she changed. Now Sarah knows the family very well, and since she started functioning on the emotional level and not only the physical, everybody likes and adores and appreciates her. Now she has become an angel.”

While inside Dina’s household “all the family fell in love” with Sheyla, who was willing to take on additional labor, inside Shmuel’s home, Sara is nearly fired for being “really busy with her family,” and for her failure to “(function) on the emotional level.” His initial description of Sara contrasts markedly with the ways Dina and Orly describe the caregivers working for their families. In order to “become an angel” in her employer’s eyes, Sara had to begin exhibiting signs of “(knowing) the family very well;” in fact, these affectations were elemental in reassuring Shmuel and his siblings that Sara was not “violent.” Indeed, as the narratives of many other migrant caregivers suggest, demonstrating affection and familiarity towards the family was a crucial way of managing job insecurity and assuaging the racist suspicions of employers. A caregiver’s affective comportment and his or her ability to demonstrate that he or she feels part of the family is also crucial to creating a relationship of indispensability. As one citizen-employer tellingly remarked, “this (caregiver) is always in a good disposition. She loves to laugh a lot, and I
like it!...She knows how to cook Bulgarian food…she is the kind of person I like to have at home.”

“Mutual Exchanges” and the Masking of Difference

Like other citizen-employers I interviewed, Dina also depicts her relationship with Sheyla as familial by highlighting the similarities between them rather than drawing attention to their differences. Through the portrayal of various household interactions as intercultural exchanges, for example, Dina depicted her relationship with Sheyla as a mutual connection among equals rather than an effect of unequal laws and exploitative ideologies. At the beginning of our conversation, Dina assured me that “from the first day, we asked (Sheyla) to come eat with us around the table and said that she didn’t have to stay in the kitchen.” Dina also talked at length about the many spiritual similarities between herself and Sheyla, whose religious practices she said mirrored many of her own:

“She was Buddhist, but it was very interesting because we were talking about God’s providence on leading and ruling the world, and about thinking that everything is for the best. She even respected Shabbat….she learned how to separate milk from meat. It was very interesting because as religious and believing persons we thought a lot about God and felt we had the same relation to God. It was natural. She really was an angel.”

In addition to describing their shared interest in god as a point of “natural” connection, Dina also portrays Sheyla’s familiarity with the laws for keeping kosher as a point of joint cultural understanding. She describes, for instance, being “really struck” that Sheyla “would say Shabbat Shalom when we were lighting candles.” Yet as non-Jewish precarious laborers inside Jewish-Israeli homes, migrant caregivers are faced daily with the imperative to learn particular aspects of Jewish-Israeli culture and Jewish law so that they can appropriately ingratiate themselves into their employers’ families. Indeed, several
migrant caregivers told me that during the pre-migration trainings provided by recruitment agencies, caregivers are tested on their knowledge of Israeli recipes, elements of Israeli culture, Hebrew catchphrases, Jewish holidays, and the laws of keeping kosher. In fact, interviewees spoke more often and in greater detail about the rules for keeping a kosher home than the majority of Jewish-Israelis. Rather than indicating a harmonious intercultural exchange, the great familiarity of migrant caregivers with Judaism and with Israeli culture is the outcome of long days spent at trainings, the effortful studying of languages and laws, and careful attention to the dynamics of the broader relationship. The intimate knowledge migrant caregivers possess of their employers’ cultural and religious practices signifies the extent to which the relationship functions upon their fluency in the dominant culture of their “host” society.

Interestingly, although there were many ways that Dina portrayed her relationship with Sheyla as familial and mutual, during our extensive discussion of Judaism she made several comments revealing her awareness of certain differences. At one point in our conversation, she noted that she and her family “didn’t care so much about the differences,” adding immediately after, “I felt like I was talking to a Jewish person.” Later in our conversation, she refers to Sheyla as a “shabbos goy” who, by virtue of not being Jewish, was able to complete tasks forbidden to Jews on the Jewish Sabbath.5 Paradoxically, Dina characterizes Sheyla as a member of the family using the religious term for a non-Jew who, by virtue of their status as a non-Jew, is responsible for particular forms of reproductive labor within the home. Revealingly, after describing the work Sheyla would do on Shabbat in her role as the “shabbos goy,” Dina adds, “she enjoyed it.”
In marked contrast to Dina, Orly, and Shmuel, Idan, a self-identified anti-Zionist activist, expressed a critical awareness of and deep skepticism towards the kinship trope frequently used by employers. Reflecting upon the performative aspects of caregiving as he has observed them within his father-in-law’s house, he notes, “saying ‘she’s like family’ is the same thing as the guy who goes to the prostitute and thinks she’s in love with him.” He then goes on to depict the migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationship in his own family and in other Israeli families as inherently asymmetrical and filled with challenges:

“The relationship is full of fears and racism. There are daily clashes over how to use the kitchen and if the smell is good or bad, to the opposite—whether you can eat the food the employer makes. Every little intimate problem of your daily life. It is a very personal, intimate relationship.”

Unlike Dina and Orly, who both expressed a general hesitance to locate migrant carework within broader political structures and racialized ideologies about work, Idan views this relationship as a window into wider patterns of racism within Israel. He adds that “the State of Israel, especially today with this government, creates a permanent fear of the foreigner, thinking this foreigner only wishes to come and break the Jewish majority.” Interestingly, Idan also evokes the concept of intimacy, but does so as a means of highlighting exploitation rather than mutuality and equality.

The Kinship Trope and the Zionist National Family

Despite its invocation of familial intimacy, the kinship trope effectively downplays and devalues migrants’ own family structures by denying that they have their own familial
responsibilities outside of their employers’ home (Parreñas 2014). In many instances, migrant caregivers provide for their family members economically and emotionally at the same time that they fulfill duties to their employers, finding time to talk to family members daily through various forms of Internet Communication Technology (ICT). By attaching familial meaning to what is ultimately a professional arrangement, the kinship trope erases the “double duty” many caregivers experience as they simultaneously tend to their elderly charges and take part in many forms of transnational parenting (Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Tungohan 2013).

Tellingly, when I ask Orly why Israelis do not become live-in caregivers, she replies, “If you live in Israel, you have to have very special circumstances to live in a person’s house; you have your own family. It’s different.” Her comment suggests that it is somehow more natural for migrants to live thousands of miles away from their families as intimate strangers in the homes of citizens; the caregiver is a priori a migrant, and the citizen, the logical employer who enfolds the migrant, through a relationship of legal and emotional paternalism, into the necessarily cohesive Jewish-Israeli family. The normalization and subsequent depoliticization of migrants’ presence inside the homes of citizens, and the tropes of feudalistic relations they conjure, reinforce on a daily basis the “occupational ghettoization” of the domestic and care sectors more broadly (Nakano-Glenn 1981). Indeed, these claims to family become part of the “moral economic justifications of overseas employment” that help “(sustain) the moral economy of the family” (Ong 2006, 200).

Though the kinship trope is a phenomenon that arises out of migrant caregiver/citizen-employer relationships transnationally, in Israel it carries a particularly
paradoxical valence, as migrant caregivers are legally forbidden from ever joining the national family. In addition to their exclusion from citizenship, to date, existing state policies prohibit migrants from marrying each other and from starting their own families within the borders of the state. Citizen-employers’ use of the kinship trope in describing migrant caregivers thus stands in ironic contrast to the rigid legal borders of the ethno-racial state and to constructions Israel as “one big (racially unified) family” within the Zionist popular imagination (Alam 2009). As Alam argues, this “myth of racial unity” and the corresponding representation of Jews as “a single family” have historically played a key role in the Herzlian Zionist project of forging a common national identity across ethnically and culturally diverse Jewish communities, and in fostering the sense that the first Zionist settlers had a “unique ability to survive and preserve their racial purity through difficult conditions” (Alam 2009, 18). Through popular discourse, government rhetoric, Zionist founding myths taught in elementary school classrooms, and the language of reproductive policies, Israel has reinforced this racially unified construction of Jews as a means of promoting an ethno-racial national identity. In contemporary Israel, these representations of Israel as “one big family” are instantiated through the nexus of pronatalist laws and policies promoting reproduction and fertility disproportionately among Jewish-Israeli women, discouraging miscegenation, and medicalizing childbirth. These familial representations of the (modern political Zionist) “Jewish nation” have also played a role in erasing the identities of the twenty-five percent of Israelis who are Palestinian, in whitewashing Mizrahi Jewish identity, and in constructing Mizrahi Jews as racially distinct from Palestinian citizens of Israel (Shohat 1998).
To call migrant caregivers “one of the family” is thus to misrepresent the boundaries of the nation as flexible and porous, when indeed the racial discourse of kinship in Israel continues to secure its borders. Most striking in my conversations with Jewish-Israeli citizen-employers was the absence of acknowledgment in many conversations of any contradiction between their representations of caregivers as “one of the family” and their simultaneous reaffirmation of—and support for—Israel as an exclusively Jewish state. With the exception of Idan, their matter-of-fact descriptions of exclusionary citizenship laws stood in marked contrast to the claims to kinship.

Importantly, in centering the exploitative implications of the kinship trope, I do not suggest that caregivers are necessarily always opposed to being considered “one of the family,” nor that they do not appreciate or even desire this designation. The pain of being physically separate from one’s own family and friend networks can instill a loneliness and a sense of isolation that may in some cases be assuaged through the forming of emotional connections to the family of one’s employer. Forming bonds with the family for whom one works can help establish a sense of self-coherence in a situation where migrant caregivers possess little control over the parameters of the work arrangement. This need to feel “part of the family” was evident in some caregivers’ expression of deep affection for their employers, whose personalities they grew to love and appreciate through the difficult process of establishing daily routines, and by being continually exposed to their vulnerability. Patricia, for instance, said repeatedly of her employer in various iterations, “he’s so sweet. I love him so much. He’s my second grandfather.” During the complex and contradictory process of caring for dependent elderly employers as legally dependent workers, migrant caregivers adopt and develop many different emotional orientations.
towards their charges and towards the job. At the same time, even the most receptive orientations towards being considered “one of the family” cannot be separated from the injunction to act like “one of the family” as part of the job. Sana, for example, says she uses the familial word “saba” (grandpa) to exhibit strategic deference to her employer. She comments, “saba (grandpa), he is so rude. So many things he doesn’t like, but I don’t care. What he needs, I do it. They love me and they think they are like my family.”

Similarly, by underscoring the disproportionate legal power that citizen-employers possess, I do not wish to suggest that elderly citizen-employers are not also vulnerable. Indeed, there were employers who expressed a fear of being abandoned by their caregivers. Further, as some of their children told me, when migrant caregivers go on vacation, their charges are sometimes unable to sleep or eat and become dissociated and disoriented. Transitioning from independent to dependent living can also be an extremely painful experience for the elderly, and equally stressful for their families, who are often responsible for mediating the citizen-employer/migrant caregiver relationship. An equally difficult burden for families is finding caregivers whom they trust to tend to cherished members of their family. Migrant caregivers and citizen-employers are in markedly different ways both part of a relationship of dependence and vulnerability. I do not wish to erase the vulnerability elderly Israeli citizens face by virtue of being elderly, but rather to highlight how these vulnerabilities are differentially visible to and prioritized by the state, and the material implications of these differential valuations.
“Everybody Wants to Be Minhalim”

Another trope among citizen-employers portrayed Jewish-Israelis as “natural” managers who were inherently unsuited to perform live-in carework. This trope was closely intertwined with a broader discourse among citizen-employers that depicted migrants as “transnational development agents” who are helping alleviate poverty through their employment in Israel (Faist 2008). While citizen-employers were portrayed as inherently opposed to the stigmatized work of live-in care, migrant caregivers were depicted as a “natural” solution to the eldercare crisis arising out of Israel’s shift from a Zionist collectivist state to a capitalist, “modern society.” Unlike the kinship trope, wherein citizen-employers tended to omit discussion of inequality or power, within this discourse they acknowledged the economic disparities that existed between themselves and the caregivers working in their homes but nevertheless viewed the relationship as apolitical. These representations of care migration to Israel reflected broader portrayals of the labor migrant as a “tool” for “lifting” “underdeveloped” countries out of poverty within mainstream development discourse (Wise, Covarrubias and Puentes 2013, 430). This discourse depicted labor migrants as flexible human capital who, through the sending of remittances, can help “move” their home countries along a linear trajectory from poverty to “modernity” (Davies 2007; Faist 2008; Raghuram 2007; Wise, Covarrubias and Puentes 2013). Much like the kinship trope, this second discourse also depoliticized the citizen-employer/migrant caregiver relationship by eliding the affective dynamics that produce and reinforce labor market segmentation, and by normalizing the disproportionate “purchasing power” Jewish-Israelis possess as citizen-consumers and as “managers.”
Evident in several of my discussions with Jewish-Israeli citizen-employers was a tendency to treat as natural the relegation of live-in carework to migrants from the global South. Interviewees normalized this division of labor by explaining migrants’ presence in citizens’ homes as an outcome of Israelis’ “preference” for being managers, rather than as an effect of intentional policies and laws enabling the marketization of racialized and gendered forms of labor. In this sense, they saw the stigmatization of carework as an originary cause, rather than an effect, of the division of labor inside their homes. Relatedly, some citizen-employers portrayed the presence of migrants in their home as an inevitable outcome of Israel’s move from a communal, “ultra-nationalist welfare state” to a capitalist, individualistic, “modern” society (Silver 2010).

Sharon, a Jewish-Israeli citizen who hired a caregiver for her elderly mother, illustrates the pervasiveness of the view that live-in carework is both undesirable and unnatural. She explains that

“(Caregiving) is a job nobody wants to do…Everybody wants to be minhalim (managers). Because the country is young, we are only sixty years old, and now the generation becomes older so we need someone to take care of the old people and we the Israelis don’t want to do that. Because when the country was young, then everybody did everything, and now we need help.”

Other citizen-employers similarly described live-in carework as a “job nobody wants to do;” Dalia, an elderly Jewish-Israeli woman living in Tel Aviv relates, “the local people prefer to be unemployed rather than care for the infirm. They feel that it’s a stigma.”

Similarly, Orly comments that

“(Migrant caregivers) don’t take the work of Israelis cuz no one wants to do this work. People appreciate it; they think good things about them…people say ‘oh, they need the money, they come to work here, they have a license, let them do it.’ This is how they’re treated, not as people taking places of Israelis.”
Whereas migrant laborers in some host countries are portrayed within xenophobic rhetoric as “stealing” citizens’ jobs, Orly suggests that in Israel, the language of stigma takes precedent. For this reason, citizens “appreciate” that they don’t have to do this work, rather than resenting the presence of migrant caregivers. Yet the stigmatization of live-in carework also helps illuminate the affective mechanics of how it becomes racialized. Rather than being portrayed as “stealing” the money of hard-working citizens, migrant domestic workers were portrayed in some citizen narratives as filling a “natural” gap in the Israeli labor market; “they need money,” and Israelis “(don’t want) to do this work.”

Instead of directly naming the stigma of live-in carework, some citizen-employers alluded to it indirectly by portraying Israelis as “unnatural” caregivers, describing them as too impatient, as “thinking they are too smart,” and as “completely unreliable.” Some interviewees also connected Israelis’ inherent “unsuitability” for carework to the country’s transformation into a “modern” society. While in her description Sharon notes that “everyone wants to be minhalim,” she also draws an interesting parallel between the aging of Israel’s population and the “maturing” of the country itself. This “maturing” she references, one other citizen-employers also mentioned, refers not only to the “aging” of Israel in numerical years, but also a shift in the Jewish-Israeli collective ethos from a welfare-based, communitarian society where “everybody did everything” for themselves, to an individualistic, capitalistic society marked by privatization and individualism, where younger generations no longer “do everything” (Beinin 1988).10 Wittingly or unwittingly, Sharon underscores how the growth of Israel’s elderly population has occurred alongside the “development” in government policies from welfare-based to neoliberal economic and health care policies aimed at privatizing and outsourcing public services more broadly.
Though Sharon’s statement that Israelis would rather be minhalim than live-in caregivers may be quite right, their preference for doing less stigmatized and devalued forms of labor is not merely the cause of the racialization of live-in carework and structural segmentation of the labor market, but also its effect. The deliberate construction of laws such as the Long Term Care Act and the Slavery Law, which rely upon the inadequate compensation of non-Jewish laborers for their implementation, have helped engineer a new managerial class of Jewish-Israelis within the home. Attributing the exclusive employment of migrants within the live-in care industry to a desire among Israelis to be managers thus overlooks, intentionally or unintentionally, how the active engineering of policies facilitating under-compensation and labor extraction shape these preferences in the first place. In doing so, such ascriptions depoliticize migrant carework by making invisible the national expression and household reproduction of labor market segmentation.

Similar to Sharon, Orly explains that Jewish-Israelis never work as live-in domestic workers because

“The old age in Israel started to be in higher percent, and now Israelis live longer. So (there are) more old people, so basically this was a solution that was to be found. Because in the modern family you don’t live in…how you call it? Hamulah, like the Bedouins…Israelis cost more and there’s fewer persons. The only economic solution for a family is a caretaker who lives there and has a salary, and you don’t have to rent for him, and this is the only way you can do it.”

Like Sharon, Orly attributes the migrant/citizen division of labor to both the growth of the elderly population and a shift from an “ultra-nationalist welfare state” to an increasingly individualistic, “modern” society (Silver 2010). Sharon suggests that in contradistinction to Bedouin living in hamulas, “modern” Israelis cannot allocate carework within the family. As a result, migrants are constructed as “the only economic solution” to Israel’s eldercare crisis.
Nadav, a Jewish-Israeli from Jerusalem who hired a caregiver for his father, similarly explains that before Israel became a “modern” society, hiring a non-Jewish migrant to live inside the home would have seemed “unnatural.” He states, “nobody even thought to take somebody strange to take care of one of the family. Now there’s modern life—it’s more materialistic, and family members don’t have time to take care of an elderly relative. You bring someone else to care for them.” In contrast to the contemporary assumption that an elderly Jewish-Israeli citizen will either be cared for by a migrant worker or by the state, Nadav recalls an era before the Long Term Care Act and the neoliberalization of health care when Israelis were not managers inside the home, but rather the exclusive providers of care, albeit under starkly different working conditions. Nadav’s allusion to the neoliberalization of Israeli society hints at a time when Jewish-Israeli citizens were not “natural” managers at all; rather, as society has become more “materialistic,” citizen-consumers and managers have been “made.”

The extent to which the racial and gendered boundaries of citizen and non-citizen labor have become imbricated in the social fabric of contemporary Israeli society is also evident in Shmuel’s story of how his mother hired a caregiver:

“(My mother) would go to the moadon and she would see all her friends with caregivers and say, ‘why don’t I have one?’ and that’s how it started…my mother wanted someone to help her with cleaning…she felt lonely and she wanted somebody…the nurse from betuach leumi (national social security agency) would come in and would ask my mother, ‘I’m very thirsty, can you get me a glass of water?’ and my mother would jump! And that was enough for the nurse to realize she didn’t need one… after something like ten or eleven times I think, she was qualified. The other (elderly) are smarter in this sense and they were able to fool the nurse.”

Shmuel’s narrative illustrates not only the extent to which the image of the migrant caregiver permeates Israeli popular perceptions of aging, but also the degree to which
employing a migrant caregiver becomes a status symbol. Shmuel’s mother first decided to apply for in-home care services because she “would see all her friends with caregivers.” That elderly Israelis commonly know they can “fool the nurse” into thinking they need the medical assistance of a caregiver speaks to migrants’ symbolic significance within popular perceptions of aging well. Further, her desire to hire a caregiver because “she felt lonely” highlights the dual roles migrant caregivers play as home healthcare aids and as companions.

Also accompanying this narrative of migrants being the “only economic solution” to Israel’s “modern” way of life is the characterization of migrants from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and India as independent economic agents of development. As Esther asserts, “(migrant caregivers) have it good here because Israel is more modern than the Philippines. They live very well. A great life, they receive a good salary. They require a lot; they develop themselves more.” Dina similarly adds, “you really feel from their situation that they have nothing.” This trope echoes discourses about female migrants within the “development-migration nexus” portraying “‘the migrant’ as a celebrated agent of development” who raises his or her home countries out of poverty as “national heroines” and as flexible forms of human capital (Hickey 2015; Raghuram 2007). Underlying the logic of this “migration-development nexus” is a “(portrayal) of the free market as the culmination of capitalist modernity, an inevitable process with no alternative” (Wise, Márquez Covarrubias, and Puentes 2013, 433). As critical development studies scholars have argued, this approach not only overstates the positive effects of remittances and essentializes migrants’ many contributions to sending and host countries, but it also decontextualizes contemporary labor migration from its historical
rootedness in failed structural adjustment programs, colonial histories of labor expropriation, and the establishment of export processing zones by corporations throughout the global South. Further, it overlooks how the portrayal of migrant women as “national heroines” facilitates their exploitation (Faist 2008; Raghuram 2007; Rodriguez 2002; Wise, Márquez Covarrubias, and Puentes 2013). From a critical perspective, Idan comments on this tendency to reduce migrant carework to a development tool, commenting, “Israelis really feel they’re in a Western, developed society and these foreigners come because they want to live in this society. Perhaps this is the predominant purview. It comes out of ignorance.”

The construction of Jewish-Israelis as managers does not only occur in relation to migrant caregivers as the workers diametrically opposite their managers; it is also inextricable from the racialization of Palestinians more broadly. Leah, an elderly Jewish-Israeli woman living in Jerusalem, also attributes the exclusive employment of migrants within the caregiving sector to Israelis’ inherent dislike of “hard work.” She states, “(Caregiving) is hard work and you need someone who is flexible who can do it. Not everyone can… We’re spoiled here. Israelis don’t like doing this work… see how many are managers, and lots of Arabs digging in the streets.” Leah’s reference to “Arabs digging in the streets” reveals another dynamic of the racialization of labor in Israel, wherein the construction of Jewish-Israelis as the “ideal” citizen and Palestinians as the internal threat reinforce the status of Jewish-Israelis as “minhalim.” Notable is Leah’s use of the term “Israeli” to denote Jewish-Israelis, in contradistinction to “Arabs,” despite that “Arabs” in Israel are also citizens.12 Leah’s comment also reinforces the extent to which the
construction of Palestinians as threatening intersects with the racialization of manual forms of labor in Israel:

“You know, if you have an Arab, you never know what he’s going to do. You're afraid. For instance we have here Arabs that clean the stairs. Sometimes I’m afraid when I see them. They are very polite, they work a lot of times but they were looking nice and then they take a knife.”

Leah’s fear of the Palestinians fixing the stairs in her apartment building underscores the intersection of labor market segmentation and securitization in Israel, wherein Palestinians are disproportionately represented in construction and other forms of manual labor, but are deemed too great a threat to let into the intimate spaces of Jewish-Israeli homes. Her description also suggests that “cost-benefit calculations” and “cost-cutting imperatives” commonly characterizing neoliberal governmentality are heavily mediated in Israel by the paramount goal of guarding the racial boundaries of the state (Brown 2015, 32, 197).

In reality, migrants come to Israel to work as caregivers for a complex range of reasons; though economic concerns are often an important motivation, caregivers also migrate for political reasons, to escape jobs and marriages, to build houses for their families, for religious purposes, to earn starting capital for small businesses, and to follow partners and family members across great distances. The situation of Pamela, a science teacher from the Philippines, exemplifies the complexity of deciding to migrate. For Pamela, the decision to migrate was based not upon an imperative to earn extra money, but rather a desire to be with her boyfriend and to experience life as a religious Christian in Jerusalem. She explains,

“Employers think we come here because of poverty. That’s the bottom line that they always say...they say everybody come here because of poverty. But I came here not because of poverty, because I have a job already in the Philippines. I came here because I want to come here, and my boyfriend is here, and I have another
intention. I don’t have poverty. I came here not because of what I’m earning. I come here because it’s Jerusalem and my boyfriend is here.”

From different perspectives, both Pamela and Idan critique employers’ essentialization of migration from the global South. Importantly, such critiques have long been a cornerstone of organizing activity among migrant networks working to end the exploitation of transnational care and domestic workers. A vivid example can be found in a 1994 anti-imperialist unity statement disseminated by Philippines-based organization Migrante International:

“Our ultimate aspiration is to stay and live with our families in a Philippines that is free from the exploitation and domination of imperialist powers, where farmers own the land they till and workers enjoy just employment and working conditions, justly compensated and justly treated, and where people’s rights are upheld and defended. We recognize that this aspiration is one that we share with the vast majority of workers, peasants, and all democratic classes and strata in our country” (Rodriguez 2002, 354).

In naming the exploitative role that Western “migrant-receiving” states play in the transnational “maid trade,” Migrante International activists reject the narrative that a true “national heroine” sacrifices her right to territorial belonging for the sake of bettering the national economy. Drawing upon anti-colonialist language, they emphasize their right to not migrate, rather than the commonly referenced right to cross borders within discourses of globalization and international human rights. Their statement stands in marked contrast to citizens’ narratives depicting Filipina migrants as eagerly seeking a “better opportunity” abroad. It equally stands in contrast to the contents of the 1999 *Handbook for Filipinos Overseas*, which states that “By the 21st century, the Filipino is envisioned to be: mobile, flexible, entrepreneurial, nationalistic and tolerant” (Rodriguez 2002, 348).
III. Jewish Exclusivity, Citizenship, and the Depoliticization of Carework

Taken together, tropes depicting migrant caregivers as “one of the family” and representing Jewish-Israelis as “naturally” unsuited to live-in carework have the effect of depoliticizing the laws, policies, and ideologies that have reproduced labor market segmentation at the national and household level. By representing the tedious work caregivers do inside the home as voluntary and as a “labor of love,” the kinship trope reinforces the connection between migrants’ job security and the desire of many to have intimate emotional connections with caregivers. This trope exacerbates the negative impacts of the Slavery Law by further obscuring the difficult and tedious nature of carework and by representing carework as exceptionally intimate in nature, and therefore “not really work.” Like the Slavery Law, the kinship trope also constructs migrant caregivers not as subjects but rather as objects that are the intimate proxies of the real legal, economic, and political subject: the citizen. By dismissing the effortful nature of carework and the stakes for unsatisfactorily fulfilling their duties, citizen-employers decontextualize carework from the broader transnational marketization of female migrants.

Likewise, tropes depicting Jewish-Israelis as natural managers and migrants as natural workers obscure how this relationship has been “made”—through policies that set the cost of migrant labor three times lower than that of citizens, through constructions of Palestinians as threats to the household, and through discourses among sending countries and international migration organizations that constitute migrants as “transnational development agents” and “collective agents of change” (Faist 2008, 26). The closely related discourse within mainstream “migration management” literature depicting global
capitalism, financialization, privatization, and transnationalism as the teleological outcomes of progress portray migrant caregivers’ presence inside Jewish-Israeli homes as inevitable (Wise, Covarrubias and Puentes 2013). It is precisely the seeming inevitability of this relationship that elides the symbolic, ideational, and material mechanics by which it is continually constructed and reconstructed. The depoliticization of carework creates additional barriers to collective organizing at the grassroots and institutional levels and creates epistemic hurdles that slow advocacy efforts around migrant workers’ rights.

At the same time, the depoliticization of carework also impacts how employers view citizenship right. Despite the claims to family that surfaced across interviews, when I asked interviewees whether they felt that migrant caregivers should be granted citizenship, they either responded definitively that they should not, or expressed that such a question was not relevant, given that Israel “is a Jewish state.” When I asked Leah, for instance, whether her caregiver Jennifer should have a right to citizenship, she answered simply and without hesitation, “no, not to citizenship.” Similarly, Orly states in an ambiguous tone that is either critically descriptive or matter-of-fact, “listen, Israel does not want (migrant caregivers) to be citizens because they are not Jewish. So from the beginning they are second-rate people.” Similarly, Dov, a secular Jewish-Israeli who describes himself as “very Zionist” and “(leading) a Jewish life all the time,” definitively states, “No, no. Same with refugees—Since it’s a Jewish state, it doesn’t accept immigrants, non-Jews.” He adds soon after that “there is a fear of non-Jews coming here.”

In sharp contrast to Dov, Idan asserts, “Remember that you are in a racist, ignorant society. People feel superior to all those ‘natives’ that come. There’s not talk of citizenship.” Idan’s observation that “there’s not talk of citizenship” helps explain the lack
of any lengthy discussions around this topic that I was able to elicit. In my interviews with citizen-employers, they tended to respond to my question about citizenship for migrant caregivers with a naturalness that precluded further conversation. Their largely unhesitant assertions that migrant caregivers should not be granted citizenship speaks to the “unwritten and implicit racialized hierarchy into which Israeli citizens are socialized over the course of a lifetime”13 (Willen 2010, 272). Indeed, widespread public conversations about demography and the impending loss of Israel’s ongoing “demographic war” - dominate the Israeli news, government rhetoric, and the language of legislation, critically impacting how citizen-employers view their own positions towards the migrants they hire (Bakan and Abu-Laban 2011; Ghanem, Rouhana and Yiftachel 1998). These ethno-racially exclusive and territorially-based understandings of citizenship stand in stark relief against the multiple meanings of citizenship that form across various migrant diasporas. As Rodriguez argues, in the case of the Philippines, citizenship has become a way for a migrant-sending government to discipline nationals working abroad through the imposition of income taxes and other financial obligations (2002). In other cases, it is the continual obligation a migrant may feel to remit money to their families that defines the meaning of citizenship. Other times, citizenship entails the deterritorialized participation in various diasporic communities. In chapter four, I turn to the building of such migrant communities and the creation of spaces of belonging across the Internet.

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NOTES
1 Several studies have examined the impact of employers’ claims “their” domestic workers are “like family.” While I describe this familial discourse within Jewish-Israeli homes as the “kinship trope,” Bakan and Stasiulis (1997) call it the “familial ideology.” Anderson views it as rooted in the social/sexual contract, in its upholding of a patriarchal division of labor that relegates “family” work to an imagined apolitical realm (2000).
2 Many scholars have commented upon the use of familial rhetoric by the Israeli state to emphasize racial likeness (see Herzog 2010), whether in the context of reproduction and childbirth (see Bercovitch 1997; Remmenick 2010), the management of non-Jewish populations (see Willen 2010), collective settlements
such as moshavim and kibbutzim (Atzmon and Israeli 2009), or in the context of the role of Jewish-Israeli women in the nation (Herzog 2004; Yuval-Davis 1997).

3 Several scholars have commented upon the deployment of Orientalist techniques of distinguishing between East/West, modern/traditional, and civilized/uncivilized within the European Zionist narrative and the context of Israel. Shohat, for example, argues that the European Zionist movement presumed to be “saving” Mizrahi Jews from “the harsh rule of their Arab ‘captors’” (she uses the word Sephardi, which at the time of writing was synonymous with Mizrahi). Through the colonization of Palestinian land this East/West binary was imposed upon Israel’s Jewish, Muslim, and Christian population with the hopes, in the words of Prime Minister Ben Gurion, of bringing them to “a suitable level of civilization” (Shohat 1998, 5). In his discussion of Orientalist constructions of the Palestinian Arab, Said (1979, 1981) also argues that the central tenet of Orientalism is “the myth of the arrested development of the Semites;” in contradistinction to the “Westerners,” the Semite (307).

4 Importantly, a caregiver’s ability to ingratiate themselves into Jewish-Israeli families is also inextricable from the gendered expectations citizen-employers hold of their employees. Hadassah asserts that while men are more forceful, for example, “women aren’t like this...they take care of things, are ready to help, to clean, sometimes they cook, they do things without being asked, they’re more a part of the family, and they play with the grandchildren.” Such characterizations of women as more ready to help and more readily incorportable into families also reflects the gendered expectation that women caregivers demonstrate caring affectations; not fulfilling such gendered expectations can have negative consequences for a caregiver’s job security in a way that may not be the case for men.

5 Shabbos goy is a term for someone not Jewish who is permitted under Jewish law to complete the tasks forbidden to Jews in their observance of the Jewish Sabbath.

6 Efforts to promote fertility among Jewish-Israeli women date back at least as far as the founding of Israel in 1948 when fears about Israel’s encroaching neighbors occupied Knesset proceedings as well as the popular imagination (Sperling; Birenbaum-Carmeli and Dinmfeld). Although IVF services are free for Jewish and Palestinian citizens alike, the location of fertility centers, the informal discrimination by doctors of Palestinian citizens of Israel patients, and historically, the selective provision of government subsidies encourage reproduction more among Jews than Palestinians. As one example, while the National Exceptions Committee (NEC) for IVF treatment can approve semen implantations among donors and recipients of different religions, the 2010 Ova Donation Law requires that donor and recipient be of the same religion (Law Library of Congress). Such stipulations demonstrate apprehension towards interfaith reproduction, encouraging instead the reproduction of babies that can be easily categorized into religio-national group. As Morganstern-Leissner argues, childbirth itself becomes a rite of passage into the Jewish nation (Berkovitch; Morganstern-Leissner).

7 Minhalim is the Hebrew word for “managers.”

8 The term “migration-development nexus” is used both critically and descriptively by scholars and practitioners to denote the policies and epistemic frameworks that emphasize the correlation between migration and the sending of remittances as a means of alleviating poverty in “underdeveloped” migrant-sending countries. This framework has been developed by scholars and practitioners within the academy, as well as the International Organization for Migration, the International Labor Organization, the World Bank, and international and local NGOs. Critics of this framework underscore its tendency to ignore inequality under neoliberal economic policies, to downplay labor exploitation, to homogenize and essentialize the multiple circuits migrants travel, to reinforce colonial conceptions of modernity that position migrant-receiving countries as Western/of the global North/modern/developed, and migrant-sending countries as of the global South/traditional/underdeveloped/poor (see Davies 2007; Faist 2008; Raghuram 2007; Wise, Covarrubias and Puentes 2013).

9 The term “ultra-nationalist welfare state” was coined by economy expert Shir Hever of the Alternative Information Center in Jerusalem, as told to journalist Charlotte Silver in an interview with Electronic Intifada (see Silver 2010).

10 Beinin argues that the shift from an ultra-nationalist and labor Zionist ethos to a neoliberal ethos was spearheaded by left-of-center politicians in the mid-to-late 1980s who “advocated jettisoning the ideological and institutional encumbrances of labor Zionism in favor of an export-led, profit-driven economy, privatization of public sector enterprises, free-markets, and an orientation toward integration with Europe.”
This shift was also precipitated by a U.S. conditional aid package of $1.5 billion, in return for which Israel was required to implement a stabilization plan (see Beinin 1998).

11 Shmueli and Khamaisi define *hamula* as a biological kinship and extended social network that “functions as a political and a socioeconomic unit vis-à-vis other hamulas and other communities” (Shmueli and Khamaisi 2015, 17, as paraphrasing El-Taji 2008). Hamulas also serve as support networks, particularly where indigenous, non-Jewish communities may feel mistrust towards formal institutions (Shmueli and Khamaisi). Though still in tact in many parts of Israel, since Israeli statehood in 1948, the Bedouin *hamula* structure has eroded due to ongoing land dispossession and the forced resettlement of Bedouin (Dinero 2010).

12 The interchangeable use of the terms “Israelis” and “Jewish-Israelis” was a common trend across interviews with citizen-employers, but is also present more broadly in everyday language usage, both by Jewish-Israelis and by Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. That “Jewish” is implied by the term “Israeli” even in common speech reveals the exclusionary nature of citizenship in practice, even if legally Palestinian citizens of Israel may be granted some civil and political rights as citizens, though not in equal amount to Jewish-Israelis (see Ghanem, Rouhana, and Yiftachel 1998; Rouhana 1997).

13 Willen draws in this discussion from Bar-Tal and Teichman 2005.
Chapter Four

Multiple Modes of Care: Internet and Migrant Caregiver Networks in Israel

_They become more attached to you than you to them...they really are like children. They see you as their food, as their life, as their everything...You have to base everything on whether he’s awake, he’s asleep, he needs something. It’s like you’re 24 hours on standby._

-David, migrant caregiver working in Jerusalem

David, a twenty-six year old nurse, came from the Philippines to Israel in 2012 to “explore the place, get to know the culture, and earn some money in the process.” In describing his job as a caregiver for Yuval, a ninety-seven-year-old retired doctor, David identifies a fundamental schism between his and Yuval’s experiences of their relationship. Yuval relies on David for his survival, while David ultimately views his presence in Yuval’s home as short-term employment that provides economic stability and allows him to explore the ancient cities of Israel/Palestine. Though he admires Yuval and enjoys their conversations about medicine and politics, the primary stimulus for his emotional and intellectual fulfillment lies within his vast social network outside the confines of Yuval’s Jerusalem apartment.

While the Israeli government labels him exclusively as a caregiver, David’s understanding of himself is contingent, shifting and multiple. As a young nurse who hopes to travel to many countries, continue his graduate studies and keep in touch with friends from the Philippines living across the world, David relies daily on various modes of internet communication technology (ICT). Given his personal aspirations and the political and structural constraints on his daily life, ICT becomes “locative media for self-expression,” a means of coping with difficulties on the job and of strengthening networks

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of support (Franklin 2004, 161). Whether between family, friends or members of extended communities, ICT creates a form of “virtual co-presence” across families, social networks and borders (Baldassar 2016, 153).

In this chapter I suggest that within the context of the unequal employer/caregiver relationship, ICT becomes a potential space for coping, self-expression, mutual support, and community-building and contestation (Franklin 2004). In examine three ways in which migrant domestic workers make use of the co-presence ICT enables – as a coping mechanism and means of self-expression; to connect with familial and friend networks of care; and to fortify community networks of solidarity and activism. ICT is not a panacea for the pain of separation from loved ones, nor should it be romanticized as a medium that necessarily equalizes inequality or democratizes hierarchical power relations. Nevertheless, the co-presence it enables allows migrants to feel connected to loved ones and to experience a sense of “ambient community” and belonging across broader social networks (Madianou 2016). The daily modes of contestation and negotiation that take place across ICT are especially important given caregivers’ exclusive relegation to the nursing sector and the hierarchical allocation of resources among Jewish and non-Jewish inhabitants of Israel/Palestine and de jure discrimination against non-Jews more broadly. These daily negotiations of structural, social and institutional discrimination work to denaturalize the racialized, gendered category of caregiver ascribed to them through law and social practice. Caregivers’ use of ICT also illuminates the concrete interests that are of utmost priority to caregivers, potentially revealing unexpected networks of solidarity and support (Mohanty 2003).

In this chapter I will first give a brief background of the context in which migrant
caregivers in Israel/Palestine live and work. I will then explore three areas within which caregivers use ICT as a space of affective exchange: as a coping mechanism and means of self-expression; to connect with familial and friend networks of care and support; and to fortify community networks of activism and solidarity. Finally, I will suggest the analytic and practical consequences of attention to caregivers’ use of ICT.

In analyzing caregivers’ use of ICT, I draw on Marianne Franklin’s conception of cyberspace as a potential “site of everyday resistance” that transforms meaning and subjectivity and allows for self-definition (Franklin 2004, 52). Consequently, I highlight the lived, embodied experiences of migrants and treat the category “migrant caregiver” as constituted through “the naturalization of categories of work” under global capitalism (Mohanty 2003, 159). I also build on the transnational caregiving literature that explores the multivalent, contingent forms care can take across physical distance (Baldassar and Merla 2014); the ways familial and “extra-familial” or “frontier networks” of care are fortified (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002, 19); and how ICT and transnational relationships become mutually constitutive (Madianou and Miller 2012). I further ground my analysis in the work of Adi Kuntsman (2009, 2012) and other scholars who examine the interplay between affect, cyberspace and the everyday politics of self-expression (Ferreday 2009; Karatzogianni 2012; Raun 2012). Finally, I draw upon Mohanty’s (2003) discussion of the racialized, gendered and sexualized constitution of “women’s work” through capitalist processes and colonial histories, and the potentialities for solidarity that ruptures in these processes can create.

ICT as a Coping Strategy and Self-Expression: The Workday Beyond ‘Migrant’ and ‘Caregiver’
So what are we gonna do at home? Just look at the four sides of the wall?!... we’re not just mitaplot taking care of the old woman, we are also human.
-Fred, caregiver from the Philippines working in Jerusalem

As one mode of coping and self-expression, caregivers use ICT to define their own experiences beyond that of the racialized, gendered construction of the ‘foreign worker’ ascribed to them through law and social practice. Tenuous job security and the asymmetrical employer/employee relationship often prevent caregivers from revealing feelings of frustration to their employers for fear of being fired and subsequently deported. This dynamic is especially pronounced for caregivers who have exceeded the number of times they can legally switch employers. Given these limitations, cyberspace becomes a crucial mode of coping and self-expression. Caregivers’ participation in video conversations, political discussions on Facebook pages and sharing of experiences across chat boards allow them to engage interests and embody a part of themselves they can only selectively express in front of employers. ICT thus becomes a sounding board for discussing hardships; exchanging tips on circumventing the trappings of Israeli migration, citizenship and labour law; and receiving support from loved ones and ‘intimate strangers’ alike (Raun 2012: 173). Though all interviewees, to varying degrees, were able to leverage some element of negotiating power through direct conversations with employers or their families, they also articulated in various ways how legal and political power overwhelmingly resides with employers (see also Liebelt 2011). Employers’ ability to influence caregivers’ right to reside in Israel infuses the caregiver/employer relationship from the tones caregivers adopt to the rights and sentiments they choose to articulate. Though employers control caregivers’ working conditions, they cannot regulate or prevent the circulation of affect across cyberspace
that allows caregivers to find belonging, express anger and frustration, and find networks of social and political solidarity. Though ICT neither uniformly results in positive interactions, nor is it always necessarily a place of belonging free from conflict, the possibility of interactively navigating the trying emotions of the job nevertheless provides a consistently used outlet for caregivers.

Fred, a farmer, father and aspiring business owner from the Philippines, works as a caregiver for an elderly couple in Jerusalem. For five and a half years he has remained in Israel/Palestine so he can send money home to finance his son’s education, start a small business and buy livestock for his farm. Though he works against regulation as a live-out caregiver, during the day he rarely leaves his employer’s house. In describing his day-to-day routine, Fred alludes to his desire for greater social, emotional and intellectual stimulation, yet his ability to seek this interaction is contingent upon his employer’s physical and emotional needs.

Despite Fred’s subjective experiences of everyday life, which shift in relation to his family, his Catholic and Filipino communities in Jerusalem, and his hopes and desires for his own professional future, under Israeli law he is only allowed to reside in Israel/Palestine as a caregiver. Both his legal relegation to the caregiving industry and the structural and ideological factors upholding the unequal relationship with his employer restrict him from expressing the different subjectivities he inhabits beyond caregiver. Within the walls of his employer’s apartment, Facebook pages, webcam and ICT-facilitated conversations provide Fred with a sense of “virtual co-presence” where he can complicate and reject the identities ascribed to him through law, social practice, and systemic racism, manifested at the individual level (Baldassar 2016). There are moments
when this online connectivity allows Fred to be actively co-present in the lives of his sons, while at other times it creates a sense of “ambient co-presence,” or a “peripheral awareness” of the presence of family, friends and broader social networks that provide a sense of “being-at-home” (Ferreday 2009, 101; Madianou 2016). Acknowledging the need to escape boredom and vent about the difficulty of the job, he explains that cyberspace provides a need place for him to complain about his employer and seek support, especially when he is not able or allowed to leave the house:

“When you get angry with them sometimes, you can not fight with them…when I’m expressing my anger to my employer, [it is] just wasting time, wasting money…you can not fight with them, even if they are angry…lately I’m playing with, enjoying my computer to talk about my employers. What I want [to know] is what’s the news [of my] family. It’s very big help for me.”

This ambient co-presence and sense of being ‘always on’ is a crucial means of coping when Fred wishes to express his anger without consequences for his employment status (Madianou 2016). He adds, “when I get angry with [my employers] sometimes...you can not fight with them. I take the patience from my family.” Constant communication with his sons gives him strength to undergo the sacrifice of living abroad, reminding him of the larger purpose behind his work in Israel/Palestine. Ramona similarly explains, “when we have no patience, we call. That’s why mitaplot have three cell phones and once we’re angry, call, call, call, [saying] ‘my employer is like this, like this, I’m angry, what can I do?’”

She adds that the first thing all caregivers do in the morning is turn on their computer, which accompanies them as they work throughout the day. This culture of being ‘always on’ can take the form of both ambient and direct co-presence, allowing her to be in tune with the ‘daily rhythms’ of family, friends and continuously evolving online communities (Madianou 2016).
The more direct forms of co-presence that ICT enables can also create a shared sense of experience through humor. Maria notes that when her employer, who suffers from severe dementia, talks abusively to her or, as on a few occasions, attempts to slap her when Maria gives her meals, she uses humor to complain to her friends on Facebook. “We put a picture of our employer (saying) ‘look how this devil looks!’” she says. Similarly, Rina visits the Facebook page “The Grief of the Unspoken,” a closed group for caregivers in Israel, which serves as a sounding and advice board for navigating exploitative and abusive treatment, to mock Israeli racism and to ask other caregivers for advice in handling difficult emotional and legal situations. The continual awareness of others going through similar experiences acts in many ways as an “ambient community” that fosters a feeling of belonging and a sense of collective solidarity. At times this continually evolving community takes the form of direct co-presence, and at other times it appears as a more indirect or peripheral awareness of others nearby.

This enhanced freedom of self-expression and co-presence with loved ones and extended social networks is possible precisely because of the simultaneity between worlds that ICT enables. Using online video and messaging software such as Skype, WhatsApp, Ringer, Viber and Chica, caregivers create continuity between the physical worlds in which they are situated with their employers and broader circles of friends and support through the “affective fabric” of exchanges across cyberspace. This affective sense of being “always on” upsets the online/offline distinction as somehow being less real; images and conversations “touch us” when we stare into our computers as affect circulates between cyberspace and caregivers’ physical locations (Kuntsman 2012, 3). This blurring of online/offline allows migrant caregivers to navigate multiple subjectivities beyond
those imposed upon them within the physical spaces to which they are restricted under
Israel law. Ramona tellingly describes this simultaneity in her constant conversations
with Filipino friends in Israel/Palestine and abroad:

“When we wake up in the morning? Duh duh doot doot doot (computer sound)... When they (my employers) wake up I can still watch what’s going on. That’s how we do. When they call me I’m still on the phone and I say “no this won’t end (points to phone) and this will (nods to them), talk to me.” I have a small laptop and in the beginning when I was new there, when they needed something I would messenger with my video call. I said when you need me tell me and I can leave this. If I’m chatting and talking, you are the priority. And they know this is our lives, that makes us happy and contented, to talk to friends and to the family, otherwise we will get crazy inside the house.”

While Ramona strategically assures her employers that they are her priority, she also
describes a delicate balancing between her exchanges online and her daily household
routine. Her assertion that online conversations with her friend “won’t end” reveals that
online interactions are the constant backdrop to her day, while those with her employer are
interruptions. At the same time that Ramona must demonstrate to her employers that she is
always on call, she also integrates this sense of ambient co-presence into her daily routine
so that she is never only performing the role of caregiver. In this sense, restrictions on
Ramona’s physical mobility do not hinder her “virtual” presence among close friends and
extended social networks (Diminescu 2008, 570). For Ramona, Fred and many other
interviewees, ICT increases caregiver mobility by fortifying networks of emotional
support and shared experiences that extend the spaces in which they can find respite from
performing the role of caregiver.

Crucially, online belonging and community cannot erase the legal, social and
political privilege granted to Israeli employers, deeply rooted racist ideologies and
racialized forms of work – nor the pain of depression and isolation. Neither is virtual co-
presence a replacement for the physical proximity of family members. Nevertheless,
within the context of an inequitable relationship that has structurally evolved to ensure the wellbeing, health and longevity of one party, cyberspace becomes a social lifeline. It functions as a site for creatively expressing the range of human experience felt by both parties to the relationship, and for caregivers to prioritize the representation of their own experiences rather than those of their employers. Finding modes of self-expression within the asymmetrical caregiver/employer relationship is important not only in sustaining caregivers’ emotional strength to meet the next day, but also as a site for refusing employers’ ‘historically specific naturalization of gender and race hierarchies’ through the category of ‘women’s work’ (Mohanty 2003: 141). Fred’s assertion that ‘we’re not just mitaplot’ speaks to the gap between the categorical identity ascribed to largely female migrants from South and Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe and the embodied realities of the people performing this role for a host of economic, political and personal reasons. When Rina, a caregiver from the Philippines, refuses to complete tasks not specified in her contract, her employer replies, ‘you’re Filipina! Why aren’t you being nice? My other Filipina did it! My Sri Lankan did it!’ This racist and gendered stereotyping of the ‘good’ caregiver is one reason Facebook and WhatsApp become crucial, if grossly inadequate, outlets for Rina not only to express forms of rage and frustration that could lead to her employment termination but also to learn Israeli labour law and to seek advice from other caregivers who daily ‘[outsmart] state migration policies’ (Liebelt 2011: 187). The collective sharing of strategies and experiences across ICT in some sense politicize the ‘affective ordinary’ (Kuntsman 2012: 8) of caregivers’ daily routines by allowing for this ‘outsmarting’ to take place. These every day ruptures in the very categorical constitution of the ‘migrant caregiver’
are not a replacement for collective political organizing that demands structural and institutional change and unequivocal protest, nor the hard work required to connect state-sponsored exploitation of caregivers to de jure discrimination of Palestinian-Israelis and of Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. At the same time, the simultaneous engagement in multiple worlds and forms of expression that ICT enables alters the scope of what, in a day spent caring for one’s employer, is politically possible.

Affect Across Cyberspace: Sustaining Long-Distance Networks of Care and Support

ICT also enables caregivers to bond with family and loved ones across vast geographical distances, giving and receiving support that sustains them through the many challenges of working and living in Israel/Palestine. The circulation of affect (Ahmed 2004) across geographical distances enables migrants to remain present in the lives of family and friend networks in diverse ways, providing love and support that is “practical, emotional and symbolic” (Ahmed 2004; Baldassar and Merla 2014). As Baldassar and Merla illustrate, the forms care takes across these distances are multidirectional and asymmetrical, changing throughout the course of a lifetime and, importantly, shaping migrants’ relationships not only with nuclear and biological family, but also with extended kinship networks (Baldassar and Merla 2014, 11, 25). The “affective economies” within which emotions, words and images circulate across cyberspace continually reshape and redefine migrants’ relationships, expanding, reinforcing and refusing the category “migrant caregiver” (Ahmed 2004, 46; Brown 2015).

These multidirectional flows of affect across cyberspace allow migrants not only to
give but also to receive care (Baldassar and Merla 2014). In the form of ‘Skype mothering’ (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2012) or fathering, celebrating anniversaries, singing with grandchildren and long distance friends on their birthdays, and sending pictures, packages and remittances (McKay 2007; Parreñas 2005), ICT facilitates new forms of intimacy that transform the meaning of traditional family roles and the notion that family members must be co-present to show care in meaningful ways (Baldassar and Merla 2014; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; McKay 2007; Parreñas 2005; Tungohan 2013). Though communication via ICT can also shape relationships negatively, lead to greater conflict and feelings of guilt, abandonment and sadness, it nevertheless allows migrants to ‘maintain and negotiate a plurality of roles and identities across distances’ (Madianou and Miller 2012: 83). Through ICT they navigate the feelings of ambivalence that accompany migration, from the sadness of separation to the relief of generating income and the excitement of building new social networks and realizing personal goals (Madianou and Miller 2012).

For migrants with children living great distances away, Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, Skype and other webcam platforms are not only conduits through which they can watch their children grow, but also a means of monitoring and keeping them out of trouble. Being present online while simultaneously caring for their employers enables caregivers to fulfill their work duties while helping spouses, parents and extended kinship networks raise children. Indeed, the very act of choosing a communicative medium for speaking with family members and friends is itself an “idiom of expressive intent” shaping these relationships (Madianou and Miller 2012, 126).

The choice Fred makes to follow his twelve-year-old son through webcam when he
returns from school creates a relationship of intensive co-presence that communicates to
his son he is aware of his daily activities despite being physically distant. Using Team
Viewer, a software program that allows remote control of a distant user’s computer, Fred
monitors the websites his son visits and the amount of time he spends doing homework
and playing games. He explains:

“Mostly I do Skype to talk to my son and I monitor how he’s studying, what they
(my children) are doing…Actually, I have access to his computer. I know what
he’s doing (through) TeamViewer, when he’s opening or touching something. My
computer is not for myself, I want to monitor…But separate from that I talk with
my wife so she can watch the children to help me to monitor them. They are still
young. So sometimes my son the last one he’s just…we are bonding. We are not
talking about (something) so important we’re just have a bonding, good
communication with him, that they feel even when I’m far I am still with them.”

Through monitoring and direct conversation, Fred establishes a virtual co-presence with
his son, fulfilling his parental responsibilities at the same time that he tends to his elderly
employer. He provides a sense of structure and guidance while simultaneously making
more money to pay for his son’s future education than he says he could in the Philippines.

The continuous co-presence that Fred works to establish is also a method of
coping and a source of comfort for him. He explains, “when I get angry with (employers)
sometimes, you can not fight with them. I take the patience from my family, that I am
doing this for my family.” As Madianou and Miller (2012) argue, this sense of fulfillment
migrant parents may gain from providing and caring for distant loved ones can be an
important part of their own sense of purpose and support. Several caregivers expressed
that, when they run out of patience, talking to their children through ICT provides great
comfort, reminding them of the motivation behind the sacrifices they have made. Like
Fred, Leela, a caregiver from Nepal, speaks with her children on Skype daily, monitoring
what they eat, ensuring they do their homework and telling them bedtime stories.
Although she cannot be physically close, through Skype she establishes a sense of everyday co-presence that allows her to instill in them “good morals” at the same time that she earns money for their education and the construction of a new house. As with Fred, the fulfilling of parental responsibilities reminds Leela of the purpose behind her difficult decision to migrate. Both Fred and Leela create intimacy and establish a sense of co-presence with their children, both direct and ambient, challenging the normative notion that only proximity can ensure quality parenting (Baldassar and Merla 2014). For Leela, the “performance of intensive mothering at a distance,” or what Tungohan terms “transnational hyper-maternalism,” entails an expansion of her role to primary financial provider (Madianou and Miller 2012, 70; Tungohan 2013).

Such transformations occur not only in parent/child relationships but also between siblings, romantic partners and friends. In romantic relationships, these transformations can at times create a feeling of confusion or separateness. Some interviewees spoke at length about caregivers they knew who remained legally married to their husbands and wives at home even after they entered new romantic relationships in Israel/Palestine. In some of these instances it is precisely the virtual entrée into each other’s lives that changed the lived meaning of categories such as mother, father, sibling, child and spouse. Alice, a caregiver from the Philippines working for an elderly woman south of Nazareth, reports that for years she has been in a relationship with a man she met in Israel while retaining her legal marriage to her husband in the Philippines. She explains that, after seeing pictures of her on Facebook with her new boyfriend, her sons became disillusioned and even angry with her, a process that was painful for the whole family. Similarly, Leela explains that she is aware of her husband’s “new girlfriend,” a
development she accepts as part of her new reality, even as she and her husband continue to co-parent and speak every day. ICT both enables practical forms of intimacy between partners at the same time that its ability to capture the details of daily life demands that partners redefine their relationships. The very negotiation of relationships it enables defies binary notions such as home/away, homeland/diaspora and victim/agent, even as it exists within broader structures and histories of violence that cannot alone be contested through ICT.

ICT is also the primary way migrant married couples stay in touch in the face of Israel’s ban on spousal migration. Maya and Sam, a married couple from Nepal, use texting and Skype to communicate with each other during long weeks apart, and Facebook to post pictures of time they have spent together. Though they hide their marriage from the government and introduce each other as “friends” to new acquaintances, in practice they sustain their relationship between visits through ICT. For migrant caregivers in a range of romantic relationships, whether with Israelis, migrants a city away or spouses in their home countries, continuous chatting on WhatsApp, Viber, Chica and Facebook not only provide comfort, but also a relief from boredom and a sense of connectedness during long periods apart.

Yet as Madianou and Miller (2012) assert, the emotional closeness facilitated by webcam can also contribute to greater feelings of loss, longing, resentment, and even desperation (see also Liebelt 2011). Though Leela appreciates the ability to monitor her daughters through Skype, she also experiences a “huge pain in (her) heart (that she) can’t put medicine on.” At the same time, she explains that “I’m here and I have difficult work. I tell (my children) I don’t want them to have that. Be doctor, be engineer.” Leela’s
yearning demonstrates the ambivalence that many migrants attempt to navigate through cyberspace as they simultaneously long for loved ones yet engage in work they see as securing the future of their loved ones (Madianou and Miller 2012). Rather than eliminating the challenges of transnational parenting, then, ICT allows for the “relativizing” or strategic shaping, creating and at times diminishing of family relations that let caregivers navigate the connections of obligation and support they most prioritize (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002).

Beyond ICT, migrant caregivers adopt a range of other tactics to manage the difficulty of their work. Fred describes taking long walks outside when his employer sends him on errands; Rina photographs the piles of laundry her employers have her wash as legal evidence that she is working beyond the requirements of her contract; Sana, a caregiver from Nepal, writes songs and stories; and Maya threatens to leave her employer when she speaks to her disrespectfully. Among these many strategies, ICT presents an easily accessible platform for “relativizing” and for strengthening the bonds that support migrants as care receivers, care providers, breadwinners and community activists.

Networks of Solidarity and Support: Activism and Community-Building

“I care for your savta (grandmother). Please care for ME!”
-A slogan displayed at a rally for domestic workers’ rights

In addition to transnational family relationships, community networks of activism and affinity play an equally important role in helping caregivers survive, cope with and contest exploitation, boredom and loneliness. Given the absence of adequate social benefits and legal protections for caregivers and the widespread surveillance and policing of migrant communities (see Kemp 2004; Willen 2010), their organizing takes
many creative forms, both overt and covert. Modes of organizing and communitybuilding do not necessarily manifest in public political protest and resistance; rather, in the context of continual policing and of the differential allocation of resources and lack of investment in non-Jewish lives, resistance more often takes the form of community survival and the insistence on the right to form thriving, active migrant communities. The 2002/3 deportation raids in south Tel Aviv and the specific targeting of migrant community spaces (Liebelt 2011; Willen 2010), such as churches, apartments, restaurants and nightclubs, illuminate the extent to which the Israeli state views migrants as a ‘demographic threat’ once they step beyond their legally and socially proscribed role as individual workers.

It is in this context that migrant communities find resourceful and creative ways to survive, grow, provide mutual aid and welfare, disseminate political information and celebrate life cycle events. The hundreds of migrant-led organizations that exist in Israel/Palestine form around national, regional, ethnic and gender identities, as well as sexual orientation and worker’s rights. For each form of community activism, ICT is a primary vehicle for information dissemination and campaign building, while also providing a broader sense of ‘ambient community’ that can foster a sense of belonging. These communities, both online and in person, are continually ‘open to transformation’ as political, social, emotional and economic contexts develop and change (Ferreday 2009, 25).

Importantly, these communities are not always an unconditional place of support; like any community, they at times can also be a source of tension and conflict among members. Rina, for example, prefers not to attend church regularly because people ‘go
to the church just to show they go to the church’. Similarly, she keeps a cautious distance from her informal network of friends with whom she shares a weekend flat to avoid being asked questions about her life that could lead to unnecessary gossip and conflict (see also Liebelt 2011). Nevertheless, such feelings of ambivalence towards various communities are also negotiated and navigated through regular interaction on ICT. Internet-based ‘information-distribution networks’ facilitate organizing and mobilizing despite limitations on physical and political mobility (Vegh 2003, 73). That provide mutual aid, welfare and political and emotional support (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002, 19; Karatzogianni 2012, 52). This ‘digital virtual’ denotes not a space distinct from the ‘actual’ world, but rather the emerging possibilities or not yet actualized political potentialities that develop across cyberspace (Ferreday 2009; Karatzogianni 2012, 52). For caregivers, cyberspace can thus be a place for engaging in, but also pre-figuratively creating, networks of solidarity and support. Through the ‘digital virtual’, caregivers fortify ‘extra-familial’ or ‘frontier networks’ that provide mutual aid, welfare and political and emotional support (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002, 19; Karatzogianni 2012, 52). This ‘digital virtual’ denotes not a space distinct from the ‘actual’ world, but rather the emerging possibilities or not yet actualized political potentialities that develop across cyberspace (Ferreday 2009; Karatzogianni 2012, 52). For caregivers, cyberspace can thus be a place for engaging in, but also pre-figuratively creating, networks of solidarity and support.

In an environment where the enforcement of labour law for migrant caregivers falls largely on civil society organizations and individual workers, Facebook has become a crucial tool for the distribution of information about rights, new legislation and protests.
The largest civil society organization mobilizing caregivers in Israel/Palestine is Kav LaOved, a worker’s rights non-profit organization that advocates for fair conditions for vulnerable workers. The organization has in the past coordinated ‘know your rights’ workshops and rallies, and regularly assists caregivers in navigating legal issues with employers and recruitment agencies. The Kav LaOved Facebook page is a critical source of information for caregivers. It publishes updated protocol on employment and visa regulations and hosts a live comments section where caregivers can ask questions about health care benefits, work related injuries, severance pay and salary calculations. When a new employment regulation is passed, there are at times over a hundred questions from caregivers in a given thread with answers posted by staff. That these answers are publicly available means that migrants can learn from each other's employment challenges and share strategies for addressing abusive employers. Though Kav LaOved is run by Israelis, caregivers are an integral part of the volunteer system, and migrant caregiver community networks serve as focal methods of the organization’s information dissemination.

Caregiver-led fundraising campaigns rely equally on ICT to create networks of solidarity. Through Facebook event pages and homepages, caregivers raise money for livelihood projects that benefit their home communities or fellow caregivers experiencing financial hardship. Abigail, a thirty-five-year-old business student and community activist from the Philippines, has worked as a caregiver in Israel/Palestine for nine years. She explains that mobilizing caregivers to raise money for educational and infrastructural projects in her home region of Cordillera is a means not only of keeping her mind stimulated during the hours she is working, but also of using her leadership and writing
skills to visibly improve life for children from her community. Through a Facebook page dedicated specifically to her fundraising campaigns and cultural events, Abigail has raised enough money to build a school and buy supplies for children in Cordillera and to send packages to families who lost their homes after Hurricane Yolanda. Similarly, Nina, a former airline employee from Nepal, used Facebook to publicize a fundraiser for an infrastructure project in Kathmandu. In the aftermath of the May 2015 earthquake in Nepal, she also helped raise more than US $90,000 for rebuilding projects that will be distributed over seven districts across the country. Facebook pages, both community and individual, were important platforms for publicizing the campaign. For both Abigail and Nina, raising money from the confines of their employers’ homes is possible because of the inexpensive and easily accessible medium of Facebook. At the same time, community organizing through ICT can be one way of “relieving embodied experiences of isolation” through collective action (Fluri 2006, 90).

Finally, community leaders working as caregivers in Israel/Palestine use Facebook to promote upcoming events organized around and across lines of multiple affinities. Beauty pageants, singing contests, picnics and church services are all gatherings that enable a temporary coming together outside the confines of the employer’s apartment, and a break from the taxing emotionally performative elements required of the job. The Facebook group ‘Overseas Filipino Lesbian and Gay International’ is but one example of a contingent community based primarily on sexual orientation. With members living in many countries across the world, this closed group is a virtual space for socializing with LGBT Filipino co-nationals and sharing experiences about working abroad while navigating sexuality in different national contexts. Similarly, the Facebook page “That’s
My Tomboy, Israel” disseminates information about galas and fashion shows organized by self-identifying Filipino lesbians across the country. After events take place, the Facebook page also becomes a repository for event photos and videos, generating new affective responses amongst viewers and instantiating “That’s My Tomboy” as a growing community.

These online discussions and campaigns hosted largely through Facebook, both create and are created by caregiver networks of emerging solidarity. The population of pages such as “That’s My Tomboy” facilitates the self-actualization of these various networks. As Liebelt (2011) demonstrates, the fortification of community networks becomes especially fragmented—and dangerous—during periods of mass deportation, as was the case during the Israeli government’s 2002 and 2003 deportation raids in Tel Aviv (see also Willen 2010). The widespread fear these raids caused within migrant communities continues to impact domestic workers’ desire to organize in public spaces, making ICT at times the only viable medium for information dissemination, political contestation and solidarity. The sharing of information and expression of emotions in public and private online spaces allows heavily policed migrant communities to take political stances as new networks of support come into being. As Ahmed suggests, investment in collectivities emerge as emotions circulate through an “affective economy,” forming the very shape that communities take (Ahmed 2004, 46).

**Conclusion**

When recounting confrontational conversations she has had with past employers, Rina repeats in a satirical tone, “Oh right, I’m a caregiver.” While some employers
perceive her primarily as a non-Jewish migrant tasked with a particular form of labor, she identifies with the term “caregiver” only in irony or out of political expediency, at the same time that she is proud of the nursing skills she has acquired and the life she has made in Israel/Palestine. In between her employer’s utterance of the phrase haFilipina sheli, or “my Filipina” and the role of subordinate worker she must perform in different capacities, are multiple embodied experiences that she does not always name and that her employer may only subtly, if at all, perceive. It is these consistent ruptures in their relationship that overtly or covertly challenge her employer’s telling use of the term haFilipina sheli, the racialized, gendered Filipina woman of whom I, the citizen-employer, or “citizen-consumer,” am in possession (Mohanty 2003, 141). At times these ruptures overtly counter her employer’s stereotypes about the “migrant caregiver,” yet they are not by themselves adequate in contesting “the broader biopolitical framework via which otherness is articulated and given expression in Israel” (Willen 2010, 263). Nevertheless, within the confines of a complicated and contradictory but ultimately exploitative relationship, strategic contestation of these stereotypes is crucial for the survival and dignity of domestic workers.

Within this biopolitical framework, Rina and others find ways to navigate, cope with and resist the intimate manifestations of structural violence, societal racism and a precarious work arrangement on a daily basis. Though many caregivers would not necessarily view their use of ICT as resistant – indeed, Rina has several times expressed her rather unconditional support for the Israeli government – these ruptures are nevertheless crucial to caregivers’ daily social and emotional survival, to establishing co-presence with loved ones and experiencing a sense of belonging to ambient online
communities, thereby ‘de-demonizing’ the physical distance that is created when members of families migrate (Baldassar 2016). In her discussion of ‘women’s work’ and solidarity among ‘Third World women workers’, Mohanty (2003, 83) suggests that resistance ‘is not always identifiable through organized movements’, but rather ‘inheres in the very gaps, fissures, and silences of hegemonic narratives’. This is especially true of caregivers who, out of choice, strategy or necessity, adopt coping and survival strategies that do not necessarily manifest in political demands placed on governments and institutions, but that nevertheless reassert their right to be treated with the same dignity as Jewish Israelis. The ways caregivers use ICT as a means of coping and self expression, to build ‘frontier networks’ of care and support, and to take part in community-building and activism, reveal how seemingly quotidian activities can be political in their insistence on survival in the face of systemic state neglect, worker exploitation and Israel’s treatment of Palestinians and other non-Jewish minorities.

At the same time, following Abu-Lughod (1990), these stories of contestation and navigation across cyberspace can be a ‘diagnostic of power’ revealing the multiple forms structural violence can take (Abu-Lughod 1990, 42). Caregivers’ ever shifting and strategic use of ICT reveals how ethno-national, racial and neoliberal logics intersect and operate both at the state level and constitutively within intimate employer/employee relationships. Returning to Mohanty’s question, ‘who are the workers that make the citizen-consumer possible’ (Mohanty 2003, 141), we must also ask what such stories of coping and resilience, both overt and covert, suggest about how power operates in similar and different ways among Palestinians, Druze, Bedouin, and Mizrahi or Middle Eastern Jews, taking particular forms across lines of gender, sexuality,
religion and class.

Such a ‘diagnostic’ is not only analytically revealing but it is also informative for solidarity efforts. Migrant caregivers’ experiences of coping with and navigating power structures, from tedious bureaucratic negotiations in government offices to online discussions about labour law, are key to informing cross-border solidarity efforts that support and follow the lead of migrant-driven agendas based on their own knowledges of power and contestation. They are also necessary for understanding how internationals and Israelis alike can leverage legal privilege in ways that are most germane to migrant caregiver-led initiatives. As the real and perceived threat of war fortifies ethnic/racial and gender hierarchies shaping who belongs and who does not, who is safe and who is not; who is human enough and who is not, the stakes become higher for contesting structural violence both overtly and covertly, and for coping in ways that make possible individual and community survival.

NOTES

1 This chapter was originally published in Global Networks. Citation: Brown, Rachel H. 2016. “Multiple Modes of Care: Internet and Migrant Caregiver Networks in Israel.” Global Networks 16(2): 237-56. Original copyright notice in Wiley publication reads “Global Networks 16, 2 (2016) 237–256. ISSN 1470–2266.© 2016 The Author(s)” Global Networks © 2016 Global Networks Partnership & John Wiley & Sons Ltd. Access at: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/glob.12112/abstract. The version appearing as chapter four has been formatted according to Chicago citation style, and omits the “background” and “methods” sections that appeared in Global Networks, as the content of these sections are otherwise covered in the introduction to this dissertation. Minor phrases and words have been changed to reflect that this version of the original article is in chapter format rather than the stand-alone article that was published in Global Networks.

2 A very small number of Filipinas who were wives of Israelis or employed by diplomats or businessmen migrated during the 1970s (see Liebelt 2011: 107). Relatedly, an exception to the ‘binding arrangement’ is such that those who marry Israelis may be permitted to run small business. On “de jure discrimination”: Yiftachel (2011), for example, argues that Palestinian Israelis hold a form of ‘ghettoized citizenship’ that differentially discriminates against them with respect to power sharing, land ownership, economic security, policing, employment, law and collective identity. See also Shafir and Peled (2002) and Rouhana (1997) for a discussion on how citizenship is differentially allocated to non-Jewish minorities.

3 Baldassar and Merla (2014: 25) use the term ‘circulation of care’ to describe the ‘reciprocal, multidirectional and asymmetrical exchange of care’ among transnational families that contingently changes across a lifetime. I draw upon their description of the multidirectional and contingent shapes care takes, while using instead the phrase circulation of affect, based on Ahmed’s discussion of ‘affective economies’ (Ahmed 2004: 46). I draw this distinction to further emphasize, drawing on Manalansan (2008), the ways
care is neither a fixed resource, nor transferrable or exchangeable as an object. The ‘affective economies’ framework has the potential to move further away from a family-focused notion of care to one involving multiple relationships (see also Brown 2015) beyond the family. 

4 In employing Abu-Lughod’s concept of resistance as a ‘diagnostic of power’, I follow the work of Groves and Chang (1999), who use this concept to understand resistance and contestation among Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong.
Conclusion

Resisting Surveillance, Rethinking Feminist Solidarity

In September, 2016, President Obama signed a thirty-eight billion dollar military aid package to Israel, the largest of its kind in U.S. history. Over a period of ten years, this package will fund the building of Israel’s missile defense system and bolster its military weaponry; as a stipulation, Israel must spend all of the aid it receives on American-made weapons (Spetalnick 2016). In the weeks that have followed this agreement, Prime Minister Netanyahu has approved the construction of hundreds of new housing units in the Israeli occupied West Bank, bolstering Israeli control over roadways, electricity, infrastructure, and the water supply (Levinson 2016). The erection of these latest housing units comes only two months after the government demolished Bedouin village Al-Araqib and increased the instances of Palestinian house demolitions in East Jerusalem by forty percent (OCHA 2016, Zonszein 2016). Each of these incidents of land annexation excludes the possibility of the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. But more imminently, each of these instances contributes to the further Judaization of Israel/Palestine. The unfolding of these events on the heels of Obama’s financial commitment to Israel underscores the complex relationship between U.S. tax dollars and the continuing practices of occupation, militarization, and land colonization that attempt to secure as fact-on-the-ground the unquestionable demographic predominance of Jewish-Israelis. Each of these acts reaffirms existing social and political hierarchies among Ashkenazi Jewish-Israelis, Mizrahi Jewish-Israelis, Muslim Palestinians, Christian Palestinians, Druze, Bedouin, African refugees, and migrant laborers.
The creation of these facts on the ground happen along the Green Line between Israel and the West Bank, along the borders with Gaza and Egypt, at checkpoints, and inside courtrooms and cabinet meetings. But they also happen inside the home, in public parks where migrant caregivers take their elderly charges on walks, and at the Tel Aviv Central Bus Station where migrants shop, relax, and socialize on their rest days. While Palestinians may be the “Real Others” posing an obstacle to the full realization of Israel as a Jewish state on the ground, migrant laborers, Israel’s “Other Others,” are the latent threat whose “threateningness” is contained so long as they refrain from taking root or making political demands of the state (Willen 2010). In this dissertation, I have focused upon this latter aspect of the creation of facts on the ground: how everyday practices of ethno-racial nation-building take place in relationship to a particular segment of Israel’s “Other Other:” migrant caregivers living inside Jewish-Israeli homes.

Returning to Ahmed’s notion of the “happiness duty” we might say that the Palestinians, as the “Real Others,” are excluded from the affective fabric of the nation because they “refuse” to “be happy.” To express melancholy towards the Zionist project, or to acknowledge that its culmination in the founding of the state of Israel was not “happy” for some, is, from the purview of the modern Zionist political project, a threat to the state. Other laws, policies, and protocol aimed at stifling Palestinian freedom of movement, stultifying the economy, preventing statehood, colonizing land, and denying Palestinian indigeneity equally punish unhappiness.

The “Other Others,” those upholding the political economy that enables the good life of the Jewish body politic, can remain temporarily within the nation’s borders so long as they demonstrate their “happiness” about Zionism. Even when they reveal that they are,
at the interpersonal level, unhappy to serve, migrant caregivers must still pass the “happiness test” that guarantees them a role in the nation’s reproductive labor force.

I have argued that the complex interplay between neoliberal economic policies governing the privatization of labor in Israel, and exclusionary citizenship laws particular to Israel as a de jure ethno-racial state, shape the various iterations of “happiness” migrant caregivers must demonstrate, the challenges they face, and the strategies they adopt to resist their marginalization and exploitation. I have also illustrated how citizen-employers respond to the presence of non-Jewish migrants in their homes and in the nation. Their conflicting desires to guard the borders of the Jewish body politic, to participate in transnational labor markets, to address the nation’s “eldercare crisis,” and to display “benevolence” are evident in their descriptions of migrant caregivers as “one of the family” and in their avowed rejection of migrants’ to citizenship. As I have argued, the practices of exclusion and exploitation to which migrant caregivers are subject reinforce the role of the Jewish-Israeli citizen as the employer/consumer/manager who is both entitled to and capable of hiring a migrant to do reproductive labor. At the same time, through exploitative practices that constitute migrant caregivers as both intimate proxies and aliens, citizen-employers secure the national borders from “distinctively racial threats from without and within” (Mills 2011, 599).

While the ethno-racial project of creating a Jewish state as a fact on the ground necessarily unfolds in a relationship of negation with Palestinians, it unfolds in a relationship of both negation and affirmation with migrant caregivers. On the one hand, the government affirms and promotes the presence of migrant caregivers as the only viable “solution” for shrinking public costs on health care. Migrant caregivers are thus
indispensable to the survival of the Jewish body politic in their role as the sole live-in caretakers of Israel’s elderly population. In a relationship of affirmation, the government thus grants visas to migrant caregivers on a daily basis, actively encouraging their entry into Israel. At the same time, through prohibitions on marriage, reproduction, permanent settlement, and freedom of movement and occupation, the government also constitutes the Jewish body politic in a negative relationship to migrant caregivers; to be a Jewish-Israeli citizen is to not be a live-in, precarious worker entitled to meaningful social membership.

As I argue throughout, one effect of the way migrant caregivers are constituted in relation to Palestinians and to Jewish-Israelis is that they are tolerated as latent—but not active—racial threats so long as they prove themselves to be valuable workers that do not attempt to become legal or political subjects, but rather, remain the legal dependents and proxies of their employers. As visible collectivities, they become active racial threats and risk deportation. The high stakes of becoming a threat to the state means that migrant caregivers often choose to increase their welfare agency and ensure their job security by avoiding contentious politics, and by representing their collective presence in apolitical terms. The 2009 closure of several migrant churches in south Tel Aviv by the Ministry of Interior is telling of the threat that migrants pose to the government when they express their existence as members of ethno-racially distinct communities.

I have also illustrated how, despite the many forms of surveillance and exploitation to which migrant caregivers are subject, they find multiple ways of negotiating their rights, resisting commodification, coping with the mental stress of caregiving through supportive networks, and maintaining active lives as community organizers, religious leaders, parents, financial providers, and political advocates. Given the high stakes of
openly contesting state policies, challenges to unfair labor practices and discriminatory laws are largely challenged through interpersonal relationships in the home, whereby migrant caregivers adopt a range of strategies to increase control over the work process. This includes forming relationships of indispensability that counteract the commodifying impact of the Slavery Law, engaging in strategic performances of deference, directly challenging employers who expect them to play the role of maid or servant, and the adoption of familial language that further ingratiates them into the hegemonic social group. Finally, I have argued that for migrant caregivers, resistance is intricately tied to survival; to exist as collectivities and as individual workers despite the many social benefits and labor rights deprived of them by the state requires deft social organizing and continual legal, economic, and political strategizing. Their ability to exist and to thrive as individuals and communities amidst state scrutiny and surveillance requires extensive amounts of planning, endurance, strategizing, and commitment.

Partly as a response to the risk that visibility brings, several migrant caregivers I interviewed made efforts to distinguish between their situations in Israel, which they represented as apolitical, and that of Palestinian citizens of Israel and Eritrean and Sudanese refugees, whose presence they viewed as politically contentious. Interestingly, more than a few citizen-employers reinforced this idea, drawing distinctions between the “legality” migrant caregivers’ presence, and the “illegality” of Eritrean and Sudanese refugees, which, as Dov explained, was a “totally separate” issue.

Throughout this dissertation, I have centered household relations as a means of illustrating the mechanics by which migrant caregivers come to be viewed by employers in the eyes of the state, and through social discourses, as “natural” workers. As I address
below, a crucial step in demonstrating the political nature of household labor and of caring labor, in particular, is to make visible the analytic and material interrelationship between migrant carework and Israel’s treatment of Palestinians more broadly. Analytically contextualizing the presence of migrant caregivers within the broader project of ethno-racial nationalism and Judaization has important implications for our understanding of how neoliberalism and citizenship operate in tandem to reinforce a lack of government accountability in Israel, as well as for transnational feminist organizing more broadly.

**Legal Instability and the State of Israeli Exception**

Since completing my interviews in January, 2015, the laws, policies, and protocol governing the living and working conditions of migrant caregivers have changed multiple times. Each time I have followed up with the migrant rights experts and migrant caregivers I interviewed originally, or revisited debates over the Slavery Law in Israeli newspapers, the laws on the books and the protocol for their implementation have changed. One former caseworker said there has been widespread confusion among migrant caregivers and activists alike over the release of new protocol detailing the conditions under which caregivers can switch employers and the various benefits to which they are entitled. Especially subject to change are protocol detailing the length of time migrants can remain in Israel after their visa expires and their employers die, the pension and separation pay to which they are entitled, the holidays they have a right to take off from work, the amount of tax the government can withhold from their pension before they leave the country, and their options for pursuing legal action if an employer refuses to pay them.
In many ways, the significant number of times that protocol governing migrant caregivers’ lives has changed is more indicative of Israel’s legal approach to its temporary inhabitants than the content of the protocol themselves. Indeed, the vicissitudes of Israeli governance towards migrant caregivers falls in logical step with the government’s perpetual declaration of a state of emergency, which allows various legal frameworks to continually shift and morph. As Lloyd (2012) has argued, one of the most salient elements of Israel’s permanent state of emergency status is the sheer proliferation of protocol and policies it produces as a means for the state to govern the minute details of Palestinians’ daily lives. As many scholars of Israeli exceptionalism have likewise argued using the work of Agamben, the policies Israel establishes under the justificatory banner of a state of emergency shapes the content, intent, and language of permanent laws that dictate who is and is not entitled to “the good life” (Ghanem and Rouhana 1998; Goldberg 2009; Lloyd 2012; Pappe 2006, 2012; Yiftachel 2006). As I have illustrated in the introduction, suspension of the “normal” state of affairs has led to Israel’s perennial immunity from the obligations imposed by domestic and international law and has served as a pretext for intervening militarily in the day-to-day life of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Such interventions continually mutate, taking the form of checkpoint construction that prevents access to farm land and social services, systematic humiliation through imprisonment, strip searches and targeted assassination, the prevention of women in labor from receiving adequate medical attention at checkpoints and in prisons, the demolition of homes, and the perpetual surveillance of Palestinians through watch towers and home invasions.
The same can be said about the legal frameworks governing migrant caregivers. Similar to its legal approach to Palestinians, Israel’s legal governance of migrant caregivers has based upon the proliferation of protocol intended to regulate intimate aspects of their lives, from the partners they are allowed to marry, to the ways in which they can have sex, to the amount of time they can spend outside their place of employment, to the ways they can respond to exploitative treatment. The frequency with which policies regulating migrants’ daily lives changes also suggests that migrant caregivers are deeply impacted by the legal vicissitudes and states of uncertainty that Israel imposes upon Palestinians. The greater the threat that Palestinians pose to the Jewish body politic at any particular moment, the more likely the government is to implement restrictions upon migrant caregivers at borders, in the parks of south Tel Aviv, and through the deployment of deportation police to individual households shared flats.

Understanding how the logic of exception creates knowledges about who is and is not included in political life is also crucial to comprehending the constitution of migrant caregivers as the legal objects of their employers. Underpinning the Israeli military presence in the West Bank and Gaza and the chronic suspension of migrant caregivers’ rights is the prioritizing of Jewish legal personhood as a vehicle for safeguarding, investing in, and promulgating Jewish life at the individual level, and the Jewish body politic at the level of population. Indeed, the “irregular” treatment of Palestinians in the West Bank and the exceptional basis upon which rights were granted to Rose Fostanes are part and parcel of a prolonged state of exception defining the what the terms of exclusion are as a permanent state of affairs.
The multiple ways migrant caregivers are impacted by ideologies, laws, and policies aimed at protecting the boundaries of the Jewish body politic and managing its non-Jewish population thus demands that their presence within Jewish-Israeli homes be treated as analytically interconnected with the continual strangulation of a collective Palestinian presence and the assertion of a Palestinian collective identity. Treating these two issues as analytically independent has the effect of depoliticizing migrant carework by framing the national struggle between Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis as the “real” realm of political contestation, and the daily struggles between migrant caregivers and their employers as an inevitable manifestation of the “natural” order of reproductive labor.

Understanding how Israel’s migrant labor population—and the disproportionately female caregiving sector—is impacted by Israel’s perpetual state of emergency, by military attacks in Gaza, or by the imprisonment of refugees from East Africa, can help forge alliances, policies, and epistemic communities addressing state violence and oppression as it impacts populations across lines of ethnicity/race, gender, sexuality, nationalism, religion, and citizenship status.

The many strategies migrant caregivers adopt for contesting exploitative treatment, finding meaning in constraining experiences, increasing their welfare, and establishing a sense of internal coherence raise crucial questions for transnational feminist theories of resistance. The myriad forms of state-sanctioned antilife shaping their everyday lives limit their ability to take subversive actions that directly name the oppressive features of the state. Complicating their efforts at subverting exploitative state policies is their deep hesitance to become involved with solidarity efforts with Palestinians and with Sudanese and Eritrean refugees. This reality underscores the need for transnational feminist
solidarity efforts to name these interconnections, and to incorporate intersectional analyses into broader organizing initiatives. Incorporation of the specific position of migrant caregivers into solidarity efforts also requires heightened attention to the various theoretical frameworks for addressing the specific social positions they occupy in Israel.

**Transnational Feminist Solidarity**

During a follow-up conversation I had with Abigail, she explained why she no longer publicly speaks out against the high fees recruitment agencies charge to migrants. Recently, a friend encouraged her to speak to a reporter for an exposé on recruitment agencies, telling her, “you’ll be a hero!” Though Abigail would have once agreed to speak to reporters about this phenomenon and its devastating impact on caregivers, she has recently decided that continuing this work carries with it too many risks. She notes that the state would perhaps “forgive her” for exposing the exploitative practices of agencies at first, but “once (coverage) fades, that’s the time they’ll do something.” Her hesitance comes, she says, from seeing other friends be promised protection and anonymity by reporters, only to later face retribution from the state. Abigail adds that another friend recently advised her to stop speaking with reporters because “the issue of illegal payments has been written about many times but nothing happens. Maybe after they will work on another documentary and they will forget.” Abigail goes on to explain how it is that recruitment agencies have become immune from any form of legal accountability:

“the problem is they are protected by members of the Knesset and some politicians here. The agencies have their own organizations. They are deciding how much they’re going to take from this country and that country…They know (caregivers) will do everything to produce the money.”
Abigail’s description of the secretive and hierarchical world of recruitment agencies and her hesitation to continue being what she refers to as the “cover girl” for the issue of debt bondage lends itself to several questions about effective forms of transnational feminist solidarity. As Abigail points out, most of the reporting on this issue as it pertains to Israel has been within the country but has not as yet reached a transnational scale. She comments,

“That’s how they did it with (migrant) children’s rights. They brought pressure from outside Israel…Maybe someone from CNN should expose it, but not the local station. And you know, it really works when the international community pressures the country so the politicians will get a sermon and be pressured by the President or higher-ranking officials. Because it’s already our country that is at stake.”

Following Abigail’s analysis, certain seats of power, such as the Knesset-backed industry of privatized labor recruitment, possess such disproportionate control over the living and working conditions of migrants, that localized forms of activism in response to these issues impractical, and could augment the danger migrants already face. Activism and advocacy at the level of international institutions and international law must therefore not only consider the challenges migrant caregivers face, but also the impact of outside solidarity efforts on their daily lives.

Most immediately, one particular way transnational feminist activists and advocates could address the hidden connection between private recruitment agencies and debt bondage is by pressuring Israel to ratify ILO Convention 189 (CO 189) on migrant domestic workers’ rights. While other ILO conventions have addressed the vulnerabilities migrant laborers face while working overseas, CO 189 explicitly centers the gendered nature of carework and the gender-specific forms of exploitation and discrimination that migrant domestic workers must confront. In addition to reaffirming migrant domestic
workers’ right to freedom of association and freedom from all forms of compulsory labor, it also calls upon signing members to prevent private recruitment agencies from charging exorbitant fees.

Because the challenges faced by migrant caregivers in Israel are bounded by neoliberal economic policies as well as Israel’s ongoing project of Judaization, organizing around CO 189 must reflect this particularity. An advocacy campaign about labor recruitment fees in Israel must therefore connect its messaging, where contextually appropriate, to migrant workers’ rights transnationally, as well as to the language of Palestinian liberation. Yet following Abigail’s analysis, it is important for this contextually specific work to be undertaken by solidarity efforts outside of Israel. So, for example, an information dissemination campaign about the specific challenges migrant caregivers in Israel face could incorporate language from both ILO Convention 97 on Migration for Employment, as well as UN Resolutions 242 and 194. In this way, rhetorical strategies within human rights campaigns and political messaging within information dissemination campaigns can locate migrant caregivers in Israel within multiple struggles.

The challenges migrant caregivers face in Israel must also inform how transnational feminist networks of solidarity contextualize their rights within other similar struggles. For instance, contextualizing the Slavery Law and marriage and reproductive policies within the kafala system of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and Lebanon may be more useful than incorporating “best practices” from Canada or the United States, despite Israel’s attempts to situate itself amongst these nations. Understanding, for example, how migrant domestic workers in Lebanon recently succeeded in forming the first migrant
domestic worker’s union in the country’s history may be useful to organizing efforts in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

A similar approach could be adopted in holding Israel accountable for its failure to uphold its obligations under CEDAW. As periodic reports by the CEDAW Committee indicate, Israel has failed to protect Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza from multiple forms of violence and discrimination that are systematic in nature (Ben-Ami 2013). In response to these findings, Israel has stated repeatedly that although it has ratified CEDAW, it holds no obligation to prevent discrimination against Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza, as its obligations under CEDAW do not apply to situations of military occupation. Due largely to the advocacy efforts of migrant rights organization Kav LaOved, since 2013 the Committee has included in its reports evidence of state-level discrimination against migrant caregivers in Israel. To strengthen institutional pressure on Israel to address its treatment of migrants, transnational advocates and activists could exert pressure on CEDAW to more extensively address the situation of migrant caregivers in its reports on Israel, and simultaneously, could pressure Israel to uphold its obligations under CEDAW with respect to all non-Jewish women in Israel.

Another avenue for transnational feminist solidarity efforts is to place pressure on Israel to sign bi-national agreements with countries that send migrants to work in Israel. These agreements, first and foremost, would place a ceiling on the prices much migrants are charged by recruitment agencies, and would provide transparency of process. Other possible avenues for advocacy include pressuring Israel to allow migrant caregivers more time off during the work week, allowing their families to visit them in Israel, and granting additional vacation time for reuniting with their family and friends.
Understanding the specific location of migrant caregivers in relation to Israel’s “broader biopolitical framework” is also important at an epistemic level. It is important to consider, for example, the extent to which existing international conventions and legal frameworks addressing migrant labor adequately differentiate between various sectors of the migrant workforce. The disproportionately negative effect of the binding arrangement on migrant women from the Philippines, Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Bulgaria, and Romania is but one illustration of the need for a more heterogeneous legal approach to migrant labor issues. To date, the ILO has adopted a largely gender and race blind approach in its formulation of conventions that address migrant workers’ rights.\(^3\) No matter how effective the HCJ may be in rhetorically reinstating Israel as a member of a normative legal community, the international interpretive community itself will only be as good as the laws that bind it together. Building upon intersectional critiques of liberal legalism, we must therefore explore strategies for “looking to the bottom” at both the level of international institutions, and in advocacy campaigns around migrant workers’ rights (Matsuda 1987). This legal and epistemic approach, developed by scholar and activist Mari Matsuda, could be particularly useful in accounting for the multiple ways caregivers experience everyday life under interlocking structures of oppression. This strategy involves treating bodies not as individualized actors, but rather as nodes within various social structures, networks, and hierarchies. In this way “looking to the bottom” historicizes and contextualizes the very concept of the individual, in effect replacing the isolated legal subject with a subject in motion who constantly negotiates, contests, and remains beholden to broader social systems of epistemic control. It attempts to debunk epistemic privilege by highlighting who has had the power to “define, appropriate, and
control the realities of others.” Matsuda argues that this approach requires a non-objective interpretation of rules and precedents, leading to the epistemological redistribution of knowledges (Scales 2006, 109). Such a method would begin to address the gender and race blindness that accompanies legal objectivity by placing caregivers as constellations within a larger nexus of oppression, hierarchy, contestation, and resistance.

Just as importantly, addressing the multiple challenges migrant caregivers face in the context of Israel requires a broader discussion about the role of the state in relation to its ethno-racial self-definition. As one example, discussions about the re-organization of state priorities with respect to eldercare, and care more broadly, must be contextualized within the specificities of the Israeli nation-building project. In her articulation of the re-organization of state priorities with regards to childcare, for example, Tronto identifies three distinct levels at which one can advocate for a more “just” caring arrangement: that of immediate, “ameliorative steps,” such as the improvement of working conditions and the strengthening of labor law enforcement; “radical reforms,” including greater public responsibility-taking for child care; and “revolutionary changes,” which re-position individuals in need of care (in this specific iteration, she refers to children), as a “collective good” rather than an individual burden (Tronto 2002, 47). Indeed, it is useful to think of responsibility for eldercare, and for the well-being of caregivers themselves, at each of these levels. However, adequate changes at each of these levels are difficult to implement without a fundamental re-envisioning of the Jewish national project in its present exclusionary form. As Yuval-Davis argues, addressing the moral problems that carework poses requires a consideration of the connection between carework and nationalism more broadly (2007). At the level of ameliorative steps, the improvement of
working conditions for migrant caregivers could include greater access to health care benefits for undocumented workers, greater coordination between ministries who are charged with enforcing laws for migrant workers, and increased regulation of privatized recruitment agencies in their mediation of employer/employee relations. Other measures could include granting migrant caregivers access to an ombudsman who can settle employer/employee disputes, as migrant laborers in all other sectors are granted, and including caregivers under the Work and Rest Hours Law so their right to overtime pay will be guaranteed. Yet implementing each of these changes becomes difficult without the concurrent abolition of the Slavery Law, and a corresponding shift away from viewing the intimate nature of carework as grounds for legally sanctioned under-compensation. Further, because the underlying motivation for the Slavery Law is to predicate a migrant’s right to reside in Israel upon her employment status, and reduce her chances of taking permanent root in Israel, removal of this law would only be effective if it were not replaced by equally restrictive policies aimed at precluding migrants from making claims to social membership.

At the level of radical reform, a crucial step towards reducing the burden of eldercare placed upon individual families and migrant caregivers is to increase public funding for long-term eldercare programs. Yet such a shift would only be achievable were there first a transfiguration in the underlying neoliberal ideologies that spawned the initial privatization and individualization of health care. Relatedly, such publicly funded programs could only adequately address Israel’s “care crisis” if Jewish-Israelis and Palestinian citizens of Israel were not equally able to benefit from them. Yet existing inequalities in health outcomes, access to health services, and in the overall
socioeconomic status of Jewish-Israelis and Palestinian citizens of Israel suggests that
greater public provisioning of eldercare services is not by itself an adequate means of
addressing the complex interplay between reproductive labor, migrant carework, and
ethno-racial nationalism (Azaisa and Brodsky 2003; Baron-Epel et. al. 2007; Suleiman
and Walter-Ginzburg 2010).

Likewise, at the level of revolutionary change, reframing “individualized accounts” of care—whether mothering, eldercare, or care for the disabled—into collective conceptions, questioning the gendered allocation of care, and revisiting the relationship between productivity and citizenship are all crucial to addressing what Tronto usefully terms “(injustices) justified by care” (Tronto 2002, 48). At the same time, re-conceptualizing care as a collective responsibility and as a state responsibility in Israel would require a simultaneous rethinking of how the “collective” body in question has already been prefiguratively defined. Indeed, re-envisioning care as a collective rather than an individual responsibility requires squaring with the deeply racialized politics of belonging in Israel. Similarly, questioning the gendered allocation of carework in Israel as a possibility for revolutionary change requires confronting how the Zionist national project has relied upon gendered and sexualized constructions of the body politic as an ethno-racially exclusive collectivity. As but one example, constructions of Jewish manhood within the Herzlian Zionist imaginary deeply tie the meaning of nationhood to gendered forms of responsibility. As Boyarin suggests, in contrast to the “new Jewish man” extolled by the modern Zionist project, the diasporic Jewish man without a territorial home is constructed as a “sissy,” a “queer,” and a victim of the Jewish ghetto (Boyarin 1997; Solomon 2006). While the “new Jew,” in the words of former Prime
Minister Menachem Begin, is a “fighting Jew”—strong, active, heterosexual, able to defend himself, a military man who holds the responsibility of forging the nation and protecting its racial boundaries—the latter is passive and acted upon, but does not act. These striking images illuminate the deeply gendered nature of national belonging in Israel, and the related roles and responsibilities that these gendered forms of belonging proscribe. Radically re-envisioning the gendered roles that men and women play in maintaining, transforming, reinventing, and resisting the Zionist national project through various forms of “caring for” and “caring about” necessitates a close examination of the interconnection between reproductive labor, gender roles, and the forging of national borders.

I do not suggest that incremental reforms in the treatment of migrant caregivers cannot be accomplished without a fundamental redefinition of citizenship and belonging in Israel/Palestine. Undoubtedly, the 2006 High Court decision declaring the unconstitutionality of the Slavery Law suggests that small, symbolic steps in the amelioration of working conditions are possible, even within a state committed to ethno-racial exclusions and an apartheid system of laws. I do argue, however, that adopting more than a problem-solving approach to the challenges migrant caregivers face, and addressing how migrant laborers have been strategically brought to Israel to maintain the economic and political separation of Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians, requires a fundamental reimagining of the national project in its current ethno-racial iteration.
**Future Research Directions**

The unique social location of migrant caregivers in Israel/Palestine and the many challenges they face raise several crucial questions for future research. The complex ways neoliberal economic policies have been used in Israel to continue ongoing practices of settler colonialism point to the need for further understandings of the intersection between neoliberalism and securitization as they complexly interact within a “state of emergency.” The case of migrant caregivers in Israel/Palestine illustrates that neoliberalism in Israel is not only about privatization, the opening up of markets, and the creation of market subjects, but also *to whom* markets are opened, and how governments weigh choices between economic efficacy and the racial securitization of borders. Within Israel, the subjectivizing of individuals and collectivities to a “market logic” is not a universal process; rather, the ways individuals are subjected depends on the extent to which this location constitutes a threat to the Zionist project. As but one example, while Indian Christians and Indian Hindus are granted visas by the Israeli government, Indian Muslims are not, despite that the majority of labor migrants in India who work abroad are Muslim. What logics underlie how governments weigh such “trade-offs”? What processes dictate who is granted a visa, at what point economic expediency outweighs the “threat” of the Muslim worker, and at what point the “Other Other” becomes the “Real Other”? What role do recruitment agencies in India play in this “social sorting”? (Abu-Laban and Bakan 2011) How does the widespread focus of public discourse on demography impact the choices privatized recruitment agencies make about how much money to charge individuals along lines of race/ethnicity and the extent to which they are perceived to be a threat?
Future research should also address the experiences of migrant caregivers working inside Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. Though in much smaller numbers, many migrants work throughout the West Bank in the caregiving, construction, and agriculture sectors, undertaking tasks on a daily basis that sustain and extend the colonization of Palestinian land. The distinctive role migrant labor plays in the reproduction of settler colonialism beyond the 1967 Green Line is crucial for understanding the intersection of privatized labor and land dispossession in active military zones. Relatedly, it is equally important to contextualize and draw connections between the phenomenon of migrant labor within occupied military zones transnationally. Though there is extensive scholarship on migrant labor within states whose borders are uncontested or taken for granted, there is less research on the connection between precarious labor and empire-building transnationally. On Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, for example, migrants from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chile, Colombia, the Philippines, and Uganda are contracted by the military to do work in housekeeping, construction, food preparation, and entertainment. As they are neither protected under American nor Cuban law, nor the laws of their home countries, they are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and poor working conditions. By outsourcing this labor away from U.S. contractors, the military can maintain its presence in Guantanamo, Iraq, and Afghanistan, for example, at a particularly low cost (Li 2015). Each of these lines of inquiry is necessary to further contextualize the changing and contingent role of “flexible labor” in various projects of nation-building and empire.
NOTES

1 Israel’s occupation thus “presupposes (the) nexus” of norms and application within a “regular” state of being, yet in Agamben’s terms, law under this “normal” state is validated precisely by its suspension under exceptional circumstances (Agamben 2005, 40).

2 The *kafala* system, which literally means “sponsorship system,” refers to the set of laws and policies governing the employment and legal status of migrant domestic workers in Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) Countries (Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, Kuwait, and Sultanate of Oman). Under the *kafala* system, employers retain migrant workers’ passports and become fully responsible for their legal and economic status. As in Israel, this system binds workers to employers, severely restricting their mobility; however, in GCC countries, a particularly severe restriction requires that workers obtain an “exit visa” from their employers before leaving the country (Bajracharya and Sijapati 2012).

3 ILO Convention No. 97 briefly acknowledges sex difference by stating that “Each Member for which this Convention is in force undertakes to apply, without discrimination in respect of nationality, race, religion or sex, to immigrants lawfully within its territory, treatment no less favourable than that which it applies to its own nationals.” It also briefly mentions equal remuneration for “women’s work,” but other than these two references fails to acknowledge the highly gendered breakdown of migrant work (see ILO 1949).

4 In delineating the argument that children are seen as the individual responsibility of parents rather than a “collective good,” Tronto draws upon the work of Nancy Folbre (1993) in *Who Pays for the Kids?*
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