

In “Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value,” Arlie Russell Hochschild explores the impact of global capitalism on care, giving examples of various financial and social inequalities that emerge in the different levels of what Hochschild calls “global care chains” (Hochschild 2000, 131). Hochschild defines a “global care chain” as “a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring” (131). Hochschild illustrates this concept through describing one such “chain,” the scenario of a nanny in the United States raising money for her children back in the Philippines, who are in turn being cared for by another “live-in domestic worker” (130). Hochschild notes that the process of globalization has complicated care as a form of labour, and that while migration is a way to increase one’s income and financial stability, the sacrifices necessary to obtain these benefits are complex and demanding (133-134). She introduces one method of viewing these sacrifices, the Marxist concept of “surplus value” (134). While global care chains clearly rely on financial inequalities between each level, Hochschild uses “surplus value” to evaluate emotional distribution as well, but clarifies that treating care (an emotional as well as physical process) as a “resource” can lead to an oversimplification of a nuanced topic (135). One such nuance is whether one can properly assess the inequalities between links in a care chain as inequalities at all, given that, as Hochschild puts it, “[e]ach person along the chain feels he or she is doing the right thing for the right reasons” (136).

Hochschild concludes by offering suggestions to mitigate the inequalities exemplified in global care chains as well as the difficulties her solutions could face (142-144). For Hochschild, her focus is on “reduc[ing] incentives to migrate” (142). She discusses methods of tempering both economic and social inequalities, and cultural understandings of gender roles emerge as a

primary concern for her as well as a primary motivation to streamline global care chains into something not only more financially supported but also more ethically sound (144).

While Hochschild does mention “large, multinational companies” as members of some care chains (141), something of interest that emerges when reading her familial examples is the complexity of determining how caring for a child should be financially valued. There is a lot to examine here. If one does not want to pay for childcare, they have two options: either taking care of their own children, or not having children at all. Should the general population be held financially accountable for the decisions of other individuals that lead to the necessity of some form of childcare? I suspect Hochschild would cite an ethics of care in analyzing how “loving, paid childcare” would be implemented (144). No, not everyone needs childcare at all times. However, everyone has benefitted from some form of it in the past. Do we not, therefore, have an obligation to pay that forward?

[Word Count: 488]

Work Cited

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. “Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value.” *On The Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, 2000, London: Vintage pp. 131-146.