

**FOUR**

**TIME IS MONEY: DESKILLING CARING WORK  
THROUGH TIME ALLOCATION IN SERVICES  
PROCUREMENT**

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**Abstract:**

Recent research provides ample evidence indicating that care work is a source of job polarization in advanced economies. Explanations for the polarization trend have rarely examined the specific contribution of public procurement to polarization and, specifically, to polarization among women of the same occupation. In this study, I aim to explore the contribution of the Israeli procurement policy to deskilling in gendered occupations, particularly nursing, social work, and teaching; areas with a rich history of unionization. I ask how polarization in general and polarization within the same occupation is accelerated by deskilling, as differentially used for core and peripheral employees. To answer this question, I examine how job size allocation in contracted-out social services generates, and often legitimizes, de-skilling and under-valuation of women's work. Three Israeli government tender calls for projects in the area of education, health and welfare, were analyzed. The data shows a systematic administrative effort to reduce skilled employees' funded time. The implications for linking public procurement of services and polarization among gendered occupations are discussed.

**Introduction**

In her recent analysis of debates over the issue of skill recognition, Armstrong (2013) raises the salience of issues relating to time in the field. She reminds us that time is involved in the ways skills are

"defined, assessed and practiced" (p. 274). Moreover, drawing on the organization of work in health services, Armstrong shows that under the New Public Management (NPM) shaping of social services, women in caring occupations are unable to manifest their occupational skills because of time constraints embedded in the work process. In looking at the role of states in promoting deskilling as linked to time allocation in social services, she recognizes that measurement has replaced the notion of a caring service. But, how did time constraints become so salient to deskilling in caring occupations? What institutional spaces shape these time constraints? Are time constraints imposed on core employees and peripheral employees in similar ways? I attempt to examine these questions by investigating a very specific organizational space: that of public procurement of social services. While authors agree that employment conditions in commissioned service deliverers are often bad (Cunningham, 2011), not enough attention has been directed to the administrative procedures responsible for this outcome. Through unveiling the dynamics behind the state administrators' definition of the funding needs of services, I attempt to shed light on a specific gendered reality that arises within public procurement of services.

During the early stages of public procurement of services, state administrators gave a disproportionate weight to the price criterion in selecting a service deliverer among all bidders. Previous accounts of the process of contracting out showed that at this stage, state administrators failed to act as the 'smart client' in at least two ways: they were not using information accumulated about specific deliverers, and they allowed service deliverers to make demands for additional funding, framing these demands as unexpected costs (Grimshaw and Hebson, 2005). After much criticism of state support for the cheapest bid, more elaborate systems of bidder selection were introduced based on the need to calculate the reasonable cost of a service. Such preliminary calculation enabled state administrators to set forth a threshold sum for the service and reinforced state's ability to argue that services procurement practices followed legal requirements with regard to services

employment. In the process of setting forth a threshold sum, the state became a smarter client by reducing its exposure to financial pressures exerted by service deliverers. However, this administrative calculation becomes a key feature when analyzing polarization in contemporary care employment.

Fine has recently (2014) articulated the basis of the polarization that occurs in caring occupations, emphasizing the differential institutional treatment of two categories of employees. He argues that contemporary operation of services offers reasonable employment rewards for those in 'core' skilled, professional and reasonably secure employment. But those considered 'peripheral' workers are forced to accept 'flexible' employment arrangements, as they are not in a strong position to negotiate with employers (p. 271). Fine's distinction in the area of caring employees suggests that in order to understand how time allocation is used institutionally and how it contributes to polarization, we need to examine two distinct approaches: that related to shaping conditions for those with relevant credentials (formally accredited social workers, nurses or teachers) and those who do not have them. In what follows I trace this distinction in the Israeli government's tender calls. In the remainder of this introduction, I define deskilling and its related mechanisms, and then I introduce my theoretical framework.

### **Skill Recognition vs. Deskilling**

The earliest definitions of deskilling referred to the introduction of technology into the workplace. From Braverman (1974) to Sennett (1999), deskilling was generally viewed as the introduction of technology in ways that replaced workers, confined their discretion and autonomy in the shaping of their work process, and exposed them to increased control. For Sennett (1999), this process was akin to contemporary alienation, which he called the 'corrosion of character'. More feminist perspectives, however, have elaborated on the meaning of deskilling as being more informed by the struggle between valuing or under-valuing women's work (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007). Externalization, for instance, was proposed as an early demonstration of deskilling (Rogers, 2000) in the sense of

constituting a woman's job, specifically, a woman's clerical job, as suitable for replacement by a temporary agency employee. Rogers' findings depicted a social process in which the skills involved in the job are re-categorized as elementary non-skills that are easily learned. Hence organizational resources would be 'wasted' on preserving the personnel who have them. In order to maintain this perception of the skill, employers disregard the value of accumulated experience and familiarity with specific workplace characteristics and personnel preferences. The outsourcing of cleaning, as documented by Aguiar (2006), was enabled by the same deskilling process with one difference: males employed in the cleaning industry often benefit from the attribution of skill that is related to operating cleaning technology. The idea of accumulated experience and familiarity with a specific workplace as a skill with some relational qualities to it was rejected in order to enable the deskilling required for the peripheralization. In other words, the externalization of employees is enabled by defining their work as 'service procurement' or 'service delivery', rather than as involving employer-employee relations. Duffy (2011) substantiated these meanings of deskilling by pointing to the ways in which cleaning work has lost its 'feminine' relational aspect and has become a highly Taylorized set of tasks through bureaucratization. Deskilling of nursing associates caring for the elderly in long term care has also taken the shape of Taylorization (Theobald, 2012).

More meanings of deskilling appear in the literature. Grugulis and Vincent (2007) found yet another meaning of deskilling, where women case workers in the area of public housing services were not recognized for the technical skills they used in their work, but for their 'feminine' soft skills only. This process would have, again, substantiated the perception of their positions as relatively replaceable. So, gendered applications of the notion of deskilling haven't focused on technology alone, but have also looked at other ways of alienating employees and depriving them of discretion, autonomy and rewards.

But, more generally, against the political history of professionalization in caring services, deskilling refers to the

shrinking protection that constructs women as the "devalued Other," where the value of their skills and accumulated occupational experience remains invisible (Davies, 1996, p. 664). Here, I adopt Rogers' gendered meaning that emphasizes the political process of the social construction of skill and skill recognition, which is consistent with the argument that "female part-time workers have borne the brunt of market tendering exercises" (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007, p. 129). Not enough scholarly attention, however, was directed to how precisely protection for core employees had weakened, and how tendering exercises were able to promote the ancient preference of extracting women's caring work for free (Folbre, 2006) or for pin money (Perrons, 2011). I turn now to the specific institutional space of services budgeting, the mapping of which can be conducive to the understanding of the forms of deskilling that facilitate these processes.

### **Professionalization Versus Budgeting**

Following Dwyer's (2013) theoretical strategy, I link an institutionalist approach with a care work approach to examine how public procurement of services became an institutional site, which has given rise to newer forms of deskilling. Because the NPM's marketization and budgeting orientation is a global movement promoted by the OECD and the WTO (Pal, 2012) an institutionalist perspective that focuses on its application in the area of services procurement, particularly as related to levels of recognition of women's work, is particularly useful.

Authors analyzing the NPM define its main principles as efficient task performance and best value. Thus, efficiency is emphasized as instrumental in gaining cost reduction for tax payers (Wood, 2004). Privatization of services and their outsourcing is seen, by NPM informed administrators, as a way of increasing efficient task performance because managerial practices in the private sector are understood as better able to achieve efficiency. In the Israeli context, this belief became dominant with the strengthening of public sector unions whose achievements and operations have been understood as a barrier for management and

efficient task performance (Galnoor, et al., 1998). Thus, the application of the NPM principles is seen as dependent on outsourcing and procurement procedures. To pursue these procedures, inevitably, public sector administrators have to develop a relatively detailed understanding of each service and its specific needs. One aspect of these needs is the labor force required. This aspect is often considered the most expensive aspect of services' funding. Thus, public sector administrators aiming at promoting the principles of the NPM have to grasp the level of skill required for the effective performance of each task in the service. The cost reduction that is potentially relevant to the 'best value' principle can be achieved if the formally accredited labor force is only employed for smaller job sizes, and by allowing larger numbers of not formally accredited employees to perform tasks previously performed by those with more formal training. This administrative practice was demonstrated by Appelbaum and Schmitt (2009), who showed how US hospitals are using nursing assistants to perform increasingly more tasks previously performed by nurses. Bach (2011) showed a similar trend in the UK for assistant social workers and assistant teachers as well as nursing assistants. He defined this trend as de-professionalization. Thus, the difference between recognized skill levels is salient for the administrative processes that define the threshold sum for funding outsourced services.

Traditionally, caring-related skills are seen as 'soft skills', and the emotional labor which they require doesn't often get to be recognized as a skill (Findlay et al., 2009). Furthermore, the caring-related skills are often seen as a 'natural' aspect of normative femininity, thus, very little training is seen as required for their development. This basic, almost universal, tendency was defeated only by the historical struggles of unionized teachers, nurses and social workers who promoted a definition of their skills as gained knowledge. This historical achievement, as explained by Duffy (2011), created a dichotomy in the field of caring work which distinguished between caring occupations that can be assumed as 'working with and through relationships' and other caring occupations which are more menial and where relationship

maintenance is allegedly less important. It is important to bear in mind the dichotomy which Duffy (2011) pinpointed in order to examine the ways in which NPM informed administrators could use this dichotomy while applying NPM principles, particularly that of best value, in the area of care.

In her definition of caring work, Tronto (1993) considered four main qualities: attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness. Although service delivery contracts may preserve such caring qualities, this requires a willingness to recognize the importance of these qualities for the high standard of the caring service, and to acknowledge the skill and budget working hours that will allow these qualities to be exercised. However, according to Folbre (2006), if caring services are seen as public goods, the expectation is that caring work will benefit society without payment. Efforts at the professionalization of nursing and social work (Abbott and Wallace, 1990) helped negate this perception by emphasizing education, training and skill development. Professionalization and unionization enabled leaders in the areas of nursing and social work to associate the required skills in these areas to formal training, payment ladders and a set of benefits. Until the neo-liberal turn, the conflicts in these areas involved differences between advantages for unionized employees over less trained and un-unionized ones. More recently, Baines (2004) showed that a variety of practices have reinforced the 'public good' view of non-paid caring services, and Jonsson (2011) showed that part-time caring jobs often imply low pay. One example is the above mentioned institutional preference for fewer trained nurses, which can be sustained because the less technical work is done by nursing aides (Appelbaum and Schmidt 2009; Bach, 2011). Duffy (2011) further proposes that “the professional strategies through which care workers sought labor market power also left them vulnerable to managerial degradation via cost-cutting” (cf Dwyer, 2013:395). Nevertheless, it remains unclear how this process unfolds and where negotiations take place. Below I further explore these issues in the Israeli context.

### **The Israeli Context**

Professionalization and unionization have protected occupational rewards in the caring professions in Israel since the 1970's. In 1973, a collective agreement was signed with the social workers' union and in 1979 with the nurses' union. Even though the payment ladders established by these contracts were relatively low, they secured job stability and a variety of employment benefits including a civil servant pension that was costly to the State. Though often erroneously assumed to be unrelated to deskilling, Israel signed the GATT Government Procurement Code (GPC) in 1983 which became the Compulsory Tender Law in 1992 (Reich, 1999). The local translation of the GPC was accompanied by guidelines set down by the Ministry of Finance's comptroller-general, who made it enforceable in 1996 - a year after the General Agreement on Trade in Services (1995) initiated its mechanism of sanctions against member states who delayed local implementation. These government regulations promoting the lowest price criterion were in force until March 2007, when political action obliged the government to replace them with guidelines taking greater account of workers' rights. At the same time, New Public Management based reforms were promoted during the 1990's with the stated goal of encouraging 'merit public servants' (Galnoor, 1998).

### **Methodological approach**

In this article I present the outcomes of one dimension of an institutional ethnography which I pursued between 2011 and 2013 in Israel. The institutional ethnography included interviews with women employed in outsourced services as well as administrators in the Welfare, Education and Health Ministries. Focusing on typical texts in the mapped institutional space, I also analyzed tender calls for projects in the area of welfare, education and health. In this way, I applied Dorothy Smith' (2005) guidelines for researchers to concentrate on the institutional practices in the world which women encounter in their daily routines. After several studies focusing on women's experiences as employed in service and caring jobs shaped by contracts between public sector organizations and service deliverers, I turned my attention to the institutional practice of

service funding. In this article, I only present my analysis of the text of the tender calls, and specifically the labor force section of these.

Lazar (2005) conceptualized feminist critical discourse analysis as a method that traces the ways in which radical/critical categories undergo appropriation which de-radicalizes them by creating a third discourse in which they appear but their original meaning is disregarded. Here I define the professionalization of care-based occupations as the radical discourse. I contrast it with the New Public Management discourse which appropriates the categories offered by professionalization without recognizing the importance of the caring qualities. Thus, I apply feminist discourse analysis, using two sub-categories: pay scale or 'payment ladder' which is a sub-category of the skill recognition category, and the silenced category of unpaid work. Baines (2004) defined unpaid work as tasks completed in time outside of the contracted hours. A caring employee is unable to perform her job properly in the fraction of time allocated, so she must work longer, unpaid, hours to complete her work. Moreover, she shows that caring work processes are currently Taylorized in ways that will allow unskilled volunteers to perform them. Lazar argued that ambivalence is a typical response to the way in which a dominant discourse appropriates categories of oppositional discourse by subjugating it. Here, I show how the feminist discourse on professionalizing employees of caring services has been subjugated by the discourse used in New Public Management.

The data used for this study were taken from two Israeli government calls for tenders for the contracting-out of social services the fields of welfare and health services. The first text consists of the personnel section in a Health Ministry tender for operating health services in primary schools. I chose this tender because of its intensely political context: the service proposed was recently 'contracted back in' in response to huge public criticism of the previous for-profit service provider. Public criticism and citizens' demands are ranked highly among the eight reasons listed by Hefetz and Warner (2004) for contracting back in. I assumed that a new call for a tender in a politically visible service would be a

good opportunity to observe discourse interaction. The second excerpt consists of the three personnel tables in an occupational-rehabilitation service tender published by the Welfare Ministry. Here as well, an intensely political context shaped the contract: less than a year before the tender was announced, the government responded to an industrial relations crisis with social workers in Israel by committing itself to a minimum wage of 7,000 NIS for all social workers in the privatized services. I expected that the new contract would reflect previous union achievements.

### **Findings**

Occupational professionalization, in the Israeli context, was historically seen as converging with the nation building project, and the occupations of nursing, teaching and social work were given both authoritative and disciplining power in order to take care of the waves of new immigrants who had what were considered to be negative domestic habits and problematic patterns of child raising (Motzafi-Haller, 2001). The social problems associated with the immigration legitimized fast development of training colleges which awarded a range of diplomas indicating occupational proficiency. Schools and various community institutions were set up and staffed by large numbers of nurses, social workers, teachers and social trainers who could exert their caring/controlling practices towards members of specific communities (Hirsch, 2011). One such figure was the school nurse who provided a range of services including medical treatment and sexual education. School nurses used to have an office in which they could admit pupils to maintain their sense of being protected and personally looked after. Nurses were also in charge of vaccinations, but this was considered a secondary aspect of their job. School nurses were tenured and held unionized jobs with the appropriate pension entitlements. Against this historical background, I examine below two processes of polarization: that which is created by the general flattening of wages for both core and peripheral employees in the caring occupations, and that which occurs among those employed in the caring occupations outside that are still delivered by public organizations

and core and peripheral employees employed in the caring services delivered by commissioned bodies.

Pursuing an institutional ethnography aimed at understanding the institutional space within which outsourced caring jobs are shaped, allowed me to learn from state administrators that levels of wages and job sizes were rarely negotiated during the process of the tender call preparation and the calculation of the required budget. It became apparent that the ministries used pre-set tables in which the wage levels and job sizes required per number of service recipients were determined. What was left open for negotiation, which is not analyzed here, was the types of occupational skills required for any service, and the level of skill. Here, I analyze the already published calls, along with the results of the negotiation and the application of the pre-set labor force tables.

### **Analysis of a tender call published by the Israeli Health Ministry**

Deskilling in health services, which has been detailed, in numerous accounts around the world (e.g. Appelbaum and Schmitt, 2009), typically, results in increasingly more services that were traditionally performed by nurses being performed by nursing assistants. Table 1 (a & b) below is a translated excerpt from a tender call to administer health services in primary schools, including vaccination. The contract implicitly conveys a message to the profit oriented service provider to prefer large numbers of part time, practical nurses paid by the hour and small numbers of full time registered nurses paid by the month. To better understand the nature of this message, the difference in wages between practical and registered nurses should be clarified: the relatively similar (only about 200-400 NIS difference) basic wages appear in the most recent nurses' collective contract pay scales. The collective contract defines the range of wages as dependent on level and experience. In order to be paid the minimum wage, in the lowest five levels, a practical nurse must have at least nine years of experience, and a registered nurse seven years of experience. A registered nurse must be on the 6<sup>th</sup> level or higher and have over 25 years of experience to

**4.3.8.13 Field Nurses**

4.3.8.13.1 The field nurses are in charge of administering services to pupils at school as specified in par. 2.

4.3.8.13.2 Field nurses must be registered nurses.

4.3.8.13.3 Despite the stipulations in paragraph 4.3.8.13.2, the service provider is permitted:

\* To provide all services to pupils by practical nurses other than in the case of vaccinations and hearing tests. Vaccinations will be administered by practical nurses while supervised by a registered nurse, and hearing tests will be conducted by practical nurses that have been authorized to conduct hearing tests in the past or have already conducted hearing screenings in the past.

\* To conduct vision tests by optometrists holding a license issued by the office for medical profession permits at the Health Ministry.

\* To conduct hearing tests by speech therapists holding a license issued by the office for medical profession permits at the Health Ministry.

\* To deliver 'education hours' by 'health counselors ' as defined in paragraph 4.7.6 of section 2b.

The service provider must produce a valid authorization from the head of the public health authority in writing and in advance.

\* The total number of practical nurses in the central district should not exceed the number of currently employed practical nurses plus 10%; namely, 105 standard nursing positions.

4.3.8.14 Required scope of duties for field nurses:

4.3.8.14.1 The service provider is required to employ standardized nursing positions as detailed above for all services to pupils

4.3.8.14.2 A standardized nursing position is defined as a registered nurse employed full time

4.3.8.14.3 That said, the provider can replace the stipulated employment coverage by field workers who are not nurses according to paragraph

4.3.8.14.4 If the provider employs part time staff, part time units will be accumulated towards full standardized positions in order to assess whether the labor force requirements have been met.

4.3.8.14.5 It is hereby clarified that any failure on the part of the service provider in fulfilling the full range of duties of nurses' employment will be considered a breach of contract.

Table 1a: Labor force section of a health services tender

<b>Extent of required employment</b>			
	1st year of contract	2nd year of contract	3rd year of contract
Nurses' standardized Positions	325	368	382
Equivalent Nurses' hours	991,250	556, 246	577, 407

Table 1b: A Tender's guideline for nurses' hours required

Table 1 (a&b): Excerpt of an Israeli call for tender pp. 15-16 of public tender 55/2012 for the delivery of pupils' health services, *Health Ministry, Israeli Government for the State of Israel*.

earn the average wage. For a practical nurse to earn the average wage, she needs to be on the 10<sup>th</sup> level or higher and have a similar number of years of experience. Registered nurses in Israel earn higher salaries in fact because of the range of fringe benefits they are entitled to according to various collective contracts, but these are not mentioned in the tender. What we see is a distancing away from Fine's argument concerning the distinction between core and peripheral employees. For the core employees, we see a sharp reduction in the number of proposed jobs along with a flattening of their wages as they are not entitled to the same benefits as nurses employed by hospitals or the health ministry. The peripheral employees' wages are also flattened by attributing to them null years of experience so that they are exposed to very low levels of the pays scales.

The legalese gives the tender call document a veneer of neutrality, equality and rationalized administrative operation, apparently to the benefit of all. However, the play with the distinction between core and peripheral employees appears clearly in the contrast between the statement; "Field nurses must be registered nurses" and the one which immediately follows it: "the service provider is permitted to provide all services to pupils by

practical nurses". The Ministry uses clear skill recognition, and then explains the conditions under which this acknowledgement can be circumvented. The legal language does not explicitly suggest circumvention but rather allows it. Skill recognition is embraced and yet defeated. The pay scale is thus incorporated, but a range of benefits remain outside the articulation of the tender; it fails to protect nurses from deskilling and wages below the minimum.

The tender call is silent about the huge range of manipulations permitted to the service provider. The level of pay, the possibility to ignore the number of years of experience and the fringe benefits all depend on the provider's good will. It is more than likely that a profit oriented service provider will minimize these benefits and therefore flatten the pay scale. Thus both registered and practical nurses can be employed at the minimum wage, and this would still be considered legal and compliant with the contract. If registered nurses demand their fringe benefits, the text indicates that the service provider can make greater profits by employing practical nurses 'under the supervision' of a registered nurse. Supervision is a vague term and the contract does not specify how many practical nurses can operate under the supervision of one registered nurse, where she is located, and how long it would take her to get to a specific school and provide assistance. Again, the professionalization is recognized in the form of attributing supervisory authority to the registered nurse, but the missing details defeat professionalization since the conditions of the supervision are left for the profit oriented service provider to define. What makes the contract even more cynical is the fact that in Israel, as a result of concerted efforts by the nurses' union to achieve professionalization, since 2007 no one can become a practical nurse because all accredited training programs have been cancelled. This means that that all those trained in nursing are accredited as registered nurses. Why, then, does the contract detail the conditions for employing practical nurses at length? Possibly, because registered nurses who need a job can be pressed to accept payment conditions that undervalue their skills by considering them to be practical nurses. The ability to exert such pressure is crucial to understanding the process

of protection confinement and fragmentation of caring positions. Even when professionalization has been achieved, but the resources aren't there to back it up. It is likely that very young as well as older job seekers may be lacking such resources. In the absence of union involvement, de-professionalization can be expected.

Towards the end of the excerpt, two other major instruments of deskilling appear. The first encourages part-time employment: "If the provider employs part time staff, part time units will be accumulated towards full standardized positions in order to assess whether the labor force requirements have been met." The reference to the accumulation of part time job fractions suggests that the tender legitimizes the employment of part-timers. Its importance as deskilling mechanism is discussed below in the analysis of the welfare excerpt. The second deskilling device that appears in the table that converts the work force requirements into "Equal value of Nurses' hours", thus, re-commodifying the job as hours worked. This device is examined in the analysis of the education excerpt. Tenders for school nursing staff express NPM conventions that also appear in the other texts.

### **Analysis of a Tender Call Published by the Israeli Welfare Ministry**

In what follows, I discuss staff requirements for running three types of occupational-rehabilitation centers for autistic patients (see job sizes and labor force tables below). Contracting-out cuts down on labor force expenses by giving rise to mini jobs, which have been identified as an employment arrangement that loads women's work with the meaning of non-work (Weinkopf, 2009). The very low (0.15, 0.30) fractions of jobs suggests that the service provider is discursively encouraged to manipulate the gap between the insufficient number of positions and the center's needs. Such encouragement is enabled by skill recognition, as can be seen in the table where the tender details the skill requirements for each of the positions. However, the small fractions of paid positions render this skill recognition irrelevant and activate a silencing mechanism over unpaid women's work.

<b>Description of position</b>	<b>Proposed Position size</b>
Manager/Social Worker	0.50
Social Worker	0.15
Communication Therapist	0.20
Occupational Therapist	0.20
Guide	3.00
Un-licensed Caregiver	1.00
Cleaner	0.50
<b>Total number of positions</b>	<b>5.55</b>

Table 2.1: Requirements for operating an occupational-rehabilitation center with 24 beds.

<b>Description of position</b>	<b>Proposed Position size</b>
Manager/Social Worker	0.50
Social Worker	0.15
Communication Therapist	0.30
Occupational Therapist	0.30
Guide	2.00
Un-licensed Caregiver	2.00
Cleaner	0.50
<b>Total Number of Positions</b>	<b>5.75</b>

Table 2.2: Requirements for operating a day care center with 16 beds.

<b>Description of position</b>	<b>Proposed Position size</b>
Coordinator	0.50
Guide	2.75
Service Manager	0.50
<b>Total Number of Positions</b>	<b>3.75</b>

Table 2.3: Requirements for operating a supported-occupation center with 24 beds.

As explained by Armstrong (2013), no skilled work can be performed because of the disparity between the allocated time and a realistic assessment of needs. In this case, either employees volunteer fractions of their time to deal with bureaucratic tasks (Baines, 2004) because the caring encounter takes up all of their paid time, or the caring encounter is sacrificed, and many of those in need do not get to interact with the care providers. The tables tacitly acknowledges the diverse range of caring occupations, some of which call for several years of academic training, and it simultaneously creates a situation where those employed are unable to provide a skilled service and earn a decent wage. The 7,000 NIS minimum wage for social workers in privatized services is not mentioned anywhere in the tender, but the small fractions of jobs suggest that in the case of a union struggle, the mini-jobs will ensure that the government will not pay the sums required for skilled work. Core workers, who according to local labor laws, are entitled to payment and benefits that are consistent with the collective contract are employed in minimal job sizes that minimizes their rewards without the need to circumvent the law. The difference in proposed position size between "guides" (the relevant peripheral category) and the other caring occupations is a major feature of deskilling. Guides do not yet have the appropriate academic training and hence are the cheapest source of work because if a skill does not need to be recognized, proposed size position can be inflated in the tender call. This again emphasizes the disparity between levels of skills, which could potentially become a source of pressure on care employees as they can be forced to take positions for which they are

over-qualified because other positions have too few hours and are over-loaded. Thus, a social worker may be offered employment as a guide. The structure of mini-jobs, with its implicit encouragement to pay by the hour without having any specific standards of hours for skilled care of patients, enables the service provider to increase profits by reducing team wages while not breaching labor or minimum wage laws.

### **Analysis of a Union Response to a Tender Call Published by the Israeli Education Ministry**

In the field of education, two recent waves of unionizing have blocked previous practices where tenders successfully flattened the pay scale. De facto, however, mini-jobs and hourly payment continue to deskill even those that are recognized as teachers and who are entitled to longstanding fringe benefits allocated by the collective agreement. The contracted out project enables school drop-outs and homeless teens detached from their families to get their high school diplomas or, more rarely, take the matriculation exams.

In response to union action by those employed on the second project, the Education Ministry conceded a range of fringe benefits for them. However, mini-jobs are still listed in tenders, so such entitlements can still be minimized. Table 5 is taken from a statement by the project teachers' union which is important because it criticizes the ways in which the State has responded to the union's demands.

The union demanded job security and continuity of employment, but, as can be seen at the beginning of the excerpt, the State simply ignored this demand. Continuity of employment may have been excluded from the tender to allow the service provider to gradually replace teachers who have years of experience in the specific project with recently recruited teachers who are not union members or who are already employed in its other projects. In both these ways, expenses can be cut, as implied in the excerpt. On the one hand, the importance of years in the project is recognized in that

**2.1 Demanding employment continuity:**

The tender call does not relate to teachers' employment continuity [years of service] and the coordinators currently employed, as regards to their transfer to the new service provider in the coming academic year...

**2.2 Setting a maximum for effective hours:** despite the new definition of monthly employment, pay calculation of effective hours continues. Instead of limiting this, the Ministry has introduced a requirement for a minimum of 30% effective hours... This requirement will generate many small positions...

**2.3 Increasing the value of an effective hour:** The value of an effective hour has increased and it now includes various components of monthly employment and payment for the summer vacation. However, it does not include any payment for other holidays.

**2.4 Calculating coordinators' experience:** this calculation must be based on previous years of experience and levels set by the appropriate occupational pay scale.

**2.5 Recognizing previous training points:** in the education system, accumulated training points are recognized when calculating wages and they constitute a significant payment increase. The tender call recognizes training points – but only for points accumulated since the year in which employment relations with the service provider began.

**2.6 Travel time reimbursement:** a unified scale for travel reimbursement must be defined for all coordinators for set expenses. As travel expenses vary, they will be paid according to receipts filed...

**2.7 Full Payment for staff meetings and training sessions:** even though there has been an improvement, and those employed in effective hours are only paid (partially) for staff meetings and training sessions, teachers employed on a monthly basis are not paid. Thus all teachers should be paid for attending staff meetings and training sessions.

**2.8 Calculating convalescence pay and uniform expenses:** these annual calculations should be based on accepted payment scales for specific years of experience levels.

**2.9 Seniority benefits** must be paid to coordinators who have accumulated 25 years of experience as defined for teachers

**2.10 Sick leave and days off:** coordinators must be authorized 22 vacation days annually and 2 days of choice. Sick leaves per annum are set at 30 days, 2 of which are based on declarations.

**3 Unresolved issues and further reservations:**

3.1 The mechanism of effective hours must be limited and used only in special instances such as supplemental teaching, intensive courses and so on.

3.2. The limit on maximum employment size has to be eliminated (currently defined as 120 monthly hours).

3.3 The indicator for setting position size: experience shows that the number of students at the beginning of the year does not reflect the number of students throughout the year. If the position size is set at the beginning of the year, it is likely that it will be an underestimate.

3.4 Paragraph 16.1.8 of the tender call deals with payment for extra hours during vacations. All vacations recognized in the regular education system must be paid accordingly.

3.5 Payment for cancelled classes: paragraph 8.7.3 in the tender call describes a situation in which a class is not held for reasons beyond the teachers' control. Teachers should be paid in full. Classes cancelled because of events, tours or other managerial decisions should also be paid.

3.6 Preparation time: the tender call allots only 2% of the minimum wage for class preparation... This level of payment is far from reflecting the amount of time actually devoted to these activities... Payment for preparation time should equal 10%.

Table 5: Project teachers' union statement

Unpaid service work is one of the cornerstones of NPM's reduction of costs, and the new tender does not abandon this method. Indeed, the notion of 'effective hours' becomes a mystified representation of re-commodification of work and an invitation to women to volunteer un-paid work: payment is due only for hours of actual teaching. While the union demands for monthly payment are symbolically heeded by creating very small (0.33) positions, the Ministry is reluctant to abandon the money saving mechanism of 'effective hours' which implies that a significant amount of teachers' time remains unpaid, as is the case whenever mini-jobs are used in social services. Deskilling is embedded in the mechanisms made available to not pay for teachers' time, either by 'effective hours' or by the staff meetings and training sessions described in paragraph 2.7. The union action is therefore organized around denouncing these 'tricks' and demanding their removal, but the Ministry maintains lower pay which, as explained in paragraph 2.3, does not include crucial payment components. This duality of adopting the language of skill recognition, but, simultaneously defeating it in actual application, exposes the coordinators (see paragraph 2.4) to the practice of ignoring a previously applied pay scale.

Training points have been a major instrument of professionalization in the caring services, and a crucial method of increasing wages above the minimum and under-minimum pay scales. Paragraph 2.5 attacks the defeat of this form of teachers' professionalization by protesting against minimizing the amount of recognized training. The travel reimbursement issue illustrates a form of deskilling which is applied by reducing income by transferring operational costs to employees' shoulders. An explanation for the gap between the Ministry's symbolic incorporation of travel time and its money saving goals can be found in paragraph 2.6: the actual traveling costs are expected to be shouldered by employees, even after the union's action. Paragraphs 2.8, 2.9 and 2.10 perfectly illustrate the nature of contracting-out as an exclusionary attempt to confine the protection of professionalization by reducing the numbers of those entitled to benefits that have resulted from collective bargaining. All three

demands that fringe benefits commonly that are commonly included in collective contracts be recognized. The reservations listed under item 3 summarize the dual nature of the struggle against deskilling: paragraphs 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 reflect an effort to resist the deskilling generated by the mechanisms which create teachers' mini-jobs; paragraphs 3.2, 3.5 and 3.6 reflect the struggle against deskilling in the form of un-paid teachers' time. However, the teachers' demands were ignored in rhetorically sophisticated ways. Only in later tender calls and through negotiation with the winning bidder, did the teachers employed in this service manage to improve their conditions (Benjamin, 2013).

### **Discussion**

The ramifications of public sector reforms for women's job quality and equal payment has preoccupied feminist scholarship since the 1990's (Armstrong, 1997) and still receives vigorous attention today (Rubery, 2013). Here I have added a focus on the amount of budgeted time as a form of deskilling. The outsourcing of caring occupations which requires a calculation of each service' labor-force-needs, reflects institutional practices that connect budgeting policies to labor market polarization. By flattening rewards for both core and peripheral employees it polarizes the positions of those in caring occupations in relations to employees outside the caring occupations. By ignoring collective contract forms of skill recognition it polarizes the positions of those whose jobs are shaped by commissioning contracts in relations to other employees in the caring occupations.

On the basis of Duffy's (2011) suggestion that there has been a historical convergence between professionalization and neo-liberalism, the findings here show that neo-liberalism manifested in NPM principles and applied by budgeting administrators, should be understood as a political force undermining the achievements of the women's movement toward valuing and recognizing caring skills. As outsourcing generates an encounter between professionalization and NPM within this space, an opportunity is created to study the conditions under which the public policy of procurement creates

polarization through deskilling. Specifically, the analysis shows that three main forms of deskilling emerge in the examined institutional space of caring services procurement. These three processes of deskilling impair the quality of social services, but more importantly, they impair the distinction between core employees and peripheral employees, so that both of them are exposed to deskilling and reward flattening mechanisms. What we have seen is that both core employees and peripheral employees lag behind their occupational counterparts – those employed by the public sector organizations forced to follow the collective contracts in their fields, in levels of reward despite similar levels of occupational skills and similar task performance.

The three main forms of deskilling which emerged in the analysis of calls announcing tenders for the delivery of social services are promoted despite the Israeli State's declared commitment to legal and professional action. They encourage operators firstly, to hire on the basis of reduced rewards and reduced recognition of experience, as was shown to be the case relating to 'practical nurses'. Secondly, to use a combination of mini-jobs and restricted forms of benefits for social workers and, thirdly, to reduce budgets through cuts in the number of hours covered by the government so that attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness are almost impossible to deliver within the paid job profile. These three forms of deskilling help shed further light on deskilling as a constantly growing repertoire of specific practices in the context of the contracting-out of caring services. With the reduction in funded hours for qualified employees, fewer skills can be applied in the operation of social services.

These processes are powerful and reveal that the number of part time jobs, which often become mini-jobs, increases by the described hidden practice of minimizing funded time, which is a strategy that indirectly moves away from the stated commitment to gender equality (Jonsson, 2011). Challenging these processes requires a coalition to bridge the interests of educated registered nurses and social workers, clients of social services and the families who care for them, state administrators who are committed to high

quality standards in public and social services, and women employed as nursing assistants or social work frontline workers. By increasing public visibility they will be drawing attention to the deskilling which occurs in all three stages in contract preparation: firstly, the budgeting that comes after the professional standards have been set forth; secondly, the actual signing of the contract with the service deliverer, and, the long term public audits of the actual delivery of the service.

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