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To be given at the Caring Democracy Panel at the Global Carework Summit, Lowell, June 3 2017

The central question of this panel is how *Caring Democracy* might be 'applicable' (Amy Armenia) or 'relevant' (Joan Tronto) to other nations, which in my case would be The Netherlands, a small country in the North-West of Europe.

My statement consists of three points:

1. The analysis made by Joan Tronto in *Caring Democracy* is definitely relevant to The Netherlands in many respects. Her analyses of the Western society, of politics and power, culture of individualism, of active citizenship, are all relevant and applicable. Since 2013 The Netherlands have seen a transition from a welfare state to a 'participation society' that only takes 'active citizens' into account. The welfare state was originally rooted in religiously inspired ideals of charity and solidarity with those in need, and also in its secularized version developed since the 1950s expressed collective responsibility for all in need. This is now broken down. Psychiatry, youth and elderly care are the first to experience its harmful effects, next to the refugees seeking safety: they meet with a dominant attitude of hostility. Institutional care is transferred to the informal sphere. These developments have been democratically confirmed in the recent national elections, resulting in the near annihilation of the social-democratic party and a swing to the right. Former ideas of solidarity have been replaced by a tendency towards protectionism, both of our individual and collective interest.

2. There are, however, also important differences on a cultural level between the US and our nation. Two main characteristics of The Netherlands are: pragmatism and egalitarianism. People are not attracted by ideals or reflection, as they rather take care of themselves and find their pragmatic way around rules and regulations. Also, there are less extreme poverty and wealth and the general health care and other services are high quality. Egalitarianism also shows in how power is divided among many parties. Our governments are always coalition governments, requiring negotiation and compromise. A strong civil society is involved in negotiating socio-economic policies. These characteristics have the effect that the Dutch culture is not one of protest movements, cheering crowds, revolutions, or political and/or moral heroism.

3. Still, caring democracy is a wonderful and inspiring political and ethical program and its relevance to The Netherlands increases. For its further development I would like to suggest two research questions that deserve further analysis:

- In what ways does *materiality* determine the distribution of responsibilities? The availability of materials – like beds, rooms, institutions, transport – seems to play a role in the (im)possibilities for responsibility that must not be overlooked.

- In what ways does the *body* play a role in responsibilities? The body as the epistemological locus of morality – both in the ways in which the body experiences and in which it performs – asks for further research, in order to underpin and elaborate the care-ethical claim of its import.

Thank you all for your attention.

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