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# Feminist Political Economy

## A Global Perspective



Pluralist Economics  
Certificate Project



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The course is based on the book by

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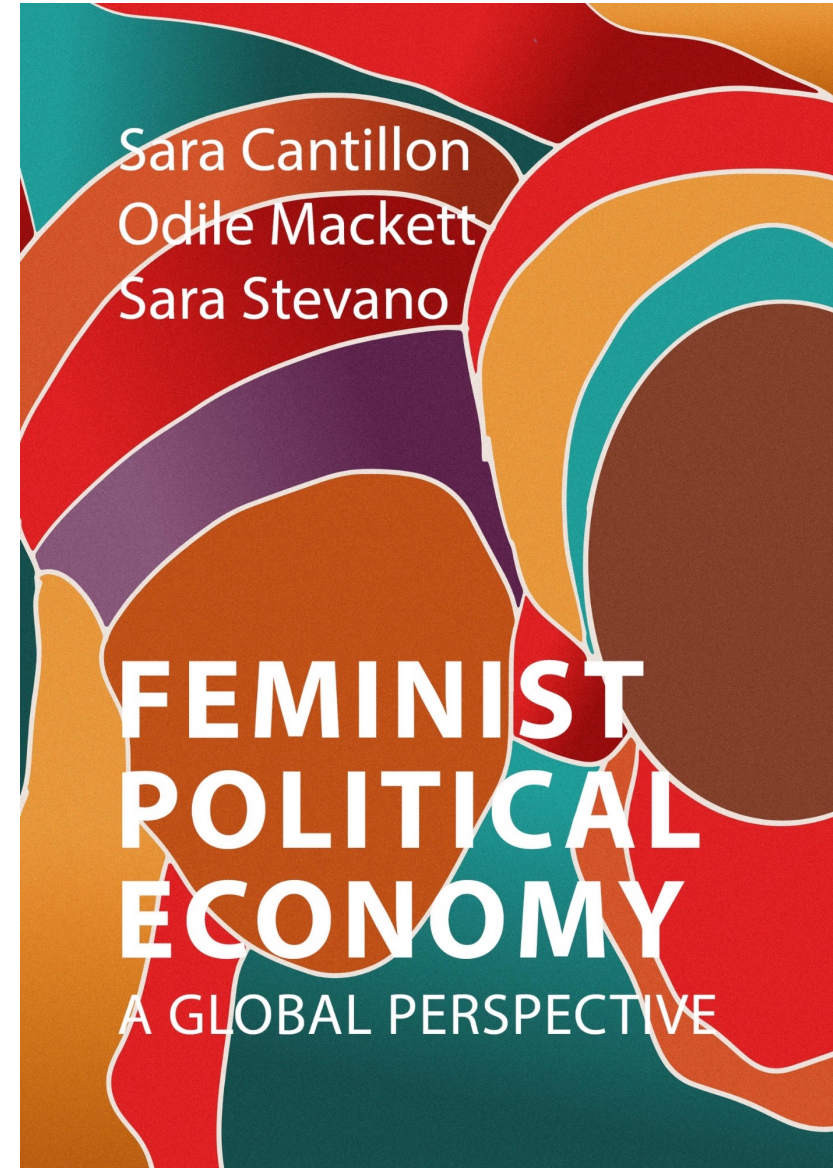
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part of Network for Pluralist  
Economics Germany



NETZWERK  
Plurale Ökonomik



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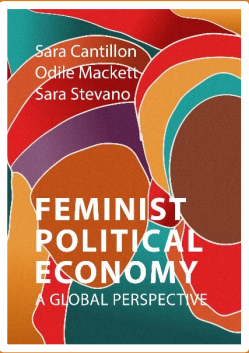


# Chapter 4

## Care

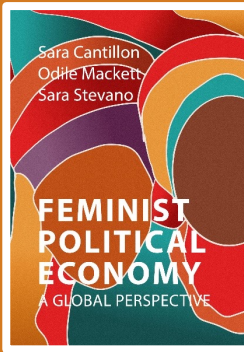


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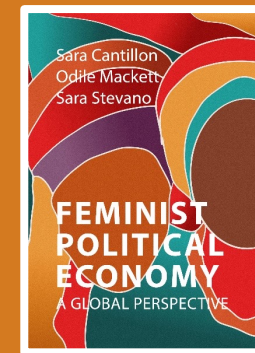


# Outline

- Context: Unequal gender distribution of care work globally
- Part 1 Relational Nature of Care Work/Limits to Commodification
- Part 2 The Care Economy
- Part 3 Paid and Unpaid Care
- Part 4 The Case for Investment in Care and Policies to Redistribute and Reward Unpaid Work.



# Context: Inequalities in Care Work



- Caring is a fundamental human capability that serves a vital human need. Being cared for is essential for survival, development, and well-being throughout our lives.
- The interdependency of humans contradicts the concept of self-interested individualism in economic theory. The emphasis on choice overlooks the structural circumstances and gender norms that influence economic life.
- Care work is often undervalued, even when it involves intrinsic motivation and commitment to those being cared for. Women have historically taken on a disproportionate amount of care work, doing three times more than men globally, leading to long-term economic implications.
- Investing in care infrastructure is crucial for addressing gender inequality and meeting changing demographic needs.





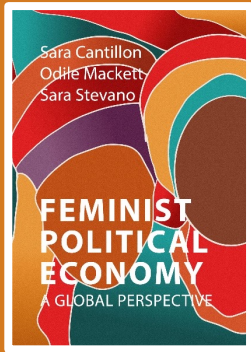
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# PART I

The Relational Nature of Care

# Relational Nature of Care Work

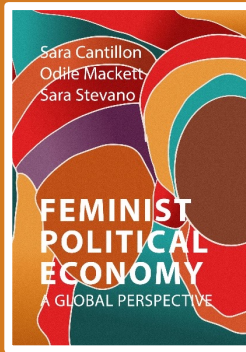
- There is a distinction between "caring for" and "caring about" Tronto (2010).
- Care work, especially unpaid care, is characterized by its relational nature.
- Primary care involves developing intimate, mutually supportive relationships, which are inalienable and non-commodifiable. Secondary care roles, such as child-care, nursing, and teaching, focus on protecting, enhancing development, restoring health, and educating.
- The emotional labor and intimate nature of primary care cannot be commodified or transferred to another person without undermining mutuality.





# Limits to Commodification

- The temporal logic of care differs from the profit-oriented rationality of the market economy. Time and presence are crucial elements in care labor for nurturing relationships.
- Care involves practical tasks, mental anticipation of needs, and emotional support.
- Attempts to package care as pre-planned units deprive carer's of connection and compromise overall welfare.
- The privatization of care provision can lead to condensed care visits, compromising the dignity of care recipients and placing unfair pressure on carers.



# Videos worth watching

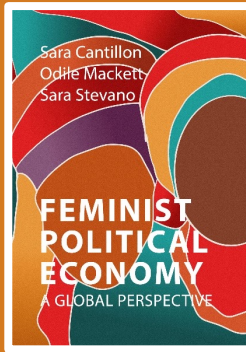
Nancy Folbre's lecture 'For Love and Money: the Distinctive Features of Care Work' (1hr 24min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91N5HtMbVHY>

Sara Cantillon on the relational nature of care

<https://wideplus.org/2021/02/24/video-available-of-webinar-covid19-and-the-care-economy-what-do-we-see-what-do-we-call-for-24-february-2021/>

I would also highly recommend the Ken Loach film, *Sorry We Missed You*, which dramatizes the issues of precarious work and the problems of care provision in the UK.





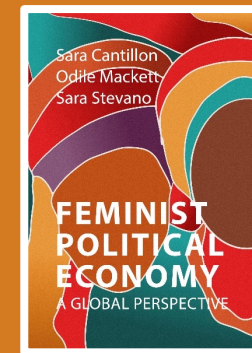
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# PART 2

The Care Economy: Paid and Unpaid Care

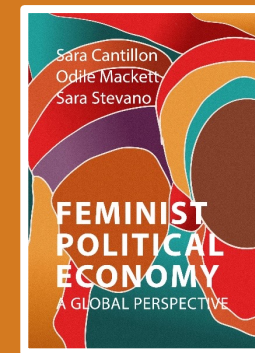
# The Care Economy

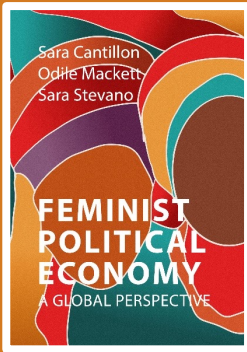
- The care economy represents a fundamental contribution to economic production in creating jobs – directly and indirectly – and in enabling other sectors of the economy to function.
- Paid care work includes education, health, social work, domestic work, and support services. It includes direct personal and relational care (e.g., child and elderly care), and indirect care (e.g., domestic work).
- Key issues include the distinction between paid and unpaid care labor, the gendered distribution of care work, and government support.



# Global Care Workforce

- The global care workforce is estimated at 381 million workers (66% are women), accounting for 11.5% of total global employment.
- Women constitute two-thirds of the global care workforce.
- Education sector: 157 million jobs (4.8% of global employment).
- Health and social work sector: 130.2 million jobs (3.9% of global employment).
- Domestic workers: 70.1 million, with 49.2 million being women



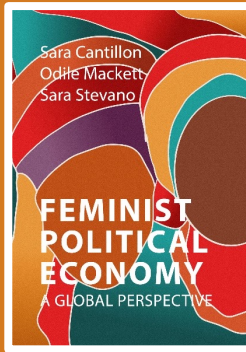


# Gender Segregation in Care Work

- Care work, both paid and unpaid, is highly gendered, with significant gender disparities, with men in higher-paid and better-qualified positions.
- Women dominate health and social work (7% of women, 2% of men) and education (7.4% of women, 3.1% of men).
- Intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and class influences care work, particularly in domestic and migrant labor.
- Ethnic minority groups, especially in health and social care, are overrepresented in lower-level occupations.



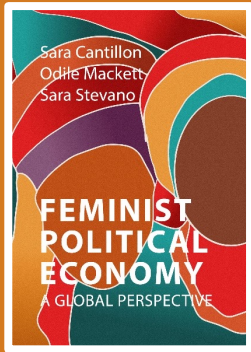
# Unpaid Care Work and Economic Value



- Unpaid care work is defined as: Non-market, non-remunerated activities encompassing direct and indirect care tasks. It is crucial for individuals, families, and societies, contributing to well-being and economic activity.
- The economic value of unpaid care work is often overlooked in GDP calculations. It is estimated that women's unpaid care contributions equate to 9% of global GDP or \$11 trillion in purchasing power parity.
- Research shows the annual wage value of unpaid household and caring work in the UK is £451 billion.



# Low Pay and Poor Conditions



- Care workers experience low wages, poor working conditions, and occupational segregation.
- Care workers face a "care pay penalty" with wage gaps ranging from 4% to 40% compared to other sectors.
- Long working hours and informal settings are common in paid care work.
- Care work is often seen as an extension of women's unpaid care roles, justifying low pay.
- Migrant care workers are vulnerable to exploitation, especially when undocumented.
- Unpaid care work acts as a fallback option, impacting the bargaining power of care workers.





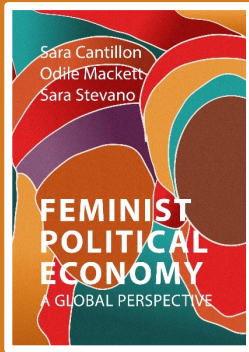


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# PART 3

Unpaid Care and Gender Inequality

# Gender Inequalities in Care Work

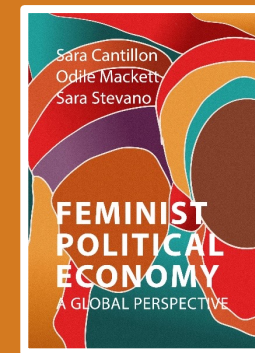


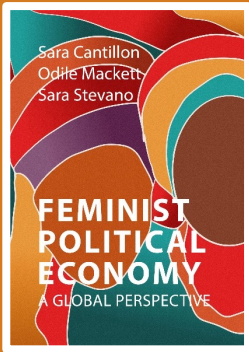
- Gender inequality: Women spend significantly more time on unpaid care work than men, impacting labor outcomes. Unequal distribution of care work hinders gender equality and women's economic and social empowerment.
- It impacts women's employment, wages, and overall economic prosperity. Women often face precarious employment, time poverty, and limited participation in social and political activities because of care responsibilities.
- SDG 5 recognizes the need to measure and address unpaid care work for gender equality.
- The care economy can have positive implications for gender equality but this requires addressing gender segregation, low pay, and unequal distribution of unpaid care work.



# Measuring Unpaid Care Work

- Improved household technologies and resources reduce unpaid work hours in richer countries.
- Marketization of care work limits productivity improvements and wage increases.
- Time-use surveys are the principal method for collecting data on unpaid work. They play a crucial role in highlighting gender-based inequalities and estimating women's contributions to national well-being.
- Time-use data disaggregated by sex, age group, and location are necessary for reporting on SDG Target 5.4. However, significant global gaps exist in the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data.



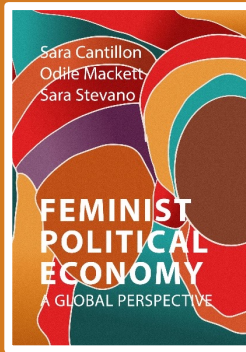


# Challenges in Measuring Unpaid Care

- Scope and quality: Time-use data differ across surveys, making cross-country comparisons problematic.
- Representativeness: Some surveys may only capture specific areas (rural/urban) or lack national representation.
- Activity coverage and detail: Surveys vary in the activities included and the level of detail (e.g., 15-minute or 30-minute time slots).
- Simultaneous activities: Capturing and measuring multitasking poses conceptual challenges.



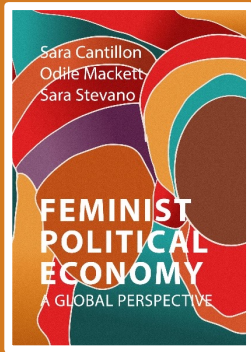
# Intergenerational Care



- Grandparents play a vital role in intergenerational family support, particularly in childcare provision. In many countries they are a significant part of informal childcare arrangements, constituting a large percentage of such care.
- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, over one-quarter of families in the United States and some European countries relied on grandparents for childcare. In the UK, 5 million grandparents provided some form of childcare pre-COVID-19, with 89 percent doing so at least once a week. Grandparents in the UK contribute approximately £3.9 billion a year to the economy through their childcare efforts. In China, more than 50 percent of people aged 45 to 57 provide childcare.
- Northern European countries have a lower proportion of grandparents providing regular childcare compared to Southern European countries with less generous state-provided services. However, even in countries with good formal childcare provision, such as Sweden, Denmark, and France, grandparents continue to provide a high prevalence of childcare.



# Intergenerational Care



- Skip-generation households, where children live without their parents, are prevalent in countries like Thailand due to rural-urban migration.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, the HIV and AIDS pandemic has led to older generations taking on caregiving roles for their sick adult children and surviving grandchildren.
- In certain situations, such as migration, incarceration, illness, or death, grandparents bear the caregiving burden in the absence of a middle generation.
- Grandmothers are much more likely than grandfathers to provide informal care for grandchildren in most countries.
- Availability of a pension increases the likelihood of grandmothers taking care of their grandchildren, as observed in China and South Africa.





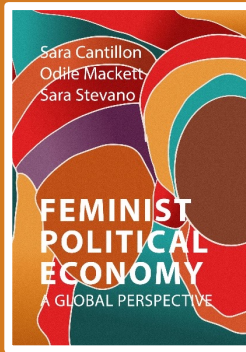
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# PART 4

Investment in Care/Policy Framework

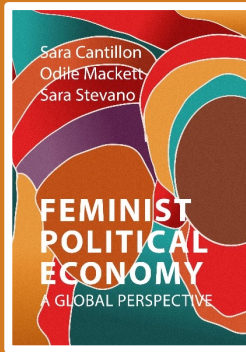
# Investment in Care

- Demographic changes (aging populations/declining birth rates)
- Allocation of funds for care viewed as social expenditures rather than investments with positive returns. But studies across multiple countries show that investing in social infrastructure, particularly in the caring industries, yields high returns and employment impacts.
- Public investment should include the labor force, skills, buildings, and facilities related to care services as part of social infrastructure.
- Research from various countries demonstrates the economic and employment benefits of investing in affordable and quality childcare services





# Employment Impact

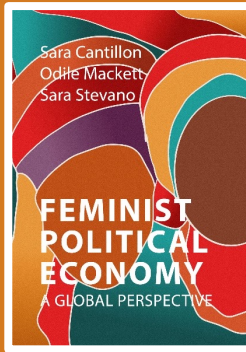


- Investing in the care economy generates significant employment opportunities. Investment in the care industry leads to more job creation compared to investment in the construction sector
- A 2% GDP investment in the care economy can increase overall employment by 2.4% to 6.1% and create over 21 million jobs. Of the jobs created through care investment, 59% to 70% would go to women.
- A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries highlights the significance of investing in both caring and physical infrastructure (REF )
  - Examples of job creation from care investment:
    - Nearly 13 million new jobs in the US
    - 3.5 million in Japan
    - 2 million in Germany
    - 1.5 million in the UK
    - 1 million in Italy
    - 600,000 in Australia
    - Almost 120,000 in Denmark



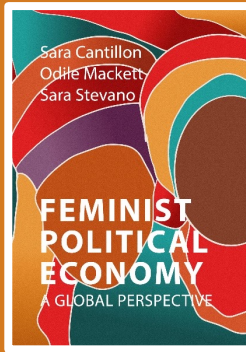
# Economic Returns and Gender Implications

- Investing in care not only generates employment but also has multiplier effects on the economy by creating indirect employment in industries down the supply chain and induced employment in industries supplying goods and services to households
- It incorporates different gendered implications compared to investment in construction:
  - Investment in construction widens the gender employment gap,
  - Investment in care narrows the gender employment gap.

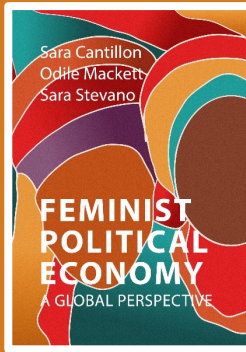


# Policy Actions on Care - Rationale

- Unpaid work significantly impacts women's empowerment, regardless of education, income, or country development level.
- Despite advances in recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care work, women continue to bear the largest share, especially those from lower socioeconomic groups, rural areas, and ethnic minority groups.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of unpaid work in social and economic life and increased recognition of those who undertake most of this work.
- Provision of accessible and affordable public care services, including childcare and social care, is pivotal. Investing in sustainable agriculture, rural development, and timesaving technology can reduce rural-urban inequalities, poverty, and constraints on women's time.



# Women's Labor Market Access and Opportunities

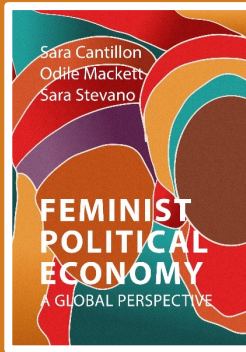


- Unpaid care work is a significant barrier to women's labor market participation. Inequalities in unpaid work and the labor market are deeply interconnected.
- Women's labor force participation stands at 54% compared to 81% for men globally.
- Inequalities in unpaid care work affect girls' education and economic participation from an early age. The unpaid work gender gap peaks for women between the ages of 25 and 44, impacting employment and career building.
- Formalizing paid parental leave for both women and men, with non-transferable paternity leave and compensation, is crucial.
- Flexible work schedules and arrangements (part-time, reduced hours, flexible schedules) can promote a better work-life balance.
- Gender norms that attribute domestic responsibilities to women hinder men's uptake of flexible working arrangements. Challenging social and cultural norms around gender roles is essential.



# Conclusions

- Care work plays a central role of every individual's life course in providing and enhancing people's physical and emotional well-being. It is critical and essential to ensure the basic functioning of humans, our economy, and the wider societal and workforce reproduction. Care is relational and there are limits to its commodification.
- It is not fully valued or recognized by traditional economic theories and wider macroeconomic models. Unpaid care is bound by institutional and socio-cultural gendered implications, commonly seen as women's work and that which is done for free, in turn, creating significant limitations on gender equality and for improving women's social and economic empowerment.
- Despite advances in country-level developments to increase gender equality in different areas of society, the labour force, and the wider economy, women, as starkly highlighted throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, still undertake a disproportionate amount of unpaid care work and are overrepresented in paid care work. This inequality is compounded for women from ethnic minority backgrounds and across intersectional factors of their age, life stage course, sex, socio-economic positioning, disability, and or migratory status.
- Unpaid care work needs to be recognized, rewarded, and revalued by wider government structures and taken into consideration at macro level policy-making; improving data collection methods for measuring unpaid work and increasing more rigorous gendered analysis at all levels of policy analysis is critical.
- Governments should prioritize investment in social infrastructure. This is essential for global care provision but will also stimulate a causal sequence for employment beyond the care sector, providing further employment opportunities for both sexes, and long-term positive returns in society.



# Resources

Institute for New Economic Thinking's interview with Nancy Folbre 'The Economics of Care' (15min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZEJV3kQBH0>

Women's Budget Group webinar 'A care-led recovery and building back better' with Sue Himmelweit, Ann Pettifor, Sarah Bedford, Nadia Whittome and Danielle Paffard, chaired by Faiza Shaheen (59min) <https://wbg.org.uk/events/a-care-led-recovery-and-building-back-better-online-webinar/>

Website of the network of researchers 'Care Work and the Economy' that advances policy solutions with gender-aware macroeconomic models <https://research.american.edu/careworkeconomy/>

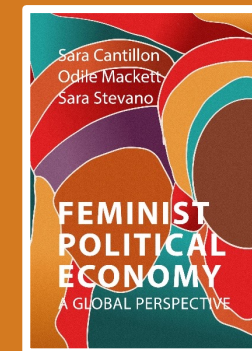
BRIDGE's *cutting edge* pack on gender and care <https://archive.ids.ac.uk/bridge/bridge-publications/cutting-edge-packs/gender-and-care.html>

The International Center for Research on Women's (ICRW) webpage on gender and care <https://www.icrw.org/issues/gender-and-care/>

Political Economy Research Institute's (PERI) program on gender and care work <https://www.peri.umass.edu/research-areas/gender-and-care-work>

International Labour Organization's (ILO) webpage on the care economy <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/care-economy/lang-en/index.htm>

Nancy Folbre, The Great Transition <https://greattransition.org/publication/the-caring-economy>



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**Thanks for watching! 😊**



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