

« New Work— Debating transformations of care work from a gender perspective. »



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University of Zurich

Keynote

In recent months, part-time labour has featured prominently in the Swiss news media: The Sunday press has launched the idea that academics must either work at least 70% or pay back the high cost of their education. Who works part-time and why? Is this the new lifestyle of the Swiss elite? And if the demand for full-time employment for all adults was heeded, who would do the unpaid care work?

My talk takes this controversial debate as a starting point to analyse the current narratives around working hours from a gender perspective. On a conceptual level, I draw on feminist theorists Nancy Fraser, Joan Tronto and others. My aim is to illustrate two key pitfalls in the current debates: their prioritising of paid employment above unpaid care and their understanding of care work as being offloaded from privileged women's onto marginalised women's shoulders.

The second part of the talk then zooms in on my own empirical research with the latter – i.e. with women who do paid care work in the households of others. My aim is to shed light on the ambivalences of two ongoing transformations in this commoditised form of care work: transnational labour mediation and the platformisation of care.

The conclusions will take us back to the question of part-time labour and its potential for a more caring society.



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New Work - New Problems? Gender Perspectives on the Transformation of Work

Lucerne, 7-8 September 2023

Keynote

Debating transformations of care work from a gender perspective

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Acknowledgements

Labour Geography, Zurich



Sarah Hartmann



Marisol Keller



Khaoula Ettarfi



Jason Schneck

TICS project: Transformations of labour and intersectional inequalities in care services



Univ. of Flensburg: Sybille Bauriedl, Me-Linh Riemann & Nicola Techel
Univ. of Graz: Anke Strüver, Janne Lentz & Sarah Baumgartner
Univ. of Zurich: Christiane Meyer-Habighorst & Sarah Staubli

Overview of the argument

- **Two pitfalls in the current discussion of work in Switzerland**

Paid employment:

The current debate on part-time work

Unpaid labour:

The care crisis and the commodification of care work

- live-in care work
- platform-based care work

- **Alternative futures of work**

The Swiss popular press states a part-time boom

Frauen haben weniger Interesse an Vollzeitjobs – nicht nur wegen der Kinder

Eine neue Erhebung bringt die weitverbreitete Annahme zum Ausdruck, dass junge Frauen würden vor allem wegen der Kinder Teilzeit arbeiten wollen. Wie alte Rollenbilder wirken nach.

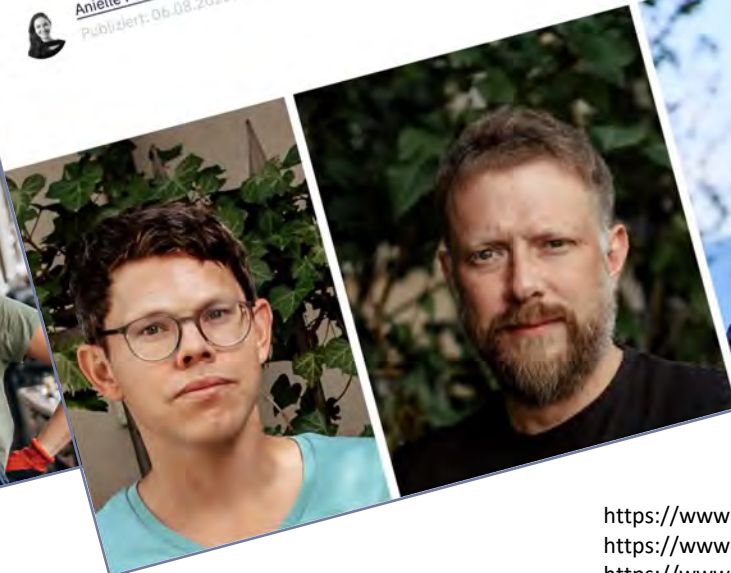
 **Markus Brotschi**
Publiziert: 21.02.2022, 05:45



Jetzt kommt der Teilzeitboom bei jungen, kinderlosen Männern an

Während des grössten Fachkräftemangels aller Zeiten fordern nun junge Frauen Teilzeitpensen ein, sondern zunehmend auch Männer. Was treibt sie an? Und wie reagieren Unternehmen auf sie?

 **Anielle Peterhans**
Publiziert: 06.08.2022, 14:27



Jetzt erreicht der Teilzeittrend die Väter

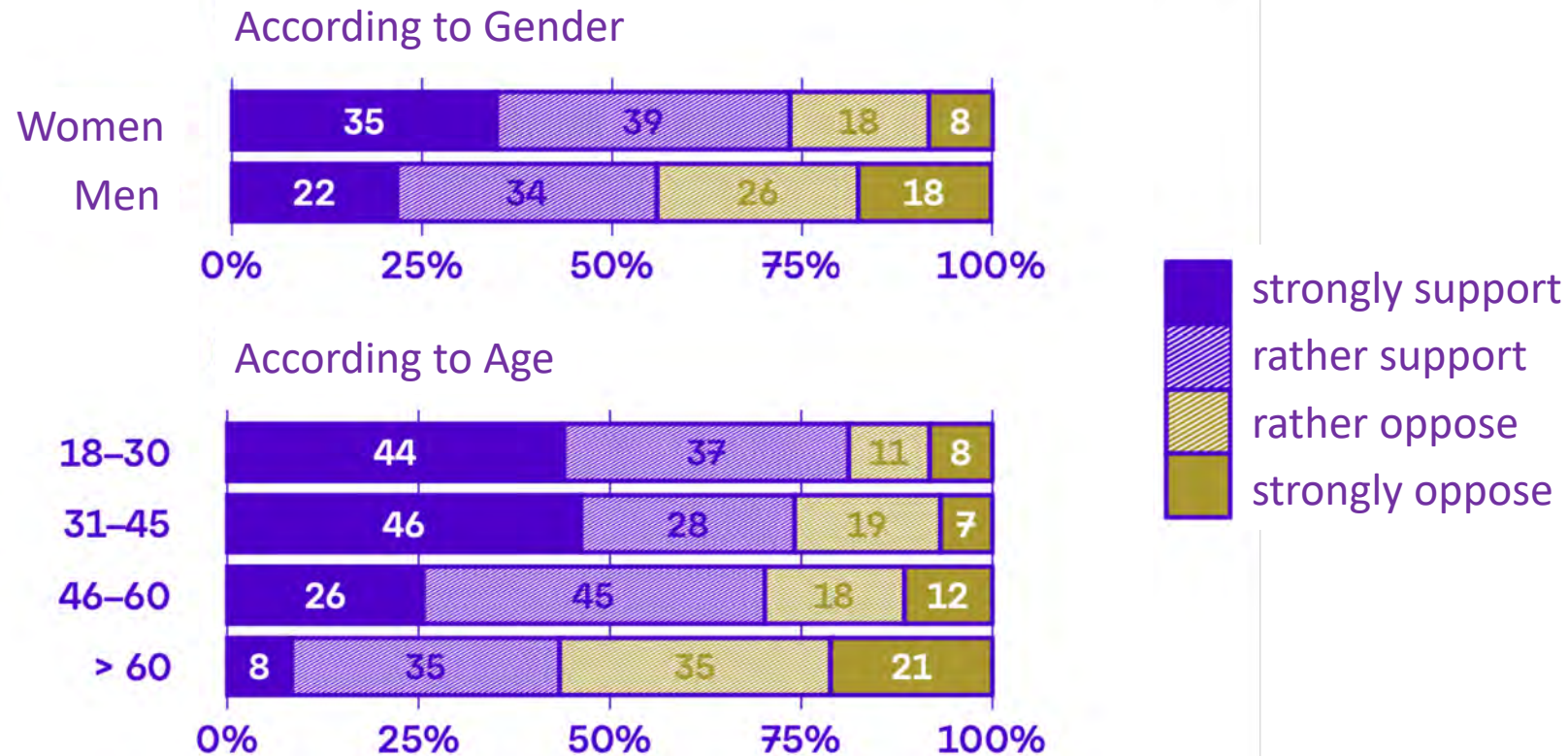
Beschäftigte verlangen zunehmend nach Teilpensen – vermehrt auch Männer mit Kindern. Was treibt sie an? Und schaden sie der Wirtschaft?

 **Simone Luchetta**
Publiziert: 18.03.2023, 22:01



The Swiss population welcomes the four-day week

Would you support or oppose a shortening of the working week to four days?



The data is based on a study on part-time work by the Think Tank #geschlechter-gerechter & the polling company Sotomo:
https://dev.geschlechtergerechter.ch/assets/debate/GG2023_DieTeilzeitStudie.pdf

Pitfall No. 1:

Prioritising paid employment
above unpaid care labour.

The dual demands for gender equality in the sphere of work

Equal access to
paid labour.



Equal division of
unpaid labour.

The dual demands for gender equality in the sphere of work



Equal division of
unpaid labour.

**Equal access to
paid labour.**

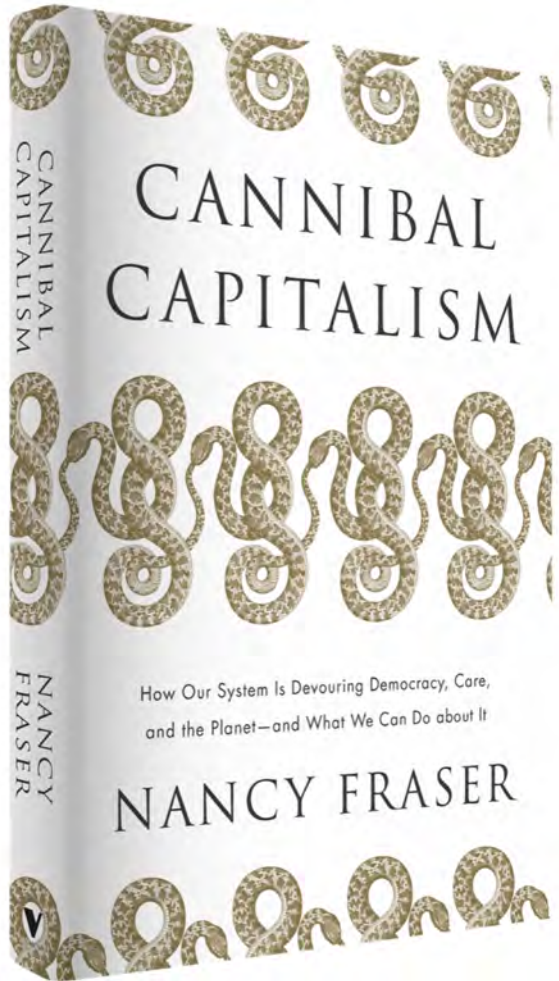
Has feminism become neoliberalism's handmaiden?

Nancy Fraser (2009: 110)

“Disturbing as this may sound, I am suggesting that second-wave feminism has unwittingly provided a key ingredient of the new spirit of neoliberalism. (...) The dream of women’s emancipation [by accessing paid labour was] harnessed to the engine of capitalist accumulation.” (p. 110)



The care crisis

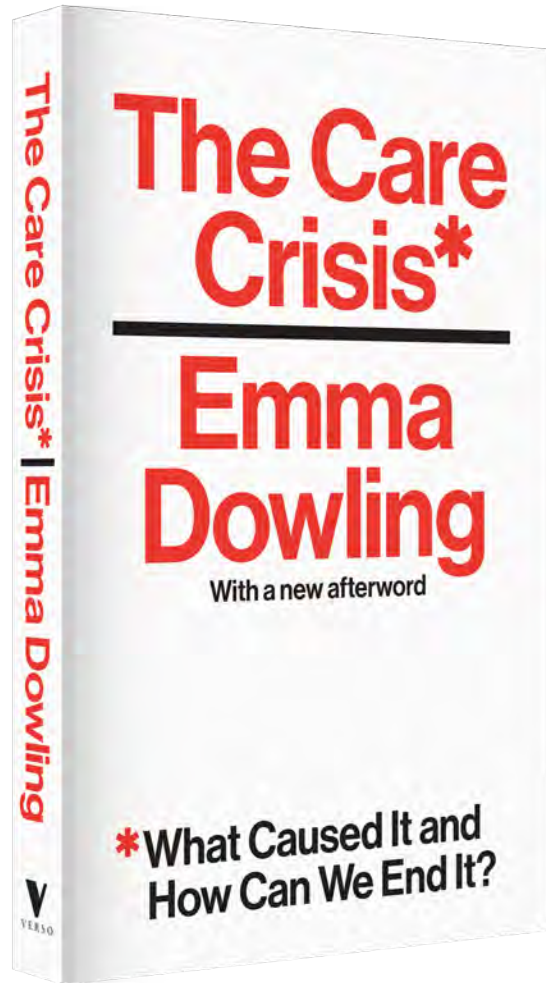


Nancy Fraser (2022: 53):

«no society, capitalist or otherwise, that systematically cannibalizes social reproduction can endure for long. Yet the present form of capitalism is doing just that: diverting the emotional and material resources that should be devoted to carework to other, inessential activities, which fatten corporate coffers ...

The result is a **major crisis ... of social reproduction** in the broadest sense.»

The care crisis



Emma Dowling (2021: 19):

«A **crisis of care** means that more and more people are unable to do these things or to get the help they need.

A **crisis of care** also means that those who provide care to others are unable to do so satisfactorily and under dignified conditions.»

The commodification of care



Ursula Huws (2019, 14):

«The **substitution of buying for doing** or making in the home is a process that is still ongoing, and if anything accelerating, in the present phase of capitalist development ... driven ... by the scarcity of time in households where all adults are increasingly likely to be exhausted from overwork in their paid jobs.»

The commodification of care

... as live-in care work



... as platform-based care work



Care agencies mediating live-in workers



McCare - gute Pflege muss nicht teuer sein

Care agencies mediating live in workers



GET 
CARE

Wir stehen Ihnen jederzeit
telefonisch zur Verfügung
061 511 23 33

Herzliche Pflege zu fairen Preisen

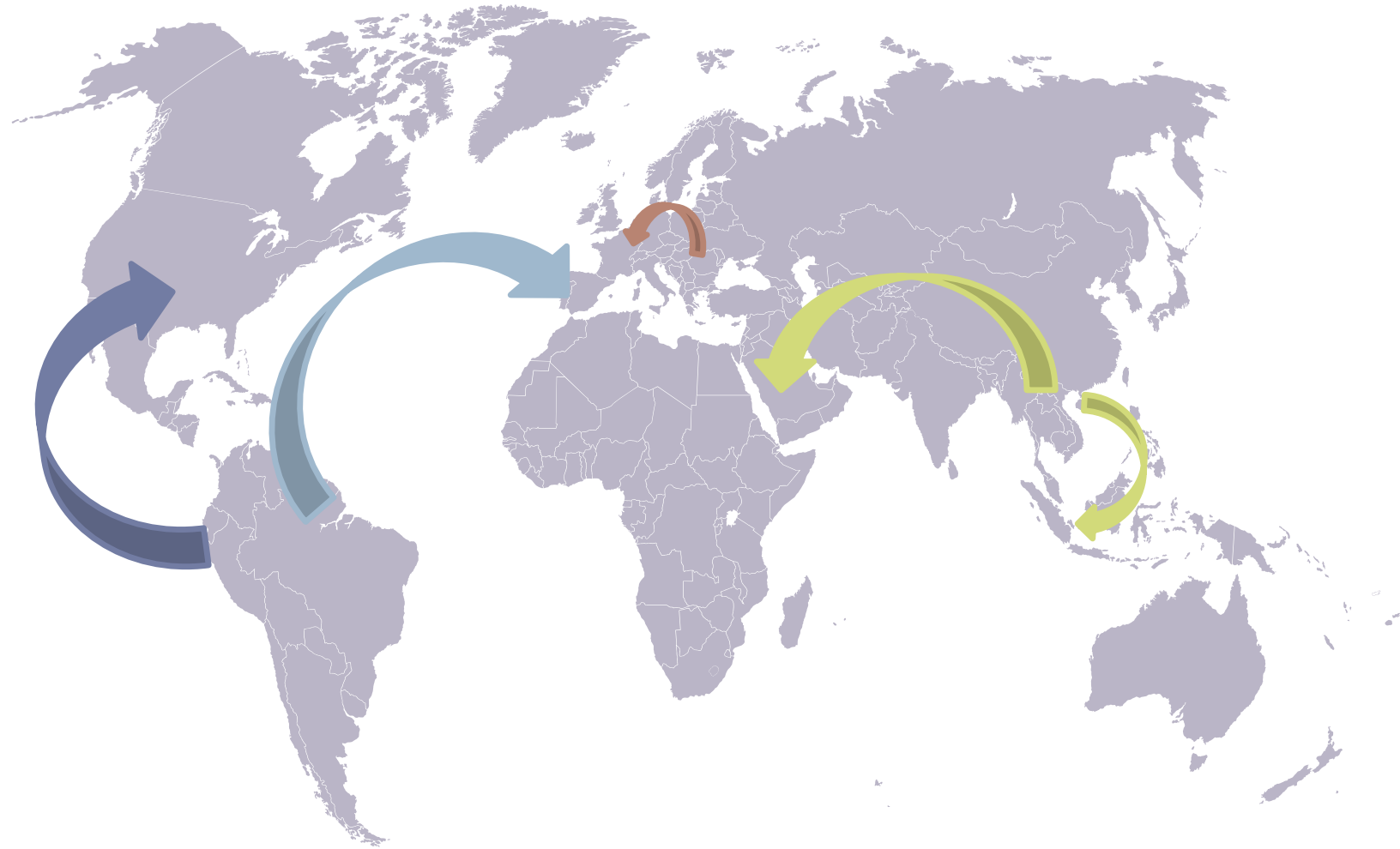
- Startseite
- Unser Angebot
- Unsere Leistungen
- Angebotsanfrage
- Ablauf
- Über uns
- Wissenswertes
- Kontakt

24-Stunden-Betreuung in der Schweiz: Betreuung mit Herz ab 1.990 Franken im Monat!

GETcare vermittelt zu fairen Preisen ausgebildetes Betreuungspersonal aus verschiedenen EU-Staaten an bedürftige Personen. Unsere 24-Stunden-Betreuung in der Schweiz kümmert sich mit Herz und Hingebung um jeden einzelnen Kunden! Die Betreuungsperson wohnt während ihrer Anstellung bei der zu betreuenden Person und kann sich somit zu jeder Zeit um alle Anliegen und anfallenden Arbeiten kümmern.

Pflege mit Herz

Global Care Chains



Working as a live-in care worker: Never off work

According to my contract, I had afternoons off, but I couldn't leave her alone from 1 to 5 p.m. I had to check whether she had enough to drink.

[When I had time off] I stayed in the house or went for a short walk. But I never went far so that nothing could happen.

I am always afraid that something happens, while I'm not in the house.

Platform-based care work

Anologous



Platform-based



The promise of labour platforms

Work wherever you want – whenever you want – and whatever you want



Working in platform-based care work: Never off work

I just keep trying [to get a job] and I get a little more addicted to my phone and the platform-app with each passing day.

When the app offers me a cleaning gig for this afternoon, I do not want to reject the offer. I am afraid that I will get fewer offers. I accept, even though I know that it will be a stressful day.

When the platform-app calls, I run.

Problematizing the commodification of care work



Julie MacLeavy (2020: 4)

“The purchase of low-wage labour as a substitute for the unpaid labour of wives and mothers maintains and strengthens systems of privilege (...)

creating new inequalities between women.”

Pitfall No. 2:

Blaming women
for outsourcing care.

The problem of understanding care as an individual responsibility

Julie MacLeavy (2020: 12)

“Neoliberal entrenchment over the past several decades has allowed little conceptual space to consider care as a public resource, instead allocating it to the private sphere to be carried out (either unpaid or poorly paid) by women.”



Alternative futures of care work: collectivising care

- ▶ **Ursula Huws** (2019: 22)

“socialising [care work] and creating good jobs in the public sector”



- ▶ **Emma Dowling** (2021: 105)

“Effective and inclusive care requires a collective social infrastructure (...) We must expand publicly funded childcare, mental healthcare, adult social care and eldercare through a progressive reform of the tax system.”

Alternative futures of care work: reducing working hours

- ▶ **Rutger Claassen (2011):**

We need to transform the **universal worker** to the **universal caregiver** model

- ▶ **Teresa Bücker (2022):**

We need to organise paid work so that it allows for balancing work, care and rest on all days of the week.



Alternative futures of care work: redirecting money flows

- ▶ **Nancy Fraser (2022):**

A worktime reduction could be funded by limiting company profits and **redirecting money flows from shareholder's coffers to the workforce** that actually produces the goods or provides the services.

- ▶ **Teresa Bücker (2022):**

Unlike time, money can be redistributed between people

... for example via progressive taxation, setting higher minimum income levels or introducing a universal basic income.



Alternative futures of care work: How to make them happen?

▶ Joan Tronto (2017):

Replacing the homo economicus by the **homo curans** – the caring human.



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