

# Equality on Whose Time?

## Women's Labour, Care, and the Cost Allocation of Relational Life: A View from the Reality Paradigm

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*Care removed from the state's budget does not leave the cost of living; it is written onto women's time.*

### Abstract

This article argues that discussing equality between women and men solely in terms of legal status, participation in paid work and equal treatment leaves out the life in which equality is to be realised. The problem is not women's participation in working life. The problem is that a worker model presumed to be free of care burdens, undisturbed by bodily interruption and permanently available is applied to all human beings as though it were a neutral norm. Where the mismatch between paid work and social reproduction is left unresolved, women are included in employment while the sphere of care left upon them remains unreorganised. Participation rises while the burden does not fall; two separate obligations converge upon the same body and the same time.

The article analyses this structure through four propositions: the allocation of public necessity to the private sphere; the gendered privatisation of the costs of social reproduction; the state's constitutive role in the distribution of these costs; and the operation of non-intervention as an instrument of allocation. Nurseries, kindergartens, pre-school education and care homes are examined within this framework — without denying their existence or their benefits — in terms of the conditions under which they cease to be free options and become compulsory institutions that preserve the continuity of working time. The same mechanism's removal of family, kinship, friendship and belonging from everyday life, and their compression into annual leave and the category of "holiday", is addressed through the concepts of relational reproduction, the condensation of needs into leave time, and relational buy-back. Remote work, in turn, is passed through the same apparatus as the strongest apparent counter-example to the thesis; through the concepts of the parallelisation assumption, the allocation of workplace costs to the household and reverse evacuation, it is argued that the allocation of costs does not change even when space is inverted — an invariance formulated as a testable hypothesis that the

constitutive variable is time, not space. The claim of this article is not to have discovered care labour; it is to bind the mechanisms shown piecemeal across the literatures of care, work and relational time into a single explanatory architecture under the sequence of preconditioning–classification–foreclosure–write-back–feedback.

Through the lens of the Reality Paradigm, the fundamental question is not the concepts with which the state declares equality, but the conditions under which it constructs, in advance, the space in which equality is to be lived — and to whom it allocates the costs of those conditions. The combined effect of working hours, leave, wage dependency, social security, care services, school hours, housing, transport and workplace performance norms is conceptualised here as temporal and reproductive infrastructure. The article shows that this infrastructure can constitute a reality circuit which first narrows women’s options and then writes the outcome it has produced back onto them as their nature or their free choice. It further discusses, through macroeconomic blindness and the vital return deficit, how aggregate indicators of production and consumption render invisible the costs of unpaid care, time poverty, and the failure of produced value to return to human life.

The first empirical ground of this text is the life its author has lived and, because of the organisation of work, has been unable to live. This situated testimony may be multiplied as readers recognise the same interruptions in their own lives; yet experiential recognition is not substituted for causal or comparative judgement. Türkiye, the United States and Europe are compared not on a single scale of development but as regimes that allocate the costs of care in differing measures to the family, the market or the public; a worked example of the analytical apparatus is presented on Turkish data. The constitutive question of the article is this: who pays for the life that produces the continuity of the state and of society?

**Keywords:** Reality Paradigm; social reproduction; cost allocation; women’s labour; care regimes; ideal worker norm; working time; remote work; right to relational time; relational autonomy; vital return deficit; evacuation symmetry

## 1. A beginning: What kind of life do I want?

As a human being, I want to see my mother and father beside me as they grow old; I want there to be time I can give them. When I grow old, I want my children to have time they are able to give me.

I want children, from the moment they are born until they reach school age, to be able to see their mothers and fathers not merely in the tired hours left over from work, but as an essential part of their lives. I do not want a working mother to be forced to hand over a substantial share of her income to a childminder or a nursery — as though she were paying the price of her own motherhood — in order to raise her child and keep working.

I do not want seeing my family, my relatives, my friends and the people I wish to have in my life to be nothing more than a “holiday” activity squeezed into annual leave. I do not want the relationships I build with them to be organised as a personal preference stolen from my time for rest, or as a travel opportunity I am obliged to purchase.

Nor do I want the only option before me, when I reach an age at which I can no longer work, to be a care home. I do not want to accept that my children’s inability to give me time stems not from a lack of love, but from a working order that has consumed their time in advance.

These words are not directed at confining women to the home, at loading a child's care solely onto its mother, or at abandoning the care of the old to the family. I do not want my children to be obliged to look after me; I want them to have a life in which they are able to choose to give me time. I do not want public care institutions abolished; I want these institutions to be a real option for people — not the compulsory discharge areas of the working order.

What, then, prevents me and those I love not from wanting these things, but from realising them? Is it the insufficiency of the love people bear one another; or an institutional reality that organises life not according to human relationships, but human relationships according to the requirements of work?

This article investigates the second possibility.

## **2. The problem is not women's work, but the organisation of life around work**

Women's participation in paid working life is not a matter of permission or favour. It is one of the principal instruments of economic independence, public visibility and participation in social distribution. Equal pay for equal work, equal status, equal access to occupations and protection against discrimination cannot be put up for debate.

It does not follow, however, that subjecting women to the same uninterrupted working hours, the same career line and the same expectation of permanent availability — all historically constructed for men — is in itself equality. Applying the same working norm to everyone while ignoring unequal burdens of life does not produce equality; it carries pre-existing inequality into working life itself.

The problem is not whether women can do the same jobs as men. The problem is whom the working order recognises as the “normal worker”. The ideal worker presumed by the present order is an abstract subject with no care burden; one who undergoes no bodily processes such as pregnancy and childbirth; who is never obliged to look after the sick or the old; whose career suffers no interruption; and who is permanently available when required. Abstract though this subject appears, it has historically been constructed upon the male life-line, in which care is undertaken by someone else.

This ideal worker is not merely a cultural expectation; it is an institutional criterion of recognition operating in hiring, performance, shifts, leave, pay, promotion and pension systems. To be recognised as a full and reliable subject in the world of paid work, a person may be compelled to behave as though they had no care burden. The working order thus does not neutrally measure the worker's existing life; it determines in advance which form of life will count as “employable”.

Today this norm has also become independent of place. The expectation of permanent availability has, with portable communication and the instruments of remote work, passed beyond the walls of the workplace; it can now reach into the worker's home, evening and day of leave. With the spread of remote work the ideal-worker assumption has also acquired a new form: the old norm excludes care — the worker is compelled to act as though no care burden existed; its remote version does not exclude care but deems it executable in parallel with work — as though care never interrupted work. This article will call this second assumption the parallelisation assumption and will address it in a separate section. For now let this much be recorded: neither assumption recognises care time; the second, in addition, erodes the quality of care.

When a woman fails to fit this measure, the mismatch produced by the working order is written back onto her as her preference, her inadequacy or her nature. The interruption of her career is explained by her being “less committed to work”; her part-time employment by her having “chosen the family”; her low pension income by her having “worked less”. Conditions are thus produced institutionally while outcomes are individualised.

The article’s objection is therefore not to equality, but to equality applied as sameness:

**Unequal distribution of care + a worker norm independent of care + formal sameness = real inequality.**

The mechanism behind this formula can be given in a single sentence: the ideal worker norm takes time from everyone; who compensates for the taken time within the household is determined by the gender order and the intra-household wage gap. Men, too, pay the norm’s general time tax; but under the present gendered distribution of care they remain, on average, very largely exempt from the burden of compensating for it within the household. Women pay both the general tax and the gendered surcharge. The two axes of this article — the time that work-centred life takes from everyone, and the compensation for that loss concentrated upon women — are bound together by this rule.

The modern working order does not equalise women with men; it compels women to conform to the care-free worker norm while they continue to carry the burden of care. Equality in the form of sameness may therefore be not emancipation, but the conjunction of two separate obligations upon a single life.

### 3. Who is the guide of this text?

The guide of this text is not the academy. I do not construct its conceptual route by inserting examples into a ready-made feminist theory. I, Hakki Tan, pose the question from lived reality. I summon the academic literature into the text not to substitute for that question, but to test it, to show its neighbourhoods, to sharpen its distinctions, and to strengthen the ground of empirical research.

#### 3.1. The empirical ground: What I have lived and what I have been unable to live

The first empirical basis of this article is myself. That basis consists not only of what I have lived, but of what the organisation of work has prevented me from living.

I am not describing here a social category observed from the outside. I am describing the time I want to give my mother and father; the relationship I want to build with my children and those close to me; the needs that will not fit into a day of leave; and the possibilities that work has withdrawn from my life. The life that carries this cost is not an anecdote external to the research; it is where the research begins.

The phrase “what I have been unable to live” does not mean that absence counts as evidence in itself. One must show by which working hours, income compulsion, leave limit, travel distance, care burden or institutional regulation the unlive life has been closed off. Yet a system of measurement that records only realised activities cannot exclude from the cost of life the missed visit, the neighbourhood never formed, the child never seen, the intimacy deferred. The unrealised relationship becomes, once its causal connection is shown, a negative life-trace produced by the organisation of work.

When a reader recognises their own life in this text and says “the empirical basis is me”, personal testimony is multiplied. The mother who spends a substantial share of her income to leave her child at a nursery, the worker torn during annual leave between resting and seeing their family, the person unable to give time to an ageing relative, may realise that what they live is not an isolated case. Such recognition shows the text’s social resonance and its experiential accuracy.

But recognition and verification are not the same thing. A reader’s saying “this is my life” does not of itself prove all the text’s causal explanations, or its judgements about every society. Equally, the person who does not find themselves in this narrative — whose freedom has been widened by a public nursery, or who says institutional care has strengthened their relationships — cannot be placed outside the theory. If the reader’s objection is dismissed in advance as their having “internalised the system”, the text becomes a closed circuit of approval.

The levels of claim must therefore be separated:

| Level of claim          | Principal ground                              | What it can show                                         | What it cannot show alone                                          |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Experiential existence  | The author’s testimony                        | That the phenomenon is lived, and how it feels           | Its prevalence in society                                          |
| Intersubjective pattern | Testimonies of readers and participants       | That the experience recurs in others                     | Its rate of representation and all its causes                      |
| Structural mechanism    | Law, budgets, institutions, the working order | Through which channels the cost is allocated             | That every outcome springs from a single cause                     |
| Comparative judgement   | Data across countries and regimes             | Different forms of allocation and their relative weights | The meaning of the experience and the whole of the relational loss |

I initiate the testimony; readers may multiply it; the counter-case shows its limit; comparison determines the scope of the judgement. That the guide is not the academy confers no right to confound these levels of claim. Academic form may be a preference; logical consistency is not.

This discipline must be applied to the author as well. My testimony anchors, first of all, the loss of relational time: the parents who cannot be seen, the intimacy compressed into holidays, the life that will not fit into a day of leave. I am not the experiential bearer of the claims concerning the allocation of care costs to women; those claims are grounded in this text at the levels of structural mechanism and comparative data, their experiential layer left open to the testimony of women readers and of future field research. The rule established in the second section — the distinction between the general time tax and the gendered surcharge — also determines which claim each of these two evidential anchors carries.

For the Reality Paradigm, the primary question is not which judgement about women and men is true. The primary question is this: within which pre-constructed conditions do women and men live, work, give care and make decisions? Before the law declares equality, how have the time, the cost and the responsibility of life been distributed? Does the declared equality change this distribution — or settle upon it?

This approach does not treat legal equality as unimportant. But it separates what the law says from how life works. A right may be recognised; yet the time, the income, the care infrastructure and the capacity to object required to use it may be absent. In such a case the right exists, but the life in which the right could be realised does not.

The article does not claim that all women live the same life, that all men stand outside care, or that all states construct the same regime. The object of analysis is not the intentions of individuals but the distribution of costs formed by the combined effect of different institutions. Moreover, bodily processes such as pregnancy, birth, post-partum recovery and breastfeeding are distinguished from the social assignment of the care of children, the sick and the old to women. Bodily difference does not prove that social responsibility naturally belongs to women.

An order cannot first construct the conditions of life unequally and then count the outcome those conditions produce as women's nature.

### 3.2. The Reality Paradigm: The conditions under which equality can be lived

The Reality Paradigm is not used in this article as a theory of truth investigating which judgement about women and men is correct. The primary question is under which pre-constructed conditions women and men encounter work, care, family and equality. The law may pronounce "equal"; but if the time, income, care, space and possibility of objection in which a person could live that equality do not exist, a correct legal statement does not become a material life.

Reality cannot therefore be accepted as a neutral ground standing prior to power. The state, the market and the working order do not merely evaluate realised behaviour; they also construct the space of options within which behaviour will be realised. Working hours, annual leave, wage dependency, social security, care services, school hours, housing, transport and the workplace's performance expectations combine to shape in advance how a person can move between care and work, intimacy and income, relationship and future security.

In this article, temporal and reproductive infrastructure is used to mean the combined structure of legal, economic, institutional, spatial and temporal conditions that pre-arranges the encounter between paid work and the reproduction of life. This structure need not have been designed completely by a single centre. The decisions, omissions, calendars and budgets of different institutions may combine to produce a compelling result. What is decisive is not the declared intent of individual actors, but which lives the resulting space of options makes possible or impossible, and for whom.

The Reality Paradigm requires a five-stage analysis in this domain:

1. **Preconditioning:** Before the person decides, how have the conditions of work, income, leave, care and space been arranged?
2. **Recognition and classification:** Who counts as the "normal worker", who as the "carer", who as "costly", who as "less committed to work"?
3. **Foreclosure of options:** Which options of income, career, care, intimacy or future does this classification actually close off?
4. **Write-back of the outcome:** By which routes is the loss produced by institutional conditions explained as the person's nature, preference, inadequacy or poor planning?
5. **Reality circuit:** How does this explanation feed back into decisions on hiring, promotion, budgets, leave and services, reproducing the initial order?

This analysis does not define the woman who gives care as a passive or will-less victim. Women work, bargain, build solidarity, produce care options and act within the narrow space opened to them. But agency exercised within a narrowed space does not prove the space to be free. The concept Homovictimus is used in this article

not as the identity of all women, but to name the position of a subject held responsible at once for work performance, for a child's care, for the continuity of the family and for her own economic losses, while being deprived of the time and infrastructure with which to discharge those responsibilities; we shall return to this position where the write-back circuit is analysed.

Nor should the Reality Paradigm be conflated with the Onopticon. This article does not declare the whole of the care regime or of working life an Onopticon. That designation may be used only in concrete cases where a person is placed into a compulsory technical-administrative order of recognition and classification; where that order closes options across more than one domain of life; where the outcomes produced are fed back into the circuit of decisions; and where effective objection or reversal is weak. Where these conditions are not shown, the Reality Paradigm retains its validity as the broader analytical lens; the label Onopticon is not used. The monitoring software of remote work is the first concrete candidate for this threshold identified in this article, and will be taken up in the relevant section.

This distinction does not diminish the article's claim. On the contrary, it turns the paradigm from a name given to everything into a testable method.

The conceptual order the reader will follow in this text has three layers:

| Layer                                       | Concepts                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Constitutive framework                      | The Reality Paradigm; temporal and reproductive infrastructure                                                                                      |
| Core mechanism                              | Cost allocation; recognition and classification; foreclosure of options; write-back; feedback                                                       |
| Sub-patterns and instruments of measurement | The evacuation symmetry; the relational compensation economy; the parallelisation assumption; the vital return deficit; the depletion balance sheet |

Homovictimus names the subject-position these layers produce; the Onopticon is a separate regime definition, usable only when the high evidential threshold noted above is met.

## 4. The state and the economy do not reproduce themselves

The modern economy, working life and the state present themselves as independent and self-sufficient structures. Yet no workforce, institution or state can sustain its existence through paid production alone. The working person must be fed, rested, and cared for when ill; children must be born, raised, educated and prepared for social relations; the lives of the old and of those in need of care must be sustained.

These are not subsidiary activities lying outside production. They are the preconditions of production, of social relation and of intergenerational continuity.

Social reproduction does not denote biological birth alone. It encompasses the daily sustaining of human life, its renewal across generations and the re-establishment of social relation. Preparing food, cleaning, raising children, caring for the sick or the old, organising daily life and keeping people fit for work are parts of this domain.

Society is reproduced, at the same time, through relationship. Family, kinship, friendship, neighbourliness, intergenerational memory and belonging do not persist of their own accord; they require time for encounter, visiting, conversation, being together and mutual support. In this article, relational reproduction is used for the

whole of those activities that enable people to sustain over time the relationships they find meaningful. Where care keeps a human being alive, relational reproduction keeps people knowing, remembering and supporting one another.

A normative limit must be stated plainly here: care and reproductive activities are not valuable because they serve the continuity of the state. Human life comes before the state. A child cannot be counted valuable for being a future worker, soldier or taxpayer. The state's responsibility towards social reproduction arises not from any right it holds over women's bodies or over children, but from the fact that its own institutions also depend upon this order of care. Dependence confers on the state not a right of ownership, but a responsibility.

The division of labour between these two sentences must also be made explicit. The state's responsibility for care has two distinct grounds: the value of human life, which precedes the state; and the dependence of the state's own institutions upon the order of care. The first ground covers lives from which the state expects no functional contribution at all; it detaches responsibility from productivity. The second explains the language of this article's constitutive question: "who pays for the life that produces the continuity of the state and of society?" is not a functionalist concession but an immanent critique — it shows that even an order which values care solely by its function stands indebted on its own measure. Throughout the article the question is used in that register.

## **5. The allocation of public necessity to the private sphere**

"Domestic" is, first of all, a spatial term. That an activity is performed at home does not show that its consequences are confined to the home. The care of a child at home, the watching-over of a sick person by their family, the meeting of a worker's daily needs within the household do not produce consequences that concern that household alone. Their consequences are carried into the education system, the health system, the labour market, the social security system and the continuity of the state.

The place of an activity may be private; its function and its consequence may be public.

The "private sphere" is therefore not a natural boundary existing of itself. It is a political, legal, fiscal and administrative classification that determines which activity counts as public responsibility and which as familial obligation. The state does not regulate the public sphere alone; it also sets the boundaries of the sphere it deems private. What it declines to provide as a service, what it leaves outside the scope of social rights, and which activity it deems a matter to be resolved within the family, effectively produce the extent of the private sphere.

Here and throughout the article, "the state" is used not in the sense of a single-willed, monolithic agent, but of the combined institutional outcome of decisions on budgets, labour law, social security, care services, school calendars and local services. Attribution of intent and structural outcome are thereby kept distinct; the distinction is developed in the seventh section.

The allocation of public necessity to the private sphere is the leaving of the responsibility for performing an activity necessary to society's continuity — and of its cost — to the family, even while its public consequences are acknowledged.

For the Reality Paradigm, this allocation is an arrangement of the field that operates before any realised decision about care. By the time a person faces the question “who will undertake the care?”, the public budget, service capacity, working hours and social rights have already opened or closed part of the options. The decision later recorded as a family preference may have been taken within a space of options restricted in advance.

The allocation proceeds in three stages:

1. **Spatialisation:** The activity necessary to society’s continuity is deemed private on the ground that it takes place at home.
2. **Familialisation:** A need that could be met publicly is converted into a responsibility the family must resolve within itself.
3. **Feminisation:** The responsibility left to the family is recorded, through the unequal division of labour within the household, as woman’s natural, moral or emotional duty.

Public necessity is thus first privatised through space, then devolved upon the family, and finally naturalised through womanhood.

The feminisation stage is not a natural tendency; it is a circuit in its own right. The gendered wage gap produces an apparently neutral calculation in the choice of who will withdraw from work within the household: the withdrawal of the lower earner — most often the woman — appears “rational” for the household budget. Withdrawal enlarges the gap in seniority and pay; the enlarged gap produces the same outcome at the next care decision. This miniature of the reality circuit at household scale shows why the explanation from “choice” falls short: even the intra-household decision is taken within a price structure constructed in advance.

The same allocation operates in relational reproduction. The support that families, relatives, friends and neighbours provide one another meets, outside public institutions, part of the costs of loneliness, care, crisis and everyday solidarity. Society and the state benefit from the results of these relational networks; but the time for visiting, intimacy and being together needed to keep the networks alive is classed as “personal life” or “holiday” and left to the individual’s budget of leave and income.

The concept cannot, however, be stretched to make every domestic activity a public necessity. For an activity to fall within its scope, at least four conditions must be sought:

1. Its sustained withdrawal must create a serious interruption in human life or in the functioning of society.
2. Were it left unperformed, the state, the market or another institution would have to undertake it for payment.
3. Its result must benefit not only the person performing it but a wider social circle.
4. There must be a marked divergence between the bearer of its cost and the beneficiaries of the social benefit it produces.

These four conditions are fully met in the case of care. In relational reproduction the second condition must be adapted: intimacy is not a service that can be substituted from the market; but its absence produces public costs — as loneliness, as burdens on health, as demand upon social services. Care is therefore the strong case of this concept, and relational continuity an extension of it with an adapted criterion. This gradation preserves the concept’s limit.

The limit prevents the concept from encompassing every personal preference or domestic behaviour. What is at issue is not the nationalisation of domestic life; it is the state's and society's meeting the cost of the activities on which they depend from the invisible resources of private life.

## 6. The gendered privatisation of the costs of social reproduction

“Privatisation” here does not mean only the transfer of a public service to a private company. In its more fundamental sense, privatisation is the removal of the cost of an activity necessary to the whole of society from the common budget, and its transfer to the household or to single individuals.

When a public nursery provides a child's care, the activity is recorded as budget expenditure, staff costs and public service. When the same care is performed at home by the mother or another member of the family, the activity largely disappears from economic records and is renamed a family responsibility. Neither the activity nor the social need has changed; what has changed is whose account the cost is written to.

When the cost is left inside the household it is not distributed equally. Owing to the existing gender order, the time, the bodily burden and the economic loss of care are concentrated predominantly upon women. “Gendering” does not assert that every woman gives care in the same measure, or that no man gives care. It denotes the systematic concentration of the cost upon women by institutional assumptions and by the actual distribution. The rule established in the second section operates here: the general time tax is taken from everyone; the distribution of its compensation within the household is gendered.

The costs of social and relational reproduction appear in at least seven forms:

1. **Temporal cost:** loss of rest, education, social participation and personal time.
2. **Bodily cost:** pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding, sleeplessness, care fatigue and the wearing-down of health.
3. **Direct monetary cost:** nursery, childminder, home care, transport, accommodation and the other private expenditures made to sustain a relationship.
4. **Income cost:** reduction of paid working hours, or temporary or permanent withdrawal from working life.
5. **Occupational cost:** loss of promotion, breaks in seniority, movement into more precarious jobs and the disruption of career continuity.
6. **Social security cost:** fewer contribution days, lower pension income and weakened access to social rights.
7. **Political and relational cost:** the narrowing of participation in public life, of organising capacity and of the person's say over their own life.

While these costs concentrate in women's lives, the benefit produced spreads to the family, the employer, the market, society and the state. The worker can return to work the next day; the employer profits from reproduced labour power; the state saves on public care expenditure; the social security and tax systems await the contribution of new generations; society uses the results of care and of generational continuity.

The fundamental asymmetry is this:

**Benefit is diffused; cost is concentrated. The outcome is socialised; the price is individualised — and gendered.**

The transfer of care labour by higher-income women to low-paid, migrant or precarious women does not remove this cost. It merely passes the cost downwards along the class and global hierarchy among women. The concentration is in this sense itself graduated: allocation is chained not only along the axis of gender, but among women along the axes of class and migration. The marketisation of care is therefore not always its socialisation; at times it is a new layer of gendered privatisation.

## 7. The state is not outside social reproduction

The state's position towards social reproduction is usually imagined at two poles: either it intervenes by undertaking care services, or it stays out of family life by not intervening. The dichotomy is misleading. Even when the state provides no service at all, the need for care does not disappear. The need is transferred to the household; and where it is not shared equally within the household, it devolves upon women.

The absence of public services is not the absence of costs. It merely prevents the cost from appearing in the public budget.

The state allocates the costs of social reproduction through the following institutional fields:

| Institutional field                  | Mechanism of allocation                                                       | Probable outcome                                                                |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Labour law                           | The norm of the uninterrupted, permanently available worker                   | Care time counted as a performance deficit                                      |
| Social security                      | Rights tied to continuous paid employment                                     | Care periods converted into pension losses                                      |
| Public budget                        | Underfunding of nursery, sickness and old-age care                            | The need met by unpaid family and female labour                                 |
| Maternity and care leave system      | Costs of birth and care left to the woman or the single employer              | Discrimination in hiring, pay and promotion                                     |
| Tax system                           | Care labour unrecognised as economic contribution                             | The persistence of economic dependence and invisibility                         |
| Statistical system                   | Unpaid care excluded from production                                          | Labour and loss invisible in decision-making                                    |
| Enforcement system                   | The burden of proving discrimination left to the individual                   | Public protection unusable in practice                                          |
| Education and service hours          | Mismatch of school, nursery and working hours                                 | The burden of time coordination transferred to the household                    |
| Housing and urban policy             | Arrangements hindering generations from living together or near one another   | The spatial fragmentation of child and elder care                               |
| Annual leave and working-time regime | Family, intimacy and care time compressed into general annual leave           | Rest and relational needs colliding within the same narrow interval             |
| Transport and settlement patterns    | The spatial separation of close relations through work, housing and migration | Relational continuity made dependent on travel expenditure and private planning |
| Remote work regulation               | Rules on costs, boundaries and monitoring left indeterminate                  | Workplace costs and boundary management devolved upon the household             |

The form of these instruments varies from country to country. The state is not a uniform, unchanging, single-willed subject. The proposition that “the state is a constitutive actor” does not assert that all state officials plan inequality with a common purpose. Constitutiveness means that the combined effect of different decisions in law, budgets, services, data and enforcement directs the cost towards particular social groups.

The state may not be the sole source of the inequality. Tradition, religion, family structure, the market and gender norms also join in this distribution. But by determining which distribution will be legally recognised, which cost will be taken into the public budget and which loss will generate a social right, the state renders the inequality durable, calculable and reproducible across generations.

The state is therefore not a neutral referee standing outside social reproduction. It is one of the constitutive actors that diffuses the benefit among public and private actors while allocating the cost to women.

## 8. Non-intervention is an instrument of allocation

The state’s abstention is usually read as neutrality. Yet where a compulsory need exists, non-intervention creates no vacuum; it leaves the existing social distribution in force. Because the need for care persists, someone must fill the space from which the public has withdrawn.

The Reality Paradigm reads non-intervention here not as the absence of a decision, but as the leaving-open of the pre-decision field with a particular distribution. Even without directly refusing a demand for care, the state may narrow in advance the options a person will face — by not establishing the service, by not recognising the time as a social right, by not compensating the loss of income. The closed door does not always appear as an explicit prohibition; at times it operates as the service never established, the time never recognised, the cost that cannot be met.

The distributional chain of non-intervention runs:

Public service deficit → transfer of the need to the household → unequal division of labour within the household → concentration of the cost upon women → recording of the resulting loss as personal preference

In relational time a second, parallel chain may form:

Narrowing of everyday relational time → transfer of the need to annual leave → recovery of intimacy through travel and expenditure → loss of rest → fatigue classed as an individual planning problem

Not every state inadequacy, however, can be counted a deliberate act of allocation. To assert that non-intervention is an institutional instrument of power, the following conditions must be shown:

1. that the social need is known to, or measured by, the state;
2. that the state possesses legal authority and institutional instruments in the relevant field;
3. that it is foreseeable to whom the cost will pass if there is no intervention;
4. that feasible public alternatives exist;
5. that the existing order is maintained although the unequal outcomes recur.

Where these conditions are met, non-intervention ceases to be simple neglect; it becomes an institutional choice with distributional consequences.

It may be said that granting women differentiated working time on account of pregnancy, birth or the care burden they actually carry could invite employer discrimination. But the employer's possible discrimination cannot serve as a ground for abandoning the protection of women. That possibility raises the question of why the state exists.

The state's task is not merely to declare equality. It is to prevent recognised protection from turning into losses of pay, seniority, promotion, pension and job security; to socialise the cost through the public budget and the social security system rather than leaving it upon the single woman or the single employer; and to police discrimination effectively and attach sanctions to it.

To ask a woman to renounce her right because an employer might find her more costly is to make her pay the price of a probable violation before the violation has occurred. If the state does not prevent this conduct it is not ineffective; by choosing to privatise the cost, it becomes one of the constitutive actors of the inequality.

## 9. Nursery, kindergarten and pre-school education: The child's need, or working time's need?

Nurseries, kindergartens and pre-school institutions can contribute to children's development; in particular circumstances they may be necessary for the child. This article does not deny their pedagogical value or the importance of public care. What is questioned is why these institutions have become mass phenomena, and in practice unavoidable for so many families.

The constitutive trigger of their spread is not only the child's need for care or education. One of the fundamental structural triggers is that the time parents would need for care has been allocated in advance by the organisation of work.

A child is not sent to nursery only to be educated or to build relationships with peers. The child is sent also because its mother and father cannot be beside it during working hours. The time that the working order takes from adults can thus be redescribed as the child's need for institutional care. The absence of time that the system produces is recorded as though it were solely the child's pedagogical requirement.

A working mother does not demand that the person labouring over her child's care, or a good nursery, go unpaid. Care labour cannot, of course, be left uncompensated. The problem is why the cost of an activity on which society and the state also depend must be met out of the mother's individual income.

The woman is summoned, on the one hand, to join working life; on the other, the price of the care that must be performed for her to work is left to her. She thus pays a private entrance fee in order actually to use her right to work. While the state benefits from her paid labour, from her tax contribution and from the child's future participation in society, it loads the cost of reconciling the two domains onto her salary.

Two distinct institutional functions of the nursery must be separated:

**The care institution that widens freedom** offers the child qualified care and education while also protecting the time in which mother and father can build a relationship with the child. The institution multiplies options.

**The care institution that evacuates the relationship** removes the child from the adult's life in conformity with working hours, because those hours remain unchanged. The institution becomes compulsory because no other option is left. The general definition of this operation — relational evacuation — is given in the following section.

The freedom-widening function is no abstract possibility, and it must be recorded with the same vividness as this article's language of evacuation: it is widely accepted that good-quality, accessible pre-school education can, in suitable conditions, support children's development, and that it is one of the practical preconditions of women's employment (OECD, 2023); for the woman who can complete her education thanks to a free nursery, return to her occupation, or gain the economic independence with which to leave an oppressive relationship, the institution is freedom itself. This article's critique is directed not at these gains, but at the order that converts the gain into a compulsion.

Beneath the distinction lie three separate kinds of time. Care time can be institutionally substituted: the nursery can undertake care. Relational time cannot be substituted: the nursery can undertake the care, but it cannot undertake the child's relationship with its mother and father. Renewal time, finally, is the person's own rest. The institution that widens freedom takes over care time and protects relational time; the institution that evacuates the relationship absorbs both. Which function the institution will perform is determined not by the institution itself, but by the regime of working time that surrounds it.

The problem is not the nursery's existence, but the working order's making the nursery the precondition of the family relationship and the private cost of the parent's ability to work.

## **10. The care home: Old age's need, or the institutional withdrawal of time?**

Old age can create particular needs of care, health and safety. Some people may freely choose to live in a care home or in professional care institutions; some care needs do require specialised institutional service. These facts cannot be denied. The liberating functions of institutional care must be recorded with equal clarity: round-the-clock expert attention, protection from neglect or violence within the family, and the recovery of their own lives by household members — most often women — crushed under the burden of care are real and unignorable achievements of professional care.

But the existence of old people does not explain their compulsory separation from their families and their everyday relational circles. What turns the care home into the only feasible option for many is the consumption of their children's and relatives' time by working life; housing and income conditions that make living together or near one another difficult; and the state's failure to organise adequate home-care and day-care provision.

In this situation the state, instead of restoring to people time for care and relationship, moves the person in need of care to another institution. By placing the child in the nursery and the old person in the care home, it preserves the continuity of working time. The problem of care is not resolved; the place of care is changed. Human relationships that collide with the working order can, under particular conditions of work and options, be evacuated into institutional spaces; those conditions are enumerated below.

This operation may be called relational evacuation: the transfer of a person in need of care or of relationship out of the working adult's everyday life into an institutional space, for the purpose of preserving the continuity of working time.

Relational evacuation does not explain every nursery or care-home placement. The concept may be used only under these conditions:

1. where institutional care is not the person's or the family's real preference but the only feasible option;

2. where the principal obstacle to living together or near one another is not unwillingness of relationship, but working time, income, housing or service inadequacy;
3. where the state provides institutional places while failing to offer home care, day care, income security or care-time options;
4. where the placement operates in conformity with the continuity of the working order rather than with the benefit of the person cared for.

The question to be asked is therefore not whether the nursery or the care home is useful. The real question is this: Are the child and the old person there because they truly want no other life than these institutions — or because the time of the people who want to live with them no longer belongs to those people?

## 11. Family, kinship and chosen intimacy: The compression of relationship into “holiday”

Visiting family and relatives is not — so long as the person wishes to sustain these relationships — an amusement lying outside life. Seeing one another, talking, eating together, being present in illness and in joy: these are the activities of relational reproduction that sustain family, kinship, friendship and belonging.

Yet the work-centred regime of time does not recognise this need as a distinct and continuous human need. Labour law and workplace order distinguish, for the most part, not relational time but working time and general annual leave. The time used to see one’s family, one’s relatives or a loved one living far away is likewise filed under “holiday”, “free time” or “personal preference”.

The relationship that ought to continue within everyday life is thereby transformed in three stages:

1. **Removal from everyday life:** long working and commuting hours, spatial separation and relocation for work make regular encounter difficult.
2. **Compression into leave time:** the accumulated relational need is deferred to the weekend or to annual leave.
3. **Reclassification as holiday:** visiting, care, belonging and the repair of relationships are rendered invisible under the single category of “rest”.

Family and intimate relation can be taken out of everyday human continuity and branded “holiday” under the make-up of rest.

This proposition does not assert that every family visit is exhausting, that no visit can be restful, or that everyone is obliged to maintain relations with their biological family. The family can be a site of pressure, exclusion or violence. A person’s friends, neighbours or other chosen relationships may be more meaningful than biological kinship. What is defended is not family duty, but the person’s having a say over the time in which they can sustain the relationships they find meaningful.

### 11.1. The condensation of needs into leave time

Annual leave is forced to meet quite different needs at once:

- reducing accumulated bodily and mental fatigue;

- spending uninterrupted time with children;
- visiting mother, father, relatives and close friends;
- discharging obligations of illness, care or family;
- completing deferred tasks of health, household and daily life;
- repairing friendships and the relationship with one's partner;
- travelling, enjoying oneself, or resting by doing nothing at all.

No single limited stretch of time can meet all these needs in full. In this article, the condensation of needs into leave time is defined as the piling-up, within the same narrow period of leave, of the needs for rest, care, visiting, relationship and personal renewal that the working order has excluded from everyday life. The three kinds of time distinguished in the ninth section compete here for the same narrow interval: renewal, care and relationship become one another's rivals within a single leave.

The remark "I came back from holiday more tired than I left" is thus not merely the confession of poor planning. It may be the consequence of trying to fit accumulated debts of life into a single period of leave. Yet the resulting fatigue is explained not by the extent of working time, but by the person's failure to manage their holiday. A scarcity of time produced institutionally is, once again, written back onto the individual as a fault of planning.

## 11.2. Relational buy-back

The removal of relational continuity from everyday life makes it dependent on material instruments. To see a loved one who lives far away requires transport, fuel, accommodation, days of leave, alignment with the school calendar and physical stamina. The person attempts to buy back temporarily, by spending part of the wage they have earned, the intimacy that the regime of work and settlement has taken from them.

Relational buy-back is the temporary re-establishment, through leave time and monetary expenditure, of the intimacy lost through the organisation of work and space.

The mechanism is kin to the structure seen in nursery fees. The working mother pays the childminder or the nursery the price of the care she cannot perform because of the time given to paid work. The worker living far from their family buys back the lost intimacy at the cost of transport and leave. In both cases the person first gives time to the productive order, and then tries to close, with their own income and remaining time, the gap that order has opened in their life.

Remote work modifies this mechanism in part: it loosens the compulsion of distance for some jobs, and may allow a person to live nearer to those they love. But the possibility is class-selective — it concentrates in knowledge work and never reaches the work of care itself. Nor is the release of relational time guaranteed where distance is loosened; that problem is taken up separately in the following section.

This does not mean that every transport or tourism service is exploitation. Transport can afford a real possibility of intimacy; a family visit can also be a restful holiday. The problem is relational continuity becoming something that can be established only by purchasing travel and consuming the right to rest.

The condensation of needs into leave time and relational buy-back are, more than two separate mechanisms, the two faces of a single superstructure: the relational compensation economy. The term names the attempt to compensate, in a secondary arena and at the price of leave time and income, for the relationship that the working order has expelled from everyday life. Condensation shows the temporal side of the compensation, buy-back its monetary side; only measured together do they reveal the true cost of the compensation.

### 11.3. The replacement of the neighbourhood by programmed socialisation

The compression of relationship into holiday is not only the adults' problem; the child's everyday field of socialisation passes through the same operation. The child's need to build relationships with peers is real. But that need does not prove that socialisation must take place in an institution segregated by age, programmed, and adapted to working hours. A safe and living neighbourhood can offer the child a socialisation that is free of charge, spontaneous, continuous, and one that brings different ages together.

Nor is the neighbourhood spontaneously free and safe. It can produce violence, exclusion, gendered pressure or the exclusion of disabled children. The neighbourhood should therefore be thought of not as a nostalgic ideal but as social infrastructure: safe, walkable, requiring no commercial payment, bringing different ages together, and allowing children to be present in everyday life.

The real distinction is not whether the pedagogical need is genuine, but whether that need has been rendered such that it can be met only in institutional form. Having narrowed the neighbourhood, the safe street and parental time, the system can then present institutional socialisation as the only valid solution.

## 12. Remote work: The return of time, or the relocation of the workplace into the home?

The strongest apparent objection that can be raised against this article's thesis is remote work. Work can now come home: the spatial separation of workplace and home has, for some jobs, been lifted; commuting time has been refunded; it has become physically possible for a worker to see their child in the middle of the day. This picture may seem to invalidate the article's analyses built upon spatial separation, commuting time and relational buy-back. This section takes up the objection not with an imported debate on flexibility, but with the article's own apparatus. The conclusion can be stated in advance: remote work inverts the variable of space, but does not disturb the allocation of costs. That the allocation does not change when space is inverted generates a testable hypothesis that the constitutive variable is time rather than space; this section constructs the conceptual case for that hypothesis, and its testing is bound to the criteria of the eighteenth section.

### 12.1. The five-stage analysis

When the Reality Paradigm's five stages are applied to remote work, the apparent refund lays bare the allocation beneath it.

**Preconditioning.** Who can work remotely is distributed, before any personal preference, by sector, education and class; the possibility concentrates in knowledge work. A room in which one can work, an uninterrupted connection and quiet are preconditions, and they are unequal across households. Most importantly: the work of

care is itself bound to place. The person who looks after the remote worker's child must travel to work. Spatial flexibility is distributed as a privilege that does not descend to the lower links of the care chain; the class-wise chain of transfer shown in the sixth section operates here as well.

**Recognition and classification.** A new axis is born: the “worker visible at the office” versus the one “working from home”. Visibility can become the ideal worker's new sub-criterion. The activity scores produced by monitoring software add a technical-administrative layer of classification; the “flexibly working mother”, meanwhile, is filed as a category of her own both by the employer and within the household.

**Foreclosure of options.** Loss of visibility can narrow access to promotion, to informal networks and to critical assignments. The workplace's costs of space, heating, electricity, connectivity and equipment are devolved upon the household. The most critical closure lies in the field of care: when the public care deficit is closed with the formula “you can work from home”, the demand for nurseries recedes and the care deficit is buried inside the household.

**Write-back of the outcome.** The slowed career is written onto the worker — predominantly the woman — as “she wanted the flexibility herself”. The compression of work and care into the same moment at home is rendered invisible as “she was at home anyway”: the double shift is recorded as a single one.

**Reality circuit.** The career data of those who use flexibility make flexibility look “costly”; the data feed back into decisions on promotion and policy. On the public side the circuit runs still more quietly: as remote work spreads, public investment in care can be deferred on the ground that it is “no longer needed” — the new version of the non-intervention analysed in the eighth section.

## 12.2. The parallelisation assumption

The mutation named in the second section must be opened out here. The old ideal-worker norm excludes care: the worker is compelled to act as though no care burden existed. The remote version does not exclude care; it deems it executable in parallel with work: as though care never interrupted work. The parallelisation assumption is the supposition that care and work can combine without collision in the same body, the same space and the same hour.

Neither assumption recognises care time. The second, in addition, erodes the quality of care: care with half one's attention, work with half one's attention. The child hushed during the meeting, the old person brushed off before a screen, the compensatory shift spilling into the night are this assumption's everyday appearances. The old norm made care invisible; the parallelisation assumption makes care visible but deems it costless. The allocation has not changed; only its justification has been updated.

Nor does this analysis proceed in a land without literature. Boundary theory documents the costs of transitions and border violations between work and home (Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, 2000); research on flexibility shows that flexible working can, within the existing gender order, increase women's burden — the pattern Chung has named the flexibility paradox (Chung and van der Lippe, 2020; Chung, 2022); studies of the flexibility stigma document the visibility and promotion penalty suffered by those who use flexibility (Williams, Blair-Loy and Berdahl, 2013); telework research records the association of homeworking with the overflow of working hours (Felstead and Henseke, 2017); and the literature on surveillance traces the historical continuity of workplace monitoring (Ball, 2010). The parallelisation assumption and the evacuation symmetry translate these findings into the language of cost allocation: the flexibility paradox is the name of the situation in which spatial flexibility leaves the allocation of time unchanged.

### 12.3. The allocation of workplace costs to the household

To the allocation mechanism analysed in the fifth and sixth sections, remote work adds a new and, this time, directly measurable item: space, heating, electricity, connectivity and equipment. The employer's saving on office space is recorded as a gain in productivity, while the household's increased outgoings appear in no account. This item is the newest instance of the macroeconomic blindness taken up in the following section: the same activity, once its place changes, is deleted from the ledger of costs — just as care performed at home vanishes from economic records.

### 12.4. Reverse evacuation: Work's occupation of the space of relationship

The tenth section defined relational evacuation: the transfer of a person in need of care or of relationship out of the working adult's everyday life into an institutional space, for the sake of the continuity of working time. Remote work can produce its mirror image: this time it is not the person who is moved but the work — into the space of relationship. This may be called reverse evacuation: the spread of work into the space and time reserved for relationship, for the sake of the continuity of working time.

Like the article's other concepts, this one must be conditioned. The designation "occupation" may be used only where:

1. remote work is not a real preference but the sole option imposed by the care deficit;
2. working time cannot in practice be bounded within the home;
3. no regulation of costs and boundaries exists;
4. the arrangement functions to close the public care deficit.

These four conditions are the exact mirror of the four conditions of the tenth section. The symmetry gathers into one sentence: the nursery and the care home evacuate the relationship from the space of work; unbounded remote work carries the work into the space of relationship. Both operations preserve the same thing: the continuity of working time.

Relational evacuation and reverse evacuation should therefore be read not as two separate concepts, but as the two directions of a single one: the evacuation symmetry. The operation is one — the subjection of relationship to working time; its directions are two — either the relationship is removed from the space of work, or the work is inserted into the space of relationship. Conceptual symmetry is not evidence; but the allocation's remaining unchanged when space is inverted generates a testable hypothesis that the constitutive variable may be time rather than space.

### 12.5. Two functions: Remote work that widens freedom and remote work that intensifies the burden

The distinction drawn for the nursery in the ninth section holds here as well.

**Remote work that widens freedom** genuinely refunds commuting time, grants spatial autonomy, makes it possible for a person to live near those they love, and — combined with accessible public care services — multiplies options.

**Remote work that intensifies the burden** is offered as the substitute for public care, combines with boundless availability, and compresses the double shift into the same space and the same moment.

Which function the arrangement will perform is determined, here too, not by the arrangement itself but by the order surrounding it: the boundary guarantee, the regulation of costs, and the care infrastructure. The mirror of the nursery sentence is this: the problem is not the existence of remote work, but its substitution for the infrastructure of care.

### 12.6. Monitoring software: The first candidate for the Onopticon threshold

The spread of remote work has added a new technical-administrative layer to the employment relation: activity scoring, keystroke and screen monitoring, the measurement of being online. This layer is the first concrete candidate, identified in this article, for the Onopticon threshold fenced in the third section and specified in the section on the limits of the claim: submission to the software is a precondition of the job (compulsory recognition and classification); the scores produced can be tied to decisions on pay, promotion and dismissal (foreclosure of options); software, performance system and human-resources data operate together (composite operation); the scores feed subsequent evaluations (feedback); and objection to an algorithmic score is in practice difficult (weak contestability).

These lines are a nomination, not a verdict. Until documentation at case level is carried out, the designation remains that of a candidate; if the conditions are not met, the analysis continues at the level of the Reality Paradigm. Either outcome demonstrates the concept's testability.

## 13. Macroeconomic blindness and the vital return deficit

Macroeconomics studies aggregate production, income, employment, consumption, investment and the movement of prices. This article does not redefine macroeconomics; it interrogates which costs and which losses of life the aggregate indicators leave invisible.

That value is socially produced does not mean that it returns to the people who make it possible. An economy can grow while the time workers can give their children, their old, their families, their friends and themselves contracts. Women's labour-force participation can rise while the care price they pay in order to work, the unpaid labour they carry and their pension loss fail to appear in the same indicator.

In everyday speech the situation is voiced as "we produce, but we cannot live". The more precise counterpart of that intuition — of the proposition "there is production, but no consumption" in its crude form — is this:

**Social value is being produced; but the value produced is not returning, in equal measure, to the people who make it possible — as time, care, income, security and relational capacity.**

In this article the vital return deficit denotes the failure of socially produced value to return to the people who make it possible as liveable time, security of care, material safety and relational capacity.

Macroeconomic blindness, in turn, is the tendency to record aggregate production and monetary circulation while leaving out of account the unpaid care costs that make that production possible, time poverty, relational depletion, and the question of to whose lives the produced value fails to return.

The depletion balance sheet of the title becomes an explicit account here. On the debit side are entered the seven cost items enumerated in the sixth section: temporal, bodily, directly monetary, income, occupational, social-security, and political-and-relational. On the credit side are entered the channels through which produced value returns to the person: liveable time, security of care, material safety and relational capacity. The vital return

deficit is the difference between the two sides. This account is not a metaphor but a template that can be filled with time-use surveys and household data; the research programme of the fifteenth section enumerates its questions. Its first indicators, with their probable measurements, can be listed now: visits postponed or cancelled (number and reason over the last twelve months); relational time missed through care obligations (hours per week or month); the compulsory non-rest use of leave (percentage of total leave); the cost of sustaining a relationship (share of income, and travel time); the change in relational capacity when working hours change (before–after difference in relational time). These five indicators take blocked relational capacity out of phenomenology and into the variables of field research.

| The visible economic account                           | The closed account of life                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Aggregate production and growth                        | The care and relational time consumed for production                                  |
| Women’s labour-force participation                     | The care price paid in order to work                                                  |
| Savings in public expenditure                          | The unpaid care cost transferred to the household and to women                        |
| Nursery and care-home capacity                         | The lost time of family, neighbourhood and intergenerational relation                 |
| Tourism and transport expenditure                      | The cost of temporarily buying intimacy back                                          |
| Paid annual leave                                      | The debt of rest, care and relation piled into the same interval                      |
| Wages and productivity                                 | Bodily wear, time poverty and pension loss                                            |
| The employer’s savings and productivity in remote work | The workplace costs and the burden of boundary management devolved upon the household |
| The return to work                                     | Unfinished rest and relational fatigue                                                |

Expenditure on transport, accommodation and holidays can be recorded as economic activity. But how much of that expenditure springs from a free desire to travel, and how much from the compulsion to compensate for the relational distance produced by the order of work and settlement, does not appear in the same account. While the expenditure figures as an indicator of welfare, the deprivation that compels it can remain invisible.

The political-economic question of this article is therefore not only “how much was produced?” The more fundamental question is:

**To whose life, in what form and in what measure does the socially produced value return?**

If, while social production expands, people’s command over their own time and their own relationships contracts, then growth may be producing not the enlargement of life but its vital depletion.

## 14. Formal equality and the writing-back of outcomes onto women

The common form of the patterns shown from the nursery to the care home, from the relationship compressed into holiday to remote work and to the macroeconomic ledger, can be gathered into a single circuit. Applying to women and men the same working hours, the same career continuity and the same performance criteria does not produce material equality where the starting conditions are unequal. To the extent that it discounts the care burden lying outside paid work, formal equality becomes a mechanism of transfer that renders inequality invisible.

The institutional production of reality, and the write-back circuit, operate as follows:

1. The state leaves the responsibility of care to the private sphere.
2. The responsibility within the private sphere is carried predominantly by women.
3. Women's paid working time, income and career continuity suffer.
4. The resulting outcome is explained as "women's preference", their "attachment to the family", their "lesser orientation to work" or their "lower professional ambition".
5. The explanation feeds back into decisions on hiring, promotion, leave, budgets and services, reproducing the initial order.

The allocation chain shown piecemeal throughout the text can be gathered into a single scheme:

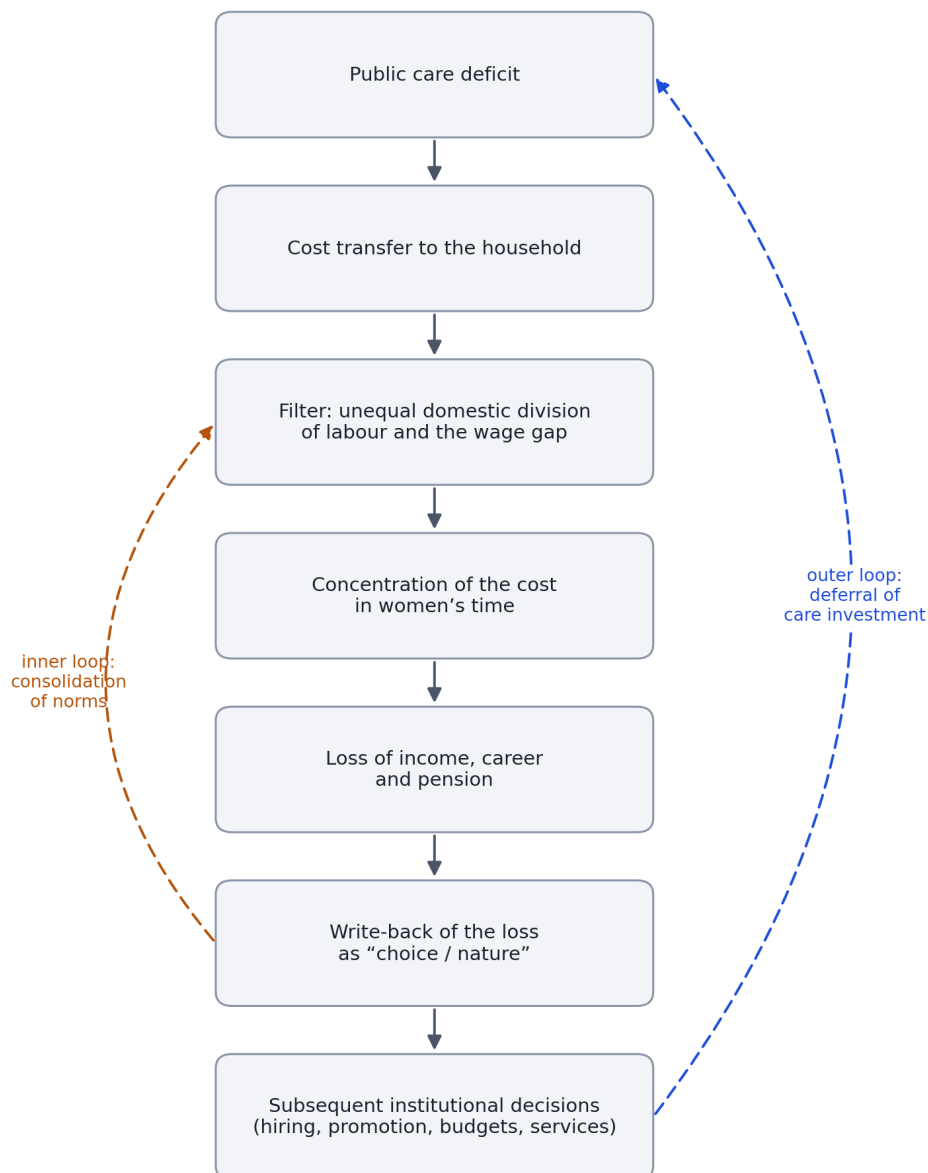


*Figure 1. The allocation and write-back circuit. Solid arrows show the chain of allocation; dashed arrows show the two feedback loops: the inner loop operates at household scale (the write-back consolidating the norms of the domestic division of labour), the outer loop at public scale (institutional decisions sustaining the public care deficit). Case-level documentation of the circuit's final link is, as noted in the eighteenth section, a matter for the research programme.*

The subject of this circuit was named in the third section: Homovictimus — the position of a subject held responsible at once for work performance, for the child's care, for the continuity of the family and for her own economic losses, while deprived of the time and infrastructure with which to discharge those responsibilities. The write-back circuit both produces this position and counts the outcomes it produces as the person's nature.

The circuit has a silent leg as well: men's consent. The ideal worker norm takes something from men too — the wishes with which this text opens are what a man has been unable to live. But the norm organises consent by compensating men's relational loss with career, income and status; the compensated loss becomes invisible. The compensation women carry, meanwhile, appears in no ledger. The regime's stability can be explained by this asymmetric compensation: the loss has been distributed to everyone, its recompense written to one side only. The transformation of the care order is for this reason no zero-sum game setting women against men; naming men's relational loss is the common ground of the transformation.

Here lies the distinctive lens the Reality Paradigm lends this article. The issue is not merely that a false judgement about women is constructed. First the conditions of life that will confirm the judgement are produced; then the outcome of those conditions is written back onto the woman as her nature or her free choice; finally that judgement becomes an input into the decisions that reconstruct the same conditions. Power thus does not merely interpret reality; it produces the reality it will later cite as evidence for its interpretation, converting its own output into its own initial assumption.

An order cannot first allocate the cost of care to women and then count the career interruption produced by that allocation as proof that women want to work less.

## **15. Who pays for the life that produces the continuity of the state and of society?**

This question is not only the article's normative slogan; it is its fundamental empirical question. The answer cannot be given by looking at the public budget alone. A cost that does not appear in the public budget does not vanish from social life; it is written onto another bearer's time, body and future.

The distribution to be investigated is this:

1. How much of the cost of care does the state assume through taxation, social security and public services?
2. How much does the employer bear?
3. How much of care time do men carry?
4. How much direct expenditure do households make?
5. How much unpaid time, income, health, career and pension do women lose?
6. To what extent is the cost passed on to poorer, migrant or precarious women?
7. Which actors profit from the social benefit produced?

8. To what extent is institutional care a free choice, and to what extent the consequence of the compulsion of work and income?
9. How much leave time and income do people spend in order to see their families, relatives and chosen intimates?
10. How much of annual leave goes to genuine rest, and how much to deferred care, visiting and the burdens of daily life?
11. How much of tourism and transport expenditure springs from free preference, and how much from the compulsory compensation of relational distance?
12. In remote work, to whom and to what does the refunded commuting time go: to relationship and rest, or to the extension of work?
13. Does the distribution of care change in remote-working households, or does the parallelisation assumption leave the burden with the same person?
14. How much of the workplace's costs has been devolved upon the household, and in which ledger does that devolution appear?
15. How widespread is monitoring software; to which decisions are the scores it produces tied, and what are the avenues of objection?
16. With what relative weight do the intermediate links of the allocation chain — the intra-household wage gap, employer conduct, gender norms, class position, migrant care labour, family structure and local service capacity — bear upon the outcome; and which link, when broken, changes the outcome most?

The whole of this programme cannot be carried out in a single study, and this article presents itself as the programme's conceptual ground; empirical verdicts are left to the pilot. The most suitable candidate for a first pilot is annual leave and the relational compensation economy: it is the least-worked original vein of the article in the literature, and it is directly measurable. A minimal design can be sketched: with 10–20 participants, a diary of the most recent annual leave; a count of the days used for visiting and for care; a record of travel expenditure; a measurement of fatigue before and after the leave; an inventory of relational activities cancelled.

Unless these questions are asked together, equality between women and men is measured only within the field of paid work. Yet before a woman enters the workplace, her working conditions have already been determined through the time she has been left obliged to assume at home.

In allocation regimes that familialise care, the home is operated like the off-budget care infrastructure of the state and the economy. Care removed from the state's budget does not leave the cost of living; it is written onto women's time, bodies, income and future. The sentence placed at the head of this article should be read within that scope: it is a tendency-proposition valid for every order that fails to socialise the cost of care; the degree to which it is realised in any given country is the subject of the comparison that follows.

## **16. The new measure of equality: The right to relational time**

Equality is not only equal pay for equal work, or subjection to the same rule. It also requires that the time people can give their children, their mothers and fathers, the sick, the old, their friends and the other relationships they find meaningful should not turn into an economic and occupational penalty.

At this point the concept of a right to relational time can be proposed:

The right to relational time is the right not to be deprived of one's income, one's job, one's professional future, one's right to rest or one's social security entitlements on account of the time one devotes to giving care, receiving care and sustaining the meaningful human relationships one has chosen.

This right is distinct from the relational autonomy that will serve as the criterion in the next section: the right denotes possessing protected, usable time for care and intimacy; autonomy denotes not being punished — by losses of income, career, status and future — for actually using that time. The right is the institutional guarantee; autonomy is the guarantee's realised capacity in the person.

The right does not mean returning care solely to the family or to women. On the contrary, it requires six public guarantees together:

1. **The time guarantee:** the arrangement of working hours according to human life during pregnancy, birth, parenthood and periods of actual care.
2. **The income and social-rights guarantee:** that care time not convert into losses of pay, seniority, promotion and pension.
3. **The service guarantee:** that nursery, day care, home care, health and elder-care services be accessible and of good quality.
4. **The choice guarantee:** that family care not become a compulsion, nor institutional care the only option.
5. **The relational-continuity guarantee:** that family, kinship, friendship and chosen intimacy not be compressed solely into annual leave or paid travel.
6. **The boundary guarantee:** that working time, including remote and hybrid work, be boundable independently of place; that the right to disconnect be recognised; and that the devolution of workplace costs upon the household be regulated.

These guarantees are no arbitrary wish-list; each is designed to break a specific stage of the write-back circuit. The income and social-rights guarantee targets the foreclosure of options: if care time converts into no loss, the circuit's third stage does not run. The socialisation of the cost through the public budget and social security removes the basis of the "costly worker" classification in the employer's ledger. Non-transferable arrangements that secure men's actual assumption of care time break the feminisation stage. Sanctioned enforcement and the regulation of the burden of proof make the writing-back of the outcome onto the woman harder. Nor should it be forgotten that the proposal itself can become an input into the same circuit: protections reserved to women can, in a design that leaves the cost upon the single employer, feed the "costly worker" classification. That risk is a reason not for renouncing protection, but for designing protection so as to break the circuit.

These guarantees are the counterpart, in the field of care and time, of the Reality Paradigm's demand for infrastructural justice. It is not enough for a right to stand in a text; the order of working time, income, services and objection must be able to carry the right's exercise. If a person holds the right to care in law and loses their job, their pay or their future upon using it, the right has been declared — but the reality in which the right could live has not been built.

Protections relating to pregnancy and birth may be specific to women on account of bodily reality. It is also necessary that care time be shared to a far greater extent by men and by public institutions. But the expectation that care will one day be shared equally cannot serve as a ground for deferring the specific protections women need against the actual burden they carry today.

Differentiated working conditions are for this reason no privilege. They are an instrument of material equality that prevents unequal burdens of life from turning into punishments within working life.

The state's task is not merely to open institutions for the child and the old. It is to protect the time in which people can relate to one another. Public institutions need not replace family bonds; they must multiply people's options of care and of relationship.

## **17. A problem not specific to Türkiye: The same mechanism across different care regimes**

This article does not construct a closed explanation resting on Türkiye's supposedly unique cultural make-up. The supremacy of working time over the time of care and relationship; the transfer of care costs to the family, the market or public institutions; the re-establishment of intimacy through leave and expenditure — these are border-crossing tendencies of the modern work-centred order.

Yet the judgement “things are graver in Europe and America than in Türkiye” is not, by itself, sufficiently determinate. Graver in what respect: the unpaid care burden women carry, the lack of paid leave, the marketisation of care, the spatial dispersal of families, the prevalence of institutional care, or the time people command over their relationships? Without a stated criterion, geographical ranking compresses different forms of the same phenomenon into a single verdict.

Comparative indicators show that the distinction is indispensable. In the OECD's assessment of 2025, the gap in unpaid work between women and men exceeds 200 minutes a day in Türkiye, Mexico and Portugal, while it falls below 60 minutes in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Because the underlying time-use surveys date from different years, these figures are no precise current league table; but they plainly weaken the verdict that “Northern Europe is graver than Türkiye in every respect”. The OECD's 2025 survey of Türkiye likewise records that women perform on average four hours more unpaid care and housework per day than men, against an OECD average of roughly two hours; and that 96 per cent of those reported as primary carers of children are mothers, as against 2 per cent fathers.

The same divergence appears in the public sharing of costs. According to the 2021 expenditure data of the OECD Family Database, public spending on maternity, paternity and parental leave per birth stands at 555 US dollars in purchasing-power terms in Türkiye, against an OECD average of roughly 20,834 dollars; spending is especially high in the Nordic countries. Public expenditure on early childhood education and care was likewise reported, on 2019 data, at 0.2 per cent of gross domestic product in Türkiye, against an OECD average of 0.8 per cent and 1.8 per cent in Iceland. These indicators show that even where some elements of the relational fabric have been preserved in Türkiye, the cost of care can be left far more heavily upon the family — and upon women in particular.

These data do more than weaken categorical geographical verdicts; they test a prediction of the theory. The mechanism thesis predicts that when the form of allocation changes, the outcome changes. That the unpaid-labour gap comes out markedly lower in regimes that socialise more of the cost is the first confirmation of that prediction; had the reverse appeared, the theory would have been weakened. The comparison is for this reason not a defence but a test: variation across regimes is the variation that confirms the mechanism's variability.

In the United States a different weight emerges. At federal level there is no general statute guaranteeing paid family and medical leave for all workers; the existing federal FMLA regime provides covered employees, under specified conditions, with unpaid, job-protected leave. State and employer programmes alter the picture in places, but care time depends to a substantial degree on employment position and purchasing power. The financialisation of care is a real field of risk as well; yet the phenomenon cannot be presented as though it represented the whole system. The US Government Accountability Office estimated in 2022 that roughly 5 per cent of care homes enrolled in Medicare had private-equity ownership. The figure does not diminish the problem's seriousness; but it prevents a particular form of ownership from being made the name of the whole care system.

Nor is Europe a single regime. The European Union's work-life balance legislation has introduced minimum guarantees such as paid paternity leave, parental leave, carers' leave and, for certain workers, the right to request flexible working. Implementation and payment levels differ across countries. In the field of time boundaries, too, regimes diverge: France has applied the right to disconnect since 2017; the European Parliament, by its resolution of 2021, has called for regulation at Union level; in Türkiye the Remote Work Regulation of 2021 draws a formal framework while leaving matters of cost and boundary largely to the contract between the parties. These rights do not resolve all the problems of the work-centred order; but neither is it correct to dismiss them as sham solutions that merely veil the market's operation. Public guarantees of care and leave can, in some conditions, genuinely widen relational autonomy by reducing the compulsory unpaid labour resting upon women.

The pandemic period of 2020–2021 also produced a vast natural experiment in this field: the question of upon whom care collapsed when schools and nurseries closed and work moved massively into the home is among the broadest intersubjective data fields available to subsequent research for comparing different regimes' responses to the same shock.

Countries should therefore be compared not through the opposition of developed and backward, or East and West, but through how they allocate the costs of social reproduction:

| Dominant allocation regime | Principal bearer of the cost              | What it can afford                                  | Principal risk of inequality                                           |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Familialised and gendered  | The family; above all women               | Intimacy and informal solidarity                    | Compulsory, unpaid and invisible female labour                         |
| Marketised                 | The household and the paid service market | Variety of services for those with purchasing power | Income-dependent access, indebtedness, care becoming a field of profit |
| Publicised                 | Taxation and public institutions          | Universal services, income and leave guarantees     | The over-institutionalisation of care to the working calendar          |
| Mixed                      | State, market and family                  | Multiple supports and transitions                   | The irregular passing of costs along class, gender and migration       |

These regimes are ideal types; no country consists of one alone. Familialisation may predominate in Türkiye, marketisation in the United States, public sharing in the Nordic welfare regimes. There are serious differences, too, among Southern, Northern, Eastern and Western Europe.

The decisive criterion here is not the number of institutions but relational autonomy. Relational autonomy is the capacity to take decisions about giving care, receiving care and sustaining the relationships one finds meaningful without being punished by losses of income, of future security and of employment status. The right to relational time defined in the previous section is the institutional guarantee of this capacity; the comparative criterion is the capacity's distribution across society. Three questions are the operational tests of the definition: Is the person forced to choose between giving time to their child, their old or their chosen intimate, and protecting their income and future? Can they genuinely choose professional care, or are they driven to it by the compulsion of work and subsistence? Does the institution support the relationship, or is it the compulsory substitute for a relationship the working order has made impossible?

By this measure the United States may produce graver outcomes in respect of the marketisation of care and the weakness of federal time guarantees; Türkiye in respect of the concentration of unpaid care upon women and the lowness of public cost-sharing; and some Western societies in respect of the spatial and institutional programming of relational life. Some European states, conversely, may achieve real improvement by socialising more of the cost of care.

The universal claim of this article is accordingly not that the outcome is the same in every country. The universal hypothesis is this:

**The modern work-centred order tends to subject the time of care and of relationship to the continuity of paid work; but the form in which this cost is allocated to the family, to women, to the market or to the public varies across countries.**

The hypothesis's comparative threshold must also be set out plainly: regimes in which increases in working time do not reduce the capacity for care and relationship, and in which guarantees of income and public care regularly reverse that relation, will count as counter-cases bounding the universal tendency hypothesis. The counter-case criteria of the next section are the detailed inventory of that threshold.

The statement "it is graver in the West" can be tested only when bounded by a specific criterion — relational dissolution, market dependence or institutional invisibility. The more defensible judgement is that in some Western societies the problem, before being graver, may have taken a more institutionalised, more marketised and therefore more invisible form. And that is not a foregone conclusion but a hypothesis for comparative research.

### **17.1. A worked example: Passing the Turkish data through the apparatus**

The analytical apparatus of this article has so far been built at the conceptual level. To show how it operates, the Turkish data cited above can be passed once through the five-stage analysis and the five conditions of non-intervention. This is a demonstration of method, not of proof; at each step it is stated which evidence is available and which is lacking.

**Preconditioning:** Public expenditure on early childhood education and care stands at two-thousandths of gross domestic product; public leave expenditure per birth lies far below the OECD average; school hours and working hours are mismatched. The household that faces a care decision decides within a space of options these conditions have already narrowed. (Evidence available: budget and expenditure data.)

**Recognition and classification:** The person undertaking a child's primary care is recorded as the mother in 96 per cent of cases; the institutional and social assumption is that the carer is a woman. (Evidence available: the OECD survey of Türkiye.)

**Foreclosure of options:** The meeting of nursery costs by the household — in practice, in most cases, from the mother's income — lowers the net return of work for the low-paid woman; it pushes forward the options of withdrawal from the labour force or passage into precarious work. (Evidence partly available: expenditure and participation data; the link at household level requires field research.)

**Write-back of the outcome:** The withdrawal is classified, in public records and in everyday explanation, as "family preference". (Evidence at the level of discourse and record; systematic documentation is assigned to the research programme.)

**Reality circuit:** The observation that "women leave work anyway" can feed back into the rationale of nursery investment and of hiring decisions. (At the level of hypothesis; requires empirical tracking of decision processes.)

The five conditions of non-intervention can be interrogated on the same data. The need is measured (OECD and national data); the state possesses authority and instruments (budget, legislation, institutions); to whom the cost will pass is foreseeable (the 96 per cent record); feasible public alternatives exist (the practice of other regimes); and expenditure remains low although the unequal outcomes recur. Evidence for the first four conditions is largely available; the "maintenance" character of the fifth must be documented by following budget decisions over time. The table turns the claim that non-intervention in this field cannot be counted simple neglect into a testable file; the missing items belong to the research programme of the fifteenth section.

## 18. The limits of the claim, and counter-case criteria

This study does not assert that the nursery, the kindergarten, pre-school education or the care home are oppressive institutions in essence. Institutional care itself must be distinguished from institutional care become compulsory. Nor can it be assumed that every relation of care ought to be sustained within the family, or that the family always offers a safe and supportive setting.

### 18.1. Testing the application of the Reality Paradigm

The Reality Paradigm is not this article's evidence; it is the theoretical frame that determines between which relations the evidence is to be sought. Reference to the paradigm does not of itself confirm that the cost of care is allocated to women, or that the relationship is evacuated by the working order. Each of the stages — preconditioning, classification, foreclosure, write-back and feedback into the decision circuit — must be shown separately with data from law, budgets, institutions, time use, workplace practice and experience.

The claim is not singular; the four levels of claim distinguished in the third section are tested separately. Beside each counter-case criterion below, the level it would weaken if realised is indicated. The article's claim weakens or falls under these conditions:

1. if care time is in fact distributed evenly between women and men (*structural mechanism*);
2. if the state assumes the cost of care to a sufficient degree through public services, income and social security rights (*structural mechanism*);

3. if pregnancy, birth and care periods lead to no loss of pay, seniority, promotion or pension (*structural mechanism*);
4. if working hours are arranged compatibly with children, the old and relations of care (*structural mechanism*);
5. if the nursery and the care home are a free choice among alternatives rather than the sole option imposed by the pressures of time and income (*structural mechanism — the relational evacuation thesis*);
6. if real passage exists among home-based, day and institutional care options (*structural mechanism*);
7. if the safe neighbourhood, public space and institutional education can coexist without excluding one another (*structural mechanism*);
8. if the order of work and leave allows people to sustain their meaningful relationships within everyday life (*structural mechanism — the relational strand*);
9. if the family or intimate visit is the outcome of free choice among options rather than a compulsory condensation consuming the right to rest (*intersubjective pattern and structural mechanism*);
10. if unpaid care labour is made visible in public statistics, budget decisions and the system of social rights (*structural mechanism — the invisibility thesis*);
11. if women's outcomes in working life are not interpreted, independently of care conditions, as their nature or their preference (*structural mechanism — the write-back thesis*);
12. if, notwithstanding the experiential recognition of author and readers, the proposed mechanism does not recur in large groups under comparable conditions (*intersubjective pattern*);
13. if, in counter-cases combining short working hours, income security and accessible public care, institutions widen people's capacity for care and intimacy instead of evacuating the relationship (*comparative judgement — narrows the scope; does not, by itself, fell the tendency hypothesis*);
14. if the distribution of care in remote-working households is in fact evening out (*structural mechanism — the parallelisation thesis*);
15. if remote workers suffer no visibility or promotion penalty (*structural mechanism — the distance-penalty thesis*);
16. if refunded commuting time flows predominantly to relationship and rest (*structural mechanism — the reverse evacuation thesis*);
17. if remote work expands together with public care provision (*the substitution thesis falls*).

The procedure for gathering counter-experience must be settled now as well: the testimony of the reader who does not find themselves in this narrative is to be recorded in empirical research not as an anomaly but as a candidate refutation; experiences in which institutional care has widened freedom, and in which remote work has restored time to relationships, are to be asked after directly. The immunity to the closed circuit of approval established in the third section becomes operative only through this procedure.

## 18.2. The limit of the Onopticon designation

The existence of pre-constructed conditions in the order of care and work does not of itself suffice for the declaration of an Onopticon. For a particular case to be examined as an Onopticon, at least the following conditions must be shown together:

1. **Compulsory recognition and classification:** to reach work, leave, benefits, care or a social right, the person enters a technical-administrative order of recognition and classification they cannot avoid.
2. **Foreclosure of options:** the category or eligibility decision produced closes options in more than one domain of life — income, work, care, movement or social security — not in a single transaction alone.
3. **Composite operation:** the closure springs not from a single, temporary decision but from the combined effect of interconnected arrangements of law, data, employer, services and social security.
4. **Feedback:** the outcomes the system produces become inputs into subsequent decisions of classification, eligibility, performance or resource allocation.
5. **Weak contestability:** the person faces serious difficulty in identifying the decision's source, learning its grounds, objecting effectively or reversing the outcome.

This article does not assert that the care regime as a whole meets this threshold on the general data available. The Onopticon will be used only where these conditions can be documented in a concrete case of leave, eligibility, performance, social security or access to care. The monitoring software of remote work is, as shown in the twelfth section, the first concrete candidate for this threshold identified in this article; it remains a candidate until case-level documentation is carried out. Where the conditions are not met, the analysis remains at the level of the Reality Paradigm. This is not a retreat; it is the limit that preserves the concept's researchability.

## 18.3. The evidential status of the concepts

Not every named pattern is a proven mechanism. This article constructs its concepts at different levels of evidence, and to forestall misreading, the status of each must be declared openly:

| Concept                                                                          | Evidential status                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The allocation of public necessity to the private sphere; gendered privatisation | Supported by comparative and structural data; worked example presented (17.1)                                                               |
| The write-back circuit                                                           | Supported by theoretical and structural literature; case-level documentation of the full feedback circuit belongs to the research programme |
| The evacuation symmetry (relational evacuation / reverse evacuation)             | A conditioned concept; case documentation is a research proposal                                                                            |
| The relational compensation economy (need condensation / buy-back)               | Experientially grounded; a conceptual proposal with measurement indicators defined for intersubjective testing                              |
| The parallelisation assumption                                                   | A conceptual naming; its empirical testing is a research proposal                                                                           |
| The vital return deficit; the depletion balance sheet                            | A conceptual proposal with a defined measurement template                                                                                   |
| Relational autonomy                                                              | A defined criterion with stated operational tests                                                                                           |
| Homovictimus                                                                     | The naming of a subject-position                                                                                                            |
| The Onopticon (remote monitoring software)                                       | A candidate; awaiting case documentation                                                                                                    |

This declaration is no confession of weakness; it is the discipline of the levels of claim applied at the level of concepts: which concept has been shown and which proposed is not left to the reader's guess.

These counter-case criteria matter. For the article's purpose is not to force every social relation into one explanation, but to render visible a particular mechanism of cost allocation operating beneath the discourse of equality.

## **19. Theoretical neighbourhoods and the distinctive contribution of the Reality Paradigm**

This study is a direct application, in the field of care, working time and social reproduction, of the Reality Paradigm systematised in Hakkı Tan's theoretical report Reality Paradigm, Onopticon and Homovictimus (Tan, 2026). The preconditioning treated in that earlier framework through the infrastructures of recognition, classification, access, eligibility and objection is carried here beyond the digital and algorithmic domain; the combined effect of the orders of working time, income, care, social security, space and relationship is analysed as temporal and reproductive infrastructure.

The question of this article is not born in a void independent of the academic literature; nor is it a repetition derived from it.

Joan Acker shows that the apparently neutral structure of organisations is gendered; Joan Williams, that the ideal worker is constructed upon a male life-line cleared of care responsibility. This article treats that norm not merely as an intra-organisational expectation, but as the criterion of recognition of a temporal and reproductive infrastructure that distributes the cost of care among state, employer and household — and names its mutation in remote work (the parallelisation assumption). Arlie Hochschild's analysis of the second shift showed that the woman in paid work takes on a second stint of labour on returning home; this article steps one stage further back, arguing that the norm of the first shift was itself constructed by discounting the second. The care ethics of Eva Feder Kittay and Joan Tronto grounds the universality of dependence and the political value of care; this article carries the same ground from the debate over value to the debate over allocation — the question is not whether care is valuable, but to whom its cost is written. The discretionary-time measure of Robert Goodin and his colleagues gauges the time left to a person once necessities are met; the capability approach of Sen and Nussbaum, what a person can actually do and be. Relational autonomy measures not only the quantity of time a person may use, but the institutional penalty they meet when they use it for care and intimacy. It is therefore more relational than discretionary time, and a more specific measure of cost and sanction than general capability.

Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* renders visible the gendered private sphere behind modern public equality. Silvia Federici and the wages-for-housework debates show that domestic labour, counted as love or as womanly duty, is the invisible precondition of the waged economy. Social reproduction theory explains that labour power and everyday life are reproduced outside the wage relation. Nancy Fraser examines capital's eroding of the conditions of care on which it depends as a contradiction of social reproduction. Nancy Folbre shows that although care labour produces public as well as private benefits, carers bear an economic penalty. Ann Shola Orloff establishes that welfare-state institutions and gender relations shape one another mutually. The non-decision-making approach of Bachrach and Baratz explains that power operates not only in the decisions taken but in the keeping of certain issues off the agenda of decision. Sandra Harding's standpoint epistemology and Donna Haraway's situated knowledges recall that experience cannot be dismissed as an anecdote outside knowledge — and that no social position produces infallibility of itself. The care-economy work of the ILO and

UN Women carries the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care to the level of institutional policy; the OECD's studies of unpaid household activities show that non-monetary care and domestic labour can remain outside the principal macroeconomic indicators.

This article is kin to those approaches; but it constructs its original contribution at eight points:

1. It carries the Reality Paradigm beyond digital and algorithmic infrastructures, analysing the time of work, care, space and relationship as temporal and reproductive infrastructure.
2. It defines the private sphere not merely as a gendered space but as a category of cost allocation produced by the state.
3. It analyses the state's non-intervention not as absence or failure but as a distributive operation measurable under specified conditions.
4. It separates, in institutions such as the nursery and the care home, the service of care from the function of relational evacuation that protects working time.
5. It shows the writing-back of institutionally produced loss as woman's nature or free choice to be a feedback-driven reality circuit within the Reality Paradigm.
6. It analyses the reclassification of the time of family, kinship and chosen intimacy as "holiday" through the mechanisms of need condensation in leave time and relational buy-back.
7. It renders visible, through macroeconomic blindness and the vital return deficit, the difference between economic production and that production's return to human life as time, care, security and relational capacity.
8. It names the mutation of the ideal worker norm in remote work as the parallelisation assumption, and analyses the allocation of workplace costs to the household and work's occupation of the space of relationship as the second direction of the evacuation symmetry (reverse evacuation).

The academic literature is therefore not the guide that sets this text's conceptual course. The literature is the guest that shows the neighbourhoods, the kinships and the distinctions encountered by the question Hakkı Tan has posed.

The claim of this positioning can be gathered into a single sentence: this article does not see care labour for the first time; it transforms the mechanisms shown piecemeal across the literatures of care, work and relational time into a single explanatory architecture under the Reality Paradigm's sequence of preconditioning–classification–foreclosure–write-back–feedback. The originality lies not in the individual links, but in the binding of the links into one circuit.

## 20. Conclusion: Equality on whose time?

Women's participation in working life is an important condition of equality; but it is not equality by itself. If the sphere of care is not reorganised while women are incorporated into paid work, a participation presented as emancipation can become the convergence of two separate obligations upon the same body and the same time.

For the Reality Paradigm, equality is not only the legal judgement pronounced upon women and men; it is the field of reality in which that judgement can be lived. Working time, income, social security, care services, the school calendar, housing, transport and workplace norms construct that field together. Where this temporal and reproductive infrastructure is left unchanged, the declaration of equality can settle upon an inequality already in place.

The state is not outside this picture. It allocates the cost of social reproduction through what it counts as public service and what as private responsibility, through which cost it takes into its budget and which it leaves to the family; non-intervention is among the instruments of that allocation.

The nursery, the kindergarten, pre-school education and the care home are not, in themselves, the problem's name; the problem is these institutions' ceasing to be freely chosen supports and becoming the compulsory substitutes of the relationship the working order has taken from people's hands. The same operation appears in relational life: the relationship that ought to continue within everyday life is compressed into annual leave; the visit is recorded as "holiday", the expenditure made to repair the relationship as "consumption", the exhaustion after leave as an individual failure of planning.

Remote work does not correct this picture of itself. The workplace's coming home does not mean that time has been refunded; if the allocation does not break even when space is inverted, the problem is seen to be temporal, not spatial. The nursery and the care home evacuate the relationship from the space of work; boundless remote work carries the work into the space of relationship — both preserve the continuity of working time. Only when combined with the boundary guarantee, the regulation of costs and accessible public care does remote work become a possibility that widens freedom; offered as the substitute for public care, it is the newest form of the allocation.

I do not want my children to be obliged to look after me. I want them to have a life in which they can choose to give me time. I do not want a mother to be forced to renounce her economic independence in order to stay with her child, and the time she would spend with her child in order to work. Neither compelling the old to be cared for by their relatives, nor consigning them to the care home because their relatives' time has been taken from them, is freedom. Nor do I want the seeing of my family, my relatives or my chosen intimates to be an exceptional possibility compressed into a few days a year and called "holiday".

Economic production and expenditure can grow while people's command over their own time and their own relationships contracts. The quantity of value produced is therefore not, by itself, a sufficient measure. The real measure is whether that value returns to the people who make it possible — as time, as care, as security, as liveable relationship. Where it does not return, what exists is not merely an inequality of distribution but a vital return deficit.

The mechanism is not specific to Türkiye; nor does it operate identically everywhere. Familialisation may come to the fore in Türkiye, marketisation in the United States, advanced institutionalisation in some European societies; public guarantees of leave, income and care can, conversely, genuinely socialise the cost and widen people's options. The measure is whether the person is forced into a compulsory choice between care and income, relationship and work, intimacy and future security — that is, the distribution of relational autonomy.

The first empirical ground of this text is the life I have lived and been unable to live. When readers recognise the same depletion in their own lives, the testimony multiplies. But that recognition cannot be allowed to become a closed circuit of approval: counter-experience shows the theory's limit, comparative data the scope of its judgement. Experience does not need the approval of statistics; nor must statistics and the counter-case be

silenced by experience. The article accordingly does not declare the whole of the order of care and work an Onopticon; it leaves that designation — as in the example of remote monitoring software — to documentation at the level of the case.

Equality is not the binding of woman and man to the same hour. Equality is that differing burdens of life should diminish no one's income, no one's future, no one's relationships and no one's say over their own life.

The final question therefore stands unchanged:

### **Who pays for the life that produces the continuity of the state and of society?**

If this cost does not appear in the state's budget, it has not ceased to exist. It has been written onto a woman's time, body, income and pension — or onto the relationship a family has lost.

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