

## The Politics of Unpaid Labour. How the Study of Unpaid Labour Can Help Address Inequality in Precarious Work

**Valeria Pulignano**

Centre for Sociological Research (CESO) | KU Leuven

### Chair

Lisa Dorigatti

NASP - University of Milan

### Discussants

Roberto Pedersini

NASP - University of Milan

Camilla Gaiaschi

University of Salento

**19 May 2025**

h. 10:30 | Room A - NASP Graduate School

University of Milan

Via Pace, 10 – Milan

### Abstract

This book introduces a theory of the politics of unpaid labour, advancing our understanding of inequality within the context of precarious work. Arguing that this theory can help address the inequalities perpetuating the dynamics and processes underpinning stigma which surround the rise of precarious work under labour market reforms and societal and technological changes, the book forges a link between the micro properties of the social system and its macro-level structural patterns. The former relates to the motivations and meanings individuals attribute to the unpaid labour they perform in a context where employment is precarious, while the latter refers to how individuals build resilience through sustaining unpaid labour by accessing resources found within the private social, financial sphere of the family as well as in regulatory arrangements at the level of the state and other social institutions. The book's empirical section is based on an extensive research comparing meanings of unpaid labour in creative dance, residential care, online freelancing in Europe. The theoretical section advances current discussion in three ways. First, it establishes the characteristics differentiating employment from self-employment, and how these lead to a revised definition of unpaid labour. Second, it illustrates that unpaid labour is both shaped by class and serves to reproduce class interests, revealing ongoing changes in welfare, employment, and state institutional policies. Third, it considers the necessity to establish conditions within the labour market conducive to genuinely cultivating and honouring the diversity of human capabilities and actions within labour structures and promoting their manifestation.

