

‘Making the Sandwiches’: Gender, Race, Social Reproduction, and Academic Labour

Thursday, 6 June 2024 15:00 (1h 30m)

Who does what labour? Who gives what? Who carries what? And, for how long? Academic labour is a profoundly gendered and racialised practice. The phrase ‘making the sandwiches’ reprises the age-old sexist stereotype that women belong to the domestic sphere, aka the kitchen (Smith 2015). This is reflected across academia where departments are often run on a gendered division of labour which maps onto the division of labour and gendered inequalities that are rooted in structures and processes of political economy (True 2012). According to Nicola Smith (2015) that labour is divided between ‘wife work’ – teaching, admin, and service work, and, to extend the metaphor, ‘husband work’, coded as ‘proper’, academic work, aka research, which carries all the gendered and racialised associations and expectations that link expertise with white, male, able bodies. This has exacerbated levels of underrepresentation and inequality in the sector. The UK political science landscape highlights striking representational issues: women, and particularly women of colour, are severely under-represented across political science departments, thinning higher-up the ranks, especially at professorial levels. Pushing for change itself is a form of gendered labour resulting in depletion (Rai, Hoskyns, & Thomas 2013), not least because institutions are often resistant to gender change. “‘We still have a long way to go’ is the catchphrase used by patriarchy to gain time, justify its opposition to change and lull feminist analysers into believing that real progress are made” (Puechguirbal 2012, 15). This roundtable brings together colleagues grappling with the question: “What, in short, does it mean to make a sandwich, and who is being asked to make it?” (Smith 2015). Calling for cross-departmental thinking, and applying feminist theories, the roundtable considers feminist solutions for change.

Track Classification: University of Birmingham, School of Government/POLSISS Gender and Feminist Theory Research Group (GAFT)