

'Worn out': Hunger, debt discipline, and the gendered contingencies of the COVID-19 pandemic amongst Cambodian garment workers

30th September 2021 at 12 noon (BST)

Microsoft Teams

The Gender Institute hosts the Lauren Berlant memorial lecture given by Professor Katherine Brickell.



Photo courtesy of Thomas Cristofolletti

Professor Katherine Brickell

Katherine Brickell is Professor of Human Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL), UK. At RHUL she is Director of the Geopolitics, Development, Security and Justice Research Group. She is also editor of the journal *Gender, Place and Culture*. Her feminist-oriented research cross-cuts social, political, development, and legal geography, with a long standing focus on the domestic sphere as a precarious space of contemporary everyday life.

Drawing on over 200 quantitative surveys and 60 interviews with women workers in Cambodia, the talk presents empirically-grounded research from garment workers on the financial challenges of navigating the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ReFashion study shows how in the making of clothes to be worn by Western consumers, poorly paid garment workers are reducing their eating to repay long-term debts and those newly taken on to cope with wage reductions resulting from factory closures, suspensions and cuts in working hours. In its examination of this phenomenon, the talk provides insights into the gendered contingencies of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 'wearing out' of garment workers through their attempts to reproduce life under (pre-existing) conditions of privation. We argue that the hunger-debt nexus is not new but reflects problems within Cambodia's capitalist development, and capitalism itself, as the costs of social reproduction and risk are privatised and financialised in the body politic. The COVID-19 pandemic is consolidation relations with financialised life such that they will outlast its duration and have long-lasting implications for workers and their families globally.

<https://www.refashionstudy.org> and @ReFashionStudy



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