

DOCTORAL THESIS

Production of legal status among Hong Kong-based domestic workers from Bangladesh

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Abstract

This thesis explores the production of Bangladeshi domestic workers' legal status in Hong Kong. Bangladeshi domestic workers started entering Hong Kong in 2013 and they were expected to gradually become one of the major national groups of domestic workers. But within the first two years, 50 to 60% of them left formal employment. In the migration industry, that phenomenon was referred to as the "runaway crisis". While the runaway crisis took place between 2013 and 2015, some Bangladeshi domestic workers still run away. I would like to reflect upon the migration experiences of Bangladeshi women recruited by two employment agencies and one small association of employment agencies and identify forces impacting their decision-making over their legal status. In doing that, I build upon feminist geography of domestic work and migration studies, Foucault's work on governmentality and Ahmed's affective economies which I extend by elaborating on her understanding of lovability with which I engage to argue for a performative view of legality. The main methodology of the research is feminist ethnography where data were collected during 2-year long field work in Bangladeshi training centers and Hong Kong agencies. The research suggests that domestic workers' legal status is produced in a multi-layered process which includes social structures and power dynamics and affects in migration industry institutions.

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