

Producing Diversity for the Global Supply Chain?

The Case of Bangladeshi Women as Labor Migrants in Mauritius

The proposed research is an ethnographic interview study of Bangladeshi women who have migrated abroad to work in export-oriented garment production in Port Louis, Mauritius. In order to expand on theories of gender and supply chain capitalism, this study brings an intersectional analysis to bear on transnational production. While the existence of gendered production regimes in the Global South is well-documented, this project incorporates gender, migrant status, and other categories of difference into our understanding of supply chain capitalism. Using Anna Tsing's (2009) theory of niche heterogeneity, the proposed study will examine how international supply chains use and re-shape diversity as a profit-generating tool. In a host country where sixty percent of the population is of South Asian descent and Islam is a common religion, Bangladeshi women migrants could potentially assimilate into local communities. However, in order to suppress labor value and maintain a profitable garment export sector, these migrant workers would have to be maintained as a social "other." In light of what is known about supply chain capitalism and the exploitation of feminine and migrant labor, I hypothesize that economic and social policies, labor arrangements, and social patterns of inclusion and exclusion affect Bangladeshi women migrants in ways that produce a gendered migrant production regime to the benefit of the Mauritian garment sector. Data for this project will come from field observations and semi-structured interviews with labor migrants and local economic stakeholders in the Port Louis area of Mauritius.