



Narratives of migrant workers: Belonging and inclusion in Qatar

Zahra Babar | Georgetown University in Qatar

Since winning the bid to host the FIFA World Cup, Qatar has become a focal point for global media and human rights activists who have drawn attention to the country for its poor track record of protecting the rights of its large migrant worker population. While much of the criticism has been on exceptional and localized conditions of exploitation, the narratives surrounding migrant workers in Qatar reflect broader, global anxieties of how to ethically incorporate legally marginalized or excluded communities. In light of mounting international criticism over the living and working conditions of migrant workers in Qatar, significant reforms have taken place to address problems that have arisen as a result of the kafala or worker-sponsorship system and other aspects of local labour law. Yet criticism persists that these are technical fixes that will not go far enough in affecting real changes to how migrants are treated and included. Multiple narratives abound on migrants, nationality, belonging and inclusion, and they all impact local attitudes toward migrants and the conditions they endure. Qatar, as a small city-state that has engaged in a deliberate and strategic process of nation building over the past 50 years, is a site where these overlapping and sometimes competing narratives need unpacking. This presentation will examine the evolution of local narratives of belonging and authenticity made tangible through Qatar's restrictive nationality laws and how these laws engage with narratives around migrant workers' protection and inclusions.