

# UNFREE: MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THE UAE

Across the globe, migrant domestic workers are unfree workers whose legal residency is contingent on their continued employment as a live-in worker with a designated sponsor. This talk examines the politics of their indenture. Providing a macro and micro perspective, it begins with a global overview of the incorporation of migrant domestic workers as indentured workers in key host countries in the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. It then interrogates dominant paradigms for thinking about unfreedom, identifying how the common frameworks of “human trafficking” and “slavery” follow liberal notions of unfreedom. Drawing from interviews with domestic workers and employers in the United Arab Emirates, it then addresses the limits of a liberal perspective. The talk proposes the greater utility of following a republication notion of unfreedom, illustrating how doing so enables us to account for the diversity of experiences of domestic workers and allows us to consider the different principles that guide the management of unequal relations between domestic workers and employers.



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Rhacel Salazar Parreñas is Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies at the University of Southern California. Her areas of research include labor, gender, international migration and human trafficking, the family and economic sociology.

Her research examines the experiences of migrant workers from the Philippines with a particular focus in the last decade on “hard to reach populations.” While her earlier works examined the constitution of gender in women’s migration and transnational families, her last two projects have sought to document and examine the experiences of migrant workers identified by the U.S. Department of State as victims of human trafficking. Her current project focuses on the “unfree labor” of migrant domestic workers in Dubai and Singapore.

## CONFERENCE

March 26, 2020  
2:00 - 4:30 pm  
Room W-5  
McCall MacBain Arts Building  
McGill University

