

## Background

In 2014 I moved to Australia and did a one-year certificate in Community Services. Initially, I thought cleaning was something I could do to get by while settling in this new country and plot my next movements. But this part time job turned full time as I had to finance my studies and pay my visa.

Cleaning, I thought, was easy and quick money. But at some point I was working daily. At hotels and private schools. I spent hours, days and weeks and soon 2 years cleaning toilets, hallways, classrooms, and penthouses and hotel rooms left unkept by bachelor parties, business travelers and teenagers.

I realized I was stuck in a migration cycle. And all I was doing was cleaning other peoples' mess.

I worked with Filipinos, Nepalese, Australians, Sri Lankans, Indians, Chinese, Taiwanese, Brazilians, Poles and Koreans. And the tolerance, I realized, for oppressive behavior among cleaners is high. I worked in two hotels and two private schools for different cleaning companies. At both hotels, managers felt entitled to shout and curse at staff, calling everyone to "use your brains". At one of my jobs, the cleaning company decided to sub-contract the cleaning manager fully aware that the sub-contractor would pay it's staff below minimum wage. In cash, to avoid leaving a paper trail. And we were instructed to not disclose to the school.

You mean to say you leave your family behind, move to another country just so you can clean someone else's mess, get shouted at and get underpaid? But cleaning is seen as a cause for greater good. I question what this means. Who is working? What for? Why? For whom? And which ideologies shape and are shaped in this process?

As my own experience illustrates, cleaning is a way that migrants finance their education and migration process in Australia. It is a way that people pay the bills and provide opportunities for themselves and their families. Meanwhile, they pay thousands of AUS\$ on tuition fee - more than double of local students - and on top of that spending thousands on visas. In Australia, migration and education industries is economics.

Cleaning as a means to pay the bills also signifies the cleaner's position in society when you consider that it is a means to "get ahead" and "move up". In the country that prides itself on being "the lucky country" where everyone has a "fair go" what does this mean when in actuality, people don't start at the same place. Cleaning becomes an act of servitude that is accompanied by an almost imposed sense of gratitude. "Be thankful to be here!" is implied.

During the two years of working as a cleaner, I used my phone to make sound recordings while I was cleaning. At the time, it was mostly to pass time and distract myself. But the repetitive nature of the audio recordings seem to capture the repetitive nature of cleaning and the greater physical and mental process. In work 37.5 150 and 1800 hrs, I wanted to give the cleaners a silent but strong presence in the space.