

WOMEN AND *KAFALA*: MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THE GULF

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Introduction

Labour migration is an integral part of the global economic system and has intensified in recent decades under the auspices of neoliberal restructuring. The contemporary proliferation of human mobility has intensified, not only due to human displacement by war and ecological disasters, but most significantly because of global capitalist economic restructuring and government-led development policies which have led to many states becoming increasingly reliant upon migrant workforces. For sending states, migrants also represent an important source of foreign exchange earnings through remittances. The sheer scale of transnational migration and its economic impact is staggering, with \$265 billion US sent to the Global South in remittances in 2007 (World Bank, 2008). The UN estimated in 2010 that around 214 million people lived outside their country of origin (United Nations, 2008; Goldring & Landolt, 2013). Host states benefit tremendously from temporary migrant labour which contributes to the production and maintenance of class, gender, and racial hierarchies, generating large profits for employers without requiring large social welfare investment on the part of the state.

The tensions and contradictions central to the production of citizenship, migrant precarity, and spatial reconfiguration inherent to globalization have provided a wealth of discussion in the field of migration scholarship and political economy. Indeed, the rise in human migration has occurred alongside the growth of neoliberal capitalism, and with it the growing demand for cheap, flexible sources of labour (Rygiel, 2010). Border regimes and immigration controls have facilitated the transition to increasingly irregularized and precarious movement, providing an almost infinite supply of vulnerable, temporary, and therefore cheap workers. The feminization of the global migrant workforce has also intensified under neoliberalism, with almost half of migrants being represented by women, and overwhelmingly in vulnerable

occupational and social positions (Arachchi, 2013). Occupying the intersections of race, class, and gender, migrant women have become important – yet highly exploited cogs in the machinery of neoliberal capitalist production.

While transnational labour migration occurs in every region of the world, the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) region is an example of perhaps the most extreme articulation of migrant precarity. The GCC countries are unique in their social, political, and economic makeup, with extremely high numbers of temporary foreign workers. Indeed, the World Bank reports that in 2013, there were 247.2 million migrants in the Gulf Cooperation Countries economic region (World Bank, 2016). The Gulf countries' very formation both as states and as integrated regional economic units has been predicated upon high-density low-skilled and low-wage labour migrants from developing countries in South and South-East Asia. Tracing the development of the *kafala* system of labour migration in the Gulf Cooperation Countries, this exploratory paper will engage with literature which argues that the very production of the *kafala* system facilitates states' desires to produce labour market segmentation, seek political loyalty of citizens, and ensure a supply of low-wage work to keep up with the extreme rate of development and capital accumulation in the region. Expanding upon these discussions of migrant exploitation, labour market segmentation, and class formation with a gender lens, I aim to focus more specifically on the role of migrant women's domestic care work in the GCC region. Using a feminist historical materialist analysis of the social reproduction performed by migrant domestic workers, the paper attempts to locate migrant women's role in GCC state and capital class formation. This framework is also helpful in contextualizing the situations of migrant women within the wider global political economic system, which is dependent on their gendered and racialized exploitation. Ultimately, this paper provides a two-pronged argument indicating, first, that the

kafala system exacerbates migrant workers' experiences of vulnerability in the Gulf states and second, that the labour and particular vulnerability of migrant domestic workers are necessary for capital accumulation within the Gulf.

The preceding analysis will be developed in three parts. First, to provide context, there will be a discussion of migration in the Gulf region, specifically outlining the recent historical development of *kafala*. Next, the paper discusses migrant precarity in the Gulf, specifically explaining its utility to the production and accumulation of capital. Lastly, this paper will examine the role of migrant women in the Gulf who work as domestic workers. It delves into their specific contributions to the reproduction of class social relations in the Gulf and labour regeneration in their home countries.

Migration in the Gulf Region

The Gulf states of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman are countries characterized by enormous flows of temporary labour which is central to each society's economic and social organisation, in addition to the region as a whole (Hanieh, 2014). *Table 1* illustrates the proportion of migrant workers to the total population in each of the Gulf states. Of particular note is the high numbers of migrant workers in the private sector workforce, which are overwhelmingly dominated by imported labour (Hanieh, 2010).

Table 1: Migrant population in the Gulf Cooperation Countries (Hanieh, 2010)

Country	Migrant-worker population	Migrant-worker population as percentage of total population		Proportion of migrant-worker population female	Migrant-workers as percentage of total labour-force	Migrant-workers as percentage of public-sector workforce	Migrant-workers as percentage of private-sector workforce
Year	2005	1995	2005	2005	2005	2001	Various
Saudi Arabia	6,360,730	24.7	25.9	30.1	50.2	11.2	95 (2004)
Kuwait	1,668,991	58.7	62.1	31.0	80.3	24	78 (2005)
UAE	3,211,749	70.5	71.4	27.8	91.3	55.5	98 (2004)
Bahrain	295,461	37.5	40.7	30.9	58.8	9.3	79
Qatar	636,751	77.2	78.3	25.8	85.9	33.9	83
Oman	627,571	26.3	24.4	20.9	79	21.9	N.A.

Source: <http://esa.un.org/migration>; Shamsi 2006, pp. 61, 63; Shah 2006, p. 6.

The vast majority of these workers come from South Asia (Gardner, 2012; Hanieh, 2010; Hanieh, 2014; Naufal, 2011; Willoughby, 2006), and are overwhelmingly represented in low-skilled, low-wage work in the construction, manufacturing, agriculture, and domestic sectors (AlShehabi, 2015; Hanieh, 2010; Hanieh 2014; Naufal, 2011; Willoughby, 2006). Not surprisingly, due to the sheer scale of the expatriate population and remittance flows, Asian sending states' economies rely heavily on labour exported to the Gulf (Hanieh, 2014; Khalaf, AlShehabi, & Hanieh, 2015).

The *kafala* system of migration which governs sponsorship relationships between citizen employers and migrant workers in the Gulf states ensures migrant insecurity and restricts access to citizenship rights for migrant workers. *Kafala* is a sponsorship system whereby Gulf nationals (citizens of the host state) have responsibility over their sponsored migrant worker, power which is handed down from the government (Gardner, 2010). Yasin Kakande (2015)

explains that the word *Kafala* and *Kafeel*, which means sponsor, come from the Arabic *Ka Fa La* “meaning ‘guardian’, ‘vouch for’, or ‘take responsibility for’ someone” (2015, 9). He elaborates that the term originates from the Bedouin traditions of extending shelter, food, and hospitality to strangers (Kakande, 2015). The Quran discusses *kafala* in some sections, and translations consider the word to mean ‘in care of’, referencing a person taking care of another (Kakande, 2015). Today’s understanding of *kafala* has turned away from this understanding of care, generosity, and hospitality, instead representing a migration system characterized by extreme exploitation and abuse of migrants. “The state ‘delegates’ the authority needed for a migrant to enter the country to the local employer, who thus becomes the owner of the work permit” (Dito, 2015, 81). Dito (2015) describes this relationship as being unique in comparison to other immigration policies, which are usually characterized by a more direct relationship between the state and migrant.

Through this delegation of power in *kafala* regimes, the state authorizes citizens to take on the responsibility for surveillance, policing, and administrating over migrant workers (Dito, 2015; Gardner 2010; Longva, 1997). The state downgrades the responsibility for regulation and enforcement of migrants directly onto citizens who become liable for any violations (Kakande, 2015). In this way, private citizens in the Gulf are invited into controlling means of movement by the state, similar to what Torpey (1998) describes as ‘sheriff’s duties’ – the policing or surveillance of migrants performed by citizens as proxies of the state. A migrant worker’s visa granting them the right to enter and work in the country is tied to the sheriff/sponsor, or *kafeel*, creating a power dynamic whereby the employer-sponsor has enormous latitude to control and often exploit their employee (Gardner, 2010). The employer has control over the worker not only in its capacity as employer, but also as representative of the state (Longva, 1997). The employer

thus has the power to dictate the migrant's ability to enter the country, renew their visa, change employers, and return home (Dito, 2015). Often employers confiscate workers' passports upon arrival, further deepening dependency and control (Gardner, 2010a). The literature describes how this power dynamic overwhelmingly can lead to abuse and harassment of workers, failure to pay wages, and unsafe working conditions (Dito, 2015; Gardner, 2010; Gardner 2014). This imbalance of power is comparable to Anderson (2010) and Fudge's (2012) descriptions of how temporary migrants in Canada and the UK are at the behest of a single employer for authorization to work and remain in the country, and thus are also extremely vulnerable to abuse. The *kafala* temporary migration system is similar to, albeit arguably more a more extreme articulation of, state produced vulnerability in other states, in this way.

Andrew M. Gardner (2010) explains that while employers often abuse and exploit migrant workers who work for them within these arrangements, this proclivity is not simply to be explained by unethical employers at the individual level. While many workers in the GCC do indeed experience horrific abuse, seizure of passports, and lost wages, Gardner (2010) explains that the problem is more nuanced. Abuse and exploitation of migrants is in fact the articulation of the structural violence of the entire *kafala* system itself (Gardner, 2010). Comparing *kafala* migrants' experiences to a form of contract slavery, Gardner (2010) argues that there are four mechanisms through which this structural violence occurs: "the transnational character of the contracts and debt incurred in their sojourn to the Gulf, the control of the guest worker's passport by the *kafeel*, the linguistic and cultural barriers that limit their strategic responses to the dilemmas they face, and the spatial aspects of this system of dominance" (2010, 211). Gulf migrant workers' precarity and dependence on employers is in fact a product of the state's institutional distance, both spatially and temporally, from the migrant (Gardner, 2010). Workers

experience large barriers when attempting to access bureaucratic bodies and consular assistance due to language, work locations, and extremely long working hours (Gardner, 2010). Instead, workers are encouraged to deal directly with their employers or an emissary of their *kafeel*, ensuring space between the migrant and the state (Gardner, 2010). Thus, workers are very often left at the mercy of employers who may overwork them, inflict physical and sometimes sexual abuse, or withhold wages and passports (Gardner, 2010).

A multitude of actors have objected to *kafala* in a variety of Gulf states as well as the region as a whole, arguing that the abuses endured by migrants and the restrictions on citizenship rights that they faced are human rights violations. International human rights organizations like Human Rights Watch and Free the Slaves have characterized migrants in the *kafala* system as enduring “modern-day slavery” (Silvey, 2016, 37). International organizations such as the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations have pushed for reform and protections for vulnerable migrant workers (Gamburd, 2010), and media outlets have shed an international spotlight on the regions transgressions, most recently with Qatar’s successful World Cup bid and impending construction (Kakande, 2015).

In addition, there is opposition to *kafala* within the Gulf states. Gulf nationals who oppose *kafala* draw attention to its exploitative nature and argue that it should be abolished. However, most who hold these views do not widely publicize their beliefs because of a political climate that disavows contentious discussion or open dissent of the political elites (Kakande, 2015). In fact, the *kafala* ‘lobby group’ has managed to persuade the majority of Gulf citizens, and especially the ruling elite, that they have much to gain from the *kafala* system and the structural violence it enables. Despite various calls ranging from reform to abolition, many in the GCC states dismiss these accounts of abuse, violence, and exploitation as exaggeration,

instead focusing on the economic benefits local citizens and businesses have enjoyed as a result of *kafala* (Kakande, 2015).

Gardner's (2010) description of the state-enabled and state-produced structural violence are complicated by systems of transnational debt and geographies of dependence and dominance. The conditions that enable Gulf states to rely on a seemingly infinite labour supply from countries in South and South East Asia are intertwined with transnational systems of economic reliance and dependency relations. Harsha Walia discusses this when she addresses global systems of dependency and the impact of migration on developing societies: "border controls are deployed against those whose recourse to migration results from the free licence afforded to capital to ravage entire economies and communities in the global South" (2010, 73). Both displaced migrant workers and home communities and governments are involved and impacted by these dependent relations which situate receiving states like the GCC countries in a position of economic power relative to the Indian sub-continent and other areas from which workers migrate. Due to booming oil- and capital-rich economies, poor, low-class, and often low-caste workers from Global South states are able to access jobs in GCC countries offering wages that are higher than what is within their reach at home (Gardner, 2010).

However, in reality the financial outlook is often less optimistic for many workers, as wages are not always paid as contractually promised, a fact which is often conveniently not shared with migrants until their arrival in the host country (Gardner, 2012). Gardner (2010; 2012) also explains how often, for a worker from many poor communities in South and South East Asia, the decision to leave for the Gulf is not made individually. For many workers, success in the Gulf is financially life-changing for their immediate and extended family. Many families go into debt to afford the cost of sending a worker overseas by mortgaging property or selling

family heirlooms, putting their entire financial hopes upon the migrant's promised wages (Gardner, 2010). Migrant workers, in many instances, are balancing their own aspirations to seek economic opportunity as well as the pressure to keep an entire family afloat financially in the face of debt and structural poverty, heightening experiences of vulnerability and the weight of precarity faced during the transition to the host state.

Moreover, migrant workers are the subject of what Gardner (2010; 2012) calls the migration industry. This is an interconnected system of multiple actors that seek to accumulate profit from a worker's labour and migration. The industry can include individuals and groups such as private money lenders in a migrant's home community, systems of labour brokers, state-run migration and labour agencies, *kafeels*, and their agents (Gardner, 2010; 2012). Anna Agathangelou discusses how these multitudes of actors "are institutions that simultaneously, albeit in a contradictory manner, control the methods and pedagogies that circulate about migrant working-class communities within its boundaries to support the fight to lower the cost of labor power" (2004, 39). These actors not only facilitate recruitment, placement, employment, and regulation of migrants, but also function as arms of the state actively taking part in the social reproduction and production of capital through migrant labour (Agathangelou, 2004).

Through the lens of Gardner's (2010; 2012) concept of structural violence, we are able to understand the multi-levelled, structural factors that both motivate a worker to migrate to the Gulf, and enables their exploitation and oppression within the migration industry:

Certainly the calculations in the migrants' heads often involve money, debt, and prevailing wage levels, but the conditions they face in their home countries are often connected to socio-political forces that spill outside a strictly economic calculus. The concept of structural violence provides a more theoretically comprehensive angle on the

forces driving out-migration – the widespread economic penury connected to decades of structural adjustment, for example, can be conceptually conflated with the violence and conflict that inevitably produces quasi-refugees dependent upon migration and the remittances it produces. (Gardner, 2012, 47)

Agathangelou (2004) supports this structural analysis, discussing how many migrant women from countries such as the Philippines, India, and Sri Lanka often seek a living abroad due to their governments' inability to provide social services and other protections due in large part to International Monetary Fund and World Bank debts imposed through structural adjustment policies and other aid packages. She articulates that while it is important not to erase the agentic choices enacted by migrant workers, many women leave their home and seek work abroad “against a restrictive backdrop of structural sexism and racism” (Agathangelou, 2004, 61). Migrant earnings sent home as remittances are a major source of foreign currency income for sending states in South Asia, and create a “relationship of mutual dependency” (Khalaf, 2015, 47). Willoughby shares how in Kerala, “remittances have sharply raised per capita income above per capita gross domestic product” (2006, 41). In 2012, the estimated value of remittances from the Gulf globally was US \$83 billion, a figure that doesn't even take into full account the use of informal remittance channels (Khalaf, 2015). With migrant labour playing such a crucial role in the economic development of many states in the Global South, temporary labour flows are eagerly accessed, promoted, and encouraged by these states, albeit with varying levels of engagement amongst states in the periphery. The Philippines, for instance, has actively engaged in labour export as a state development program since the 1970s as a strategy to manage the impact of globalization and global systems of economic dependency (Rodriguez, 2010). The state actively develops international labour markets for their workers, mobilizing global

discourses of gendered racialized workers to market its workforce in a desirable manner to global employers (Rodriguez, 2010). As a result, Filipina migrant domestic workers in the Gulf are viewed desirably by Gulf employers, usually fetching higher wages and working in richer households than workers from South Asian and African states (Fernandez & de Regt, 2014). In contrast to the approach taken by the Philippines, the Sri Lankan state is fairly new and undeveloped in its promotion of migrant workers at the state level. Still, Sri Lankan state-led market liberalization policies introduced in the 1970s have certainly impacted poor workers, influencing many to seek work abroad (Frantz, 2013). While sending state involvement in migrant labour brokerage varies enormously between national contexts, sending states remain implicit in supporting the Gulf capital class' profit maximization through facilitating temporary migration flows to the Gulf.

The Production of Migrant Precarity in the Gulf

Hanieh's Khaleeji-Capital: Capital Class Formation in the Gulf

Adam Hanieh's work on Gulf societies' economic development is extremely helpful in developing a framework of understanding how labour migration in the region fits into larger systems of accumulation and capital class development. Hanieh (2010) asserts that GCC capital accumulation dominates not only the Middle East region, but also that it also influences trade, economic development, and labour for many neighbouring countries in Africa and South Asia. Even more astoundingly is the extent to which Gulf capital is intertwined with (and supports) US power, and is integral to the functioning of the global economic system (Hanieh, 2010).

Having demonstrated the scale of migrant labour in this region, what impact have GCC temporary labour flows had on the development and maintenance of the capital class in the Gulf and in global settings? In order to understand the economic, political, and social significance of the imported labour force to the contemporary Gulf integrated economy, this paper now turns to an examination of the emergence of class formation throughout these societies. Ultimately, this section will demonstrate that through the various value-flows within the Gulf-region, which include the oil industries, a specific set of social relations have emerged which have both enabled and have become dependent on high levels of temporary labour migration.

The Gulf region is home to the world's largest sources of crude oil, a commodity central to the entire global economy (AlShehabi, 2015). Many approaches that explain the Gulf societies' focus on rentier-state analyses over-emphasizes the role of oil within the economy. What this focus on oil misses is the understanding that "the significance given to that commodity [in this case oil] by the social relations within which it is embedded and thereby given meaning" (Hanieh, 2010, 38). Oil extraction has certainly had an enormous impact on the Gulf societies, but for the purposes of this paper and its examination of migration, it is more useful to examine this through the lens of the accompanying social relations which have enabled and maintained these levels of accumulation.

Gulf oil, one of the key inputs of the world's 'circulating constant capital,' has become central to the global system of consumption and accumulation, especially since the end of the Second World War (Hanieh, 2010). Since that time, US involvement in the region has been prominent, and the Gulf region certainly remains key to the maintenance of US hegemony today (Hanieh, 2010). At the same time, there have been significant developments since the first half of the 20th Century in the way extraction, production, industrialization, and internationalisation of

the region has progressed. While US involvement in the region remained strong, the post-war period also saw a significant amount of decolonial movements across the Global South, and the Gulf is no exception (Hanieh, 2010). Decolonization led to the nationalization of oil production capabilities in the gulf, and today oil extraction and production is nationalized throughout the region (AlShehabi, 2015, Hanieh, 2010; Hanieh, 2014). Once this occurred, states were able to share revenues with the ruling class and families close to the ruling royal family, rather than being directed out of the country to foreign companies and colonial enterprises, as was previously done (Hanieh, 2010). The accumulation throughout these dominant families has progressed into the formation of giant corporations with an economic interest at all points of the circuits of capital, from production, to retail sale, and finance (Hanieh, 2010).

The productive capacity of the GCC is not limited to only oil and hydrocarbon extraction and production. Cheap energy prices have unlocked a number of other industries which are energy intensive, namely the production of aluminium, steel, and cement (Hanieh, 2010). These industries have proved to be another major source of profit for Gulf capital. These also bolster the local construction markets both for retail ventures and for building of industrial infrastructure (Hanieh, 2010). Indeed, construction activities related to the oil are now central to the maintenance of Gulf capital, with apartment buildings, malls, and power plants being built at a massive scale. In 2006, projects in the region reached a value of US \$1 trillion, representing a third of the world's financing (Hanieh, 2010).

In comparison, other industries such as the manufacturing of consumer goods are not as dominant. Instead, these goods tend to be imported internationally (Hanieh, 2010). Foreign imports have enabled another element of capital class formation with the opportunity for local

agents to act as importers and distributors, and the development of retail malls and hypermarkets – “GCC malls generate around US \$30 billion in sales annually (Hanieh, 2010, 50).

In addition to accumulation amassed through the Gulf commodity circuit, financial flows to and out of the region have been significant since the 1970s. Petrodollars which flowed through the Gulf beginning in this period were central to the financial circuits in much of the developed Western markets, including supporting the Eurodollar and US-dollar (Hanieh, 2010). So not only has the development of oil and other industries in the Gulf been central to the formation and maintenance of capital in the region, it has been critical to the maintenance of foreign capital and the global economic markets, but in particular to US power.

These major sources of capital accumulation have been critical to the formation of the capital class in the Gulf region. These are what Adam Hanieh (2010) calls *Khaleeji-capital*. The creation of an integrated Gulf economic space, with the associated institutional restructuring, has further entrenched the power and reach of *Khaleeji-capital* across the region (Hanieh, 2010). Such restructuring included the establishment of ‘national treatment’ without taxation for goods and services produced across the member states, unified external tariffs, a common labour market, integration of capital markets and financial regulations, and movement towards a single currency for all GCC countries (Hanieh, 2010; Sturm & Siegfried, 2005). Efforts to facilitate the greater mobility of capital across and throughout the Gulf has led to more opportunities for axes of *Khaleeji-capital* to consolidate accumulation flows throughout the region. Such *Khaleeji-capital* is unfettered by institutional frameworks and regulations in each state. In the other parts of the world, this kind of institutional restructuring has led to the ‘hollowing-out’ of the welfare state and the roll-back on social safety-net welfare spending, relocating the onus for social protection onto the household (Bakker, 2003; Bakker & Gill, 2003; Lebaron, 2015). The concern

is that this movement towards neoliberalism effectively weakens the relative autonomy of the state to capital while also weakening social protections and subsidies available to citizens. This has led to violent experiences of poverty for the working class, often articulated and intensified along the intersections of race and gender (Bakker, 2003).

Migrant Precarity

The relationship between capital, working class, state, and social spending in the Gulf is radically different than descriptions of Global North welfare state rollback. Hanieh (2010; 2014) argues that although the internationalisation of Gulf capital eases mobility and access to accumulation, this does not occur at the expense of the state, as it is precisely state power which enabled integration. While further exploration of the autonomy of the state to capital in the Gulf is outside the scope of this paper, it is important to note that restructuring and increased capital mobility in the Gulf has not led to rolling back of state subsidies and welfare state provisions, as in other parts of the world. Indeed, the provision of state-funded goods has been central to the maintenance of class formation of both *Khaleeji*-capital and the migrant working class. The extremely high representation of migrant workers in the labour markets of the Gulf region is not an accident, nor is it simply explained by attractive wage opportunities and a local workforce who simply will not perform low-skilled work. Instead, the very production of the *kafala* migration system revolved around an active state desire to produce labour market segmentation, seek political loyalty of citizens, and ensure a supply of low-wage work to keep up with the extreme rate of development and capital accumulation in the region.

Gulf states have used the provision of social goods – healthcare, housing, education – to Gulf national citizens only as a way to maintain political loyalty to the ruling families. In the postcolonial period, most migrant workers in the Gulf were of Arab origin and were specifically

from Palestine and Egypt. Solidarity movements in these two countries led to strikes, demonstrations, and uprising, which posed challenges to the dominant rule (Hanieh, 2010; Hanieh 2014; Naufal, 2011). By the 1970s, migrant labour force in the Gulf was overwhelmingly Arab, and was beginning to organize politically, influenced by Pan-Arabism, Arab nationalism, and socialist ideologies, leading to the development of various labour movements particularly in opposition to oil companies (AlShehabi, 2015). Strikes were common in this early period, with workers demanding fair wages and benefits in Bahrain and better living conditions and wages in Saudi Arabia. As well, there were strong labour movements and strikes waged by workers in the oil sector in Qatar and Kuwait (AlShehabi, 2015). Each of the states and the capital elite in the region were wary of this newfound political consciousness being imported by Palestinian, Egyptian, and Yemeni migrants and were quick to repress left-wing movements (AlShehabi, 2015; Khalaf, 2015), leading to a ‘spatial fix’ to this crisis and a realignment of the migrant working class (Hanieh, 2014).

The current state of Gulf citizenship, where the small minority of Gulf nationals have access to full political and economic citizenship, and the majority of migrant workers have access to none of these benefits nor substantive citizenship outside of *kafala* temporary visas, also corresponds to stark differences in the provision of social goods and labour segmentation. In order to quell the possibility of working class uprising in the future, each of the Gulf states instituted highly restrictive citizenship regimes. Citizenship was only extended to Gulf nationals who had access to large amount of social goods – healthcare, housing, education, among others (Hanieh, 2014). Accordingly, citizens moved into positions of highly paid jobs in the public sector (AlShehabi, 2015; Hanieh, 2010; Hanieh, 2014; Khalaf, 2015). As Kinninmont argues, “the legal, political, and economic construction of citizenship by Gulf regimes has been designed

partly to provide incentives for Gulf nationals to support the existing nations rather than being swayed by stronger pulls towards transnational Arab or Islamic identities” (2014, 29). Migration flows were directed away from the politically volatile Middle East region towards South Asia and the Indian sub-continent, with a massive population of un- and under-employed workers (Gardner, 2010b; Hanieh, 2014; Khalaf, 2015). At the same time, Gulf citizens have become so dependent on the ruling elites for all aspects of social and economic life that they are rendered politically impotent. They were completely discouraged from criticizing the state or engaging in any participatory democratic process (Khalaf, 2015). Gulf migrant workers’ experiences of non-citizenship are so extreme that they will never access any of the associated rights experienced by Gulf citizens. Furthermore, labour segmentation between citizen and migrant workers and delegated migration responsibilities to the *kafeel* further entrench differentiation and alienation between citizens and guest workers as well as providing motivation for the surveillance and policing of migrants on the part of citizens (Hanieh, 2014).

The migrant worker phenomenon in the Gulf is an expression of a global trend at its most extreme. Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter (2014) explain how international migration has been intensified by processes of globalization and economic restructuring, which has significant impacts for vulnerable migrants (often from the Global South), and the international labour market. In recent decades, there has been a shift towards labour market segmentation whereby low-wage, low-skilled labour is increasingly performed by migrants (Bloch, et al., 2014). This segmentation has been discussed at length in the literature, and has been demonstrated not to be an accidental or unintended consequence of globalization, but is rather actively produced and created by a multiplicity of actors – just as labour market segmentation in the Gulf is actively produced through state policy in those countries. States actively facilitate low-wage migrant

workers entering the country to enable maximum profit accumulation and economic growth without the associated public social costs that come with legal status (Bloch, et al., 2014; Rygiel, 2010). “Illegality’ and/or the precariousness of immigration status are policy constructs, the result of a drive to regulate immigration in a global environment, not an *a priori* or objective condition” (Bloch et al, 2014, 21). Immigration policies ensure ‘irregularity’ of migrant status by creating near impossible trajectories towards obtaining legal status, and maintaining multiple state-regulated articulations of non-citizenship (Bloch et al., 2014). DeGenova explains how irregular status maintains an easily exploited, low-wage migrant workforce:

It is precisely their distinctive legal vulnerability, their putative ‘illegality’ and official ‘exclusion’, that inflames the irrepressible desire and demand for undocumented migrants as a highly exploitable workforce – and thus ensures their enthusiastic importation and subordinate incorporation. (2010, 38-39)

Migrants in the gulf, exploited and excluded from most spaces of civil society and denied access to citizenship, are thus too produced into a highly exploitable workforce for the Gulf economies. Bridget Anderson (2010) and Judy Fudge’s (2012) work surrounding the links between precarious migrant status and precarity in the labour force are additionally illuminating. Immigration policy and categories of entrance function both to regulate how many migrant workers enter and exit the country, but also exist to shape labour relations and associated precarity experienced by many migrant workers. As seen in the *kafala* system, migrants are restricted from participating in the labour market based on rigid non-citizenship categories of entrance, in this case as temporary guest workers, and are not able to freely compete or participate in Gulf labour markets without restrictions and limitations. Anderson explains that:

Immigration controls function both as a tap regulating the flow of labour, but also, it will be argued, as a mould shaping certain forms of labour. Through the creation of categories of entrant, the imposition of employment relations and construction of institutionalised uncertainty, immigration controls work to form types of labour with particular relations to employers and labour markets. They combine with less formalised migratory processes to help produce ‘precarious workers’ that cluster in particular jobs and segments of the labour market. (2010, 301)

Fudge (2012) agrees that immigration controls are extremely facilitative in creating precarious workers and shifting towards precarious employment norms for migrant workers.

In the Gulf through *kafala*, we see how migrant workers are funneled into work that is unstable, that makes them vulnerable, and that lacks protections (Anderson, 2010; Fudge, 2012). Anderson (2010) explains that the very temporal limits on many categories of non-citizenship have been shown to increase a migrant’s willingness to forego social attachments or other workplace protections they may have expected from a longer-term arrangement. Migrants who know they are only able to work in a country for a limited amount of time may perceive a job with little protections, opportunity for career progression, or security, more favourably over the short-term (Anderson, 2010). Thus, employers’ tendency to exploit a temporary migrant or other category of non-citizen is facilitated by the very limited temporality of their work permit, as granted by the state. Anderson (2010) identifies this strategy used by numerous immigration regimes as one which seeks to subvert claims-making on the part of the migrant: “states attempt to enforce temporariness and limit the length of stay of migrants in order to ensure that they do not develop the opportunity for such claims” (Anderson, 2010; Ruhs & Martin, 2008).

Anderson’s observations support our understanding of the historical development of *kafala*

migration with its focus on Asian sending states over those from politically stable Middle Eastern regions. Ultimately, the consensus within much of the literature is that immigration policy actively produces migrants with irregular or non-citizenship status, excluding them from legal and social protections and institutionalizing their precarity and uncertainty to ensure they remain working in low-wage and insecure jobs (Anderson, 2010; Fudge, 2012).

By limiting migrants' access to citizenship, and the right to claim rights, the state actively creates a pool of temporary and extremely vulnerable migrant workers who remain part of a low-wage and highly expendable labour force. In sum, Harsha Walia puts it best:

The denial of legal citizenship through temporary migrant worker programmes ensures legal control over the disposability of labourers, which, in turn, embeds exploitability of labour as an inherent feature of such programmes. Migrant worker programmes allow for capital to access cheap labour that exists under precarious conditions, the most severe of which is the condition of being deportable. This assures a pool of highly exploitable labour, excluded from the minimal protections of the welfare state, and readily disposed of without consequence. (2010, 73).

Migration flows directed towards South and East Asia benefit from workers' extreme relative poverty and sending states' massive population of un- and under-employed workers (Gardner 2012; Hanieh, 2014; Khalaf, 2015). In addition to this, the *kafala* system of non-citizenship produces and maintains uncertainty and vulnerability, akin to what has been described by migration scholars such as Bloch et al. (2014), DeGenova (2010), Anderson (2010), Walia (2010) and Fudge (2012). Thus, it is clear that the Gulf states actively create and maintain distinctions between categories of citizenship and non-citizenship (through Torpey's (1998) *kafala* sheriff's), and ensure migrant workers' extreme vulnerability of status and the

‘unfreedom’ of their labour (Anderson, 2010; Bloch, et al., 2015; DeGenova, 2010; Fudge, 2012; and Walia, 2010).

Migrant Domestic Workers in the Gulf

The Gulf region’s reliance on poor migrant workers is not simply explained by greater opportunities for higher-waged work, nor of a lack of desire for Gulf workers to perform low-skilled and low-waged work. Instead, the very state formation of all six nations systematically created an extremely limited citizenship regime with extensive associated benefits to facilitate the process of capital accumulation. By institutionalizing migrant precarity and influencing discourse necessitating extreme social hierarchization between migrants and citizens, elites have been able to manipulate class relations in a way that ensures the un-challenged loyalty of citizens, who benefit from capital accumulation. Labour segmentation between citizen and migrant workers and delegated migration responsibilities to the *kafeel* further entrench differentiation and alienation between citizens and guest workers and provide motivation for the surveillance and policing of migrants on the part of citizens.

Not as widely explored are the gendered relations involved in this process of class and state formation. We know that the majority of migrant workers to the Gulf are men, with the exception of domestic workers or housemaids, who are overwhelmingly women (Hanieh, 2014; Longva, 1997; Naufal & Genc, 2012). Capital accumulation associated with the productive industries in the Gulf, including oil extraction and production, construction, and manufacturing, fundamentally rest on the low-waged temporary migrant workers. But of equal importance to capital accumulation is the reproductive role of low-waged, women of colour from the Indian

sub-continent and the Southeast Asian region who perform roles of caregiving, housework, and sex work. This section will argue that social reproduction work performed by poor, racialized migrant women in positions of domestic work in the Gulf is ultimately necessary to the production of capital, the maintenance of accumulation in the region, and the reproduction of the next generation of migrant labour.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that domestic work has grown significantly as a sector since 1995 to 2010 (ILO, 2013), with at least 67.1 million workers performing domestic work globally, 11.5 million of which are migrant workers (Tayah, 2016). Women are over-represented amongst migrant domestic workers, and the ILO reports that 83% of the world's domestic workers are women (ILO, 2015). Domestic work represents 5.6% of total employment in the Middle East as a whole, but these rates are much higher in Gulf countries, with 12.8% in Bahrain in 2009, 12.8% in the UAE in 2008, and 21.9% in Kuwait in 2005 (ILO, 2013). Additionally, a large portion of migrant domestic workers hail from South and Southeast Asian countries, notably Sri Lanka, India, the Philippines, and Indonesia (Shah, 2008). In Kuwait, the number of migrant domestic workers increased by 66% from 1995 to 2005 (ILO, 2013). Saudi Arabia in particular is an important destination for migrant women, a massive employer of domestic workers (784,500 in 2009) and paid domestic work represent 47.1% of women's total employment in that country (ILO, 2013). Finally, the ILO reports that 61% of all women migrant workers in the Arab states are domestic workers (Tayah, 2016).

Care work is overwhelmingly performed in private homes in the Gulf, and is divided based on gender, with men undertaking tasks like gardening and driving (especially in Saudi Arabia where women cannot legally drive), and women performing cooking, cleaning, and other care tasks coded for women (Tayah, 2016). Domestic workers' educational level is often very

low (Longva, 1997), perhaps with the exception of Filipina migrant domestic workers who are typically better educated (ILO, 2013). Longva (1997) writes that the domestic sector in Kuwait has historically been unregulated as work takes place in private households. Only recently have human rights NGOs and international organizations like the ILO pushed for greater oversight, but bilateral agreements with sending states are often ignored and fail to meet international labour standards (Murray, 2012). Like all other categories of migrant employment, domestic workers in the Gulf are subject to *kafala* sponsorship. Domestic workers are arguably among the most vulnerable migrant workers in the Gulf, performing work directly in the private home of their *kafeel* and generally exempt from attempted *kafala* reforms or labour protections (Murray, 2012; Silvey, 2016). Longva explains that the lack of *kafala* regulation of the domestic sector in Kuwait stems from understandings of the ‘private’ nature of domestic work performed in the home, and traditions of sexual segregations therein: “in this private context, the implementation of the law’s requirements about adequate treatment of the workers, their right to one day’s rest per week, to holidays, yearly home-leave, and so on, were left entirely to the discretion of the employer” (1997, 92). This is confirmed by Bina Fernandez and Marina de Regt (2014), who observe that domestic workers across the Gulf region are easily exempted from regulation and inspection due to the private site of the household where the domestic work relationship is undertaken: “the employment of paid domestic workers within households presents some difficulties for the consideration of the employer ‘s home as a workplace, as it is not ‘public’ in the way other workplaces are. While the home is the workplace for the domestic worker, it is the private sphere of the employee” (Fernandez & de Regt, 2014, 10).

Institutional supports available for migrant domestic workers in the Gulf are even more lacking compared to their counterparts in other sectors. Domestic workers who are not

adequately remunerated in a timely manner, those who are overworked, and those who experience wide ranges of abuse at the hands of their employers are often left with few options (Longva, 1997; Murray, 2012). With most sponsor/employers confiscating passports, and with limited access to embassy and NGO support, many women are faced with the impossible choice of remaining in their current employment arrangement, or absconding and finding other work illegally (Longva, 1997). In March 2017, a disturbing video went viral online internationally of an Ethiopian domestic worker hanging from a seventh-floor window, pleading with her Kuwaiti employer who simply filmed and watched (BBC, 2017). Murray (2012) recounts the story of an Indonesian domestic worker who was killed by beheading in Saudi Arabia in 2011 for reportedly killing her abusive employer after being told she could not return home. In this case, Indonesia issued a ban on migration to Saudi Arabia for work, but a few months later, Saudi Arabia retaliated and banned visas to domestic workers from Indonesia and the Philippines, citing the decision to explore labour channels in countries with much cheaper labour, including Nepal, Vietnam, and some African states (Murray, 2012).

Thus, while many call upon sending states to protect migrant workers in the Gulf, they are often at the behest of host countries for a number of reasons. Murray explains that “would-be migrant workers who stayed in their home countries due to the bans missed out on generating remittances that could fuel their countries’ economies and feed their families” (2012, 463). In 2010, the year before Indonesia’s proposed moratorium, migrant workers remitted an estimated \$440 billion globally (World Bank, 2011). Other states like Sri Lanka have been extremely hesitant to advocate for domestic workers’ rights in the Gulf through diplomatic channels, fearful that host states will turn elsewhere for cheaper workers and eliminate a precious form of foreign exchange income, as in the case of Indonesia and Saudi Arabia (Murray, 2012). Michele R.

Gamburd echoes this observation when she notes that: “as a debtor and a developing nation, Sri Lanka has little status and power in the international hierarchy of nations and its diplomats operate within these pre-existing power relations when crafting intergovernmental arrangements and protecting its citizens abroad” (2010, 78). She attests that in the case of Sri Lanka, government officials very often acquiesce to the interests of GCC states out of a fear of losing out on economic opportunities (Gamburd, 2010). She identified cases where Sri Lankan officials visited consular offices in Kuwait and UAE and reports which indicated that in the future government may value building positive relationships with employers over working conditions for its citizens abroad (Gamburd, 2010). In this way, sending states’ need to build and enhance economic opportunities and business relationships can often directly conflict with protecting their own migrant workers’ health and livelihoods (Gamburd, 2010; Murray, 2012).

Gamburd (2010) argues further that the ability of governments, NGOs, and workers to organize and contest exploitative working conditions is largely determined by the structures of the host state. While workers can organize politically in Hong Kong, and governments and NGOs are active negotiators in European labour markets, the lack of political freedoms afforded to migrant workers in GCC countries largely hampers the agency and ability of foreign actors at all levels to create substantive change or advocate for labour protections without retaliation.

Gamburd insists then that:

The institutions with the most power to protect Sri Lankan migrant workers are the governments in GCC countries – bodies that benefit from cheap, exploitable labor, and have no democratic obligations to these foreign nations. This situation reflects the existing hierarchy among nations; it also reflects the expectation that a sovereign nation will regulate

its own labor market and labor laws – an expectation that persists despite the increasingly transnational character of labor. (2010, 86)

GCC governments are the ultimate locus of power at the macro level and have enormous interests invested in limiting *kafala* reform or instituting labour protections for migrant workers.

While Gulf governments have been persuaded to make limited reforms, and allow minimal labour protections for certain sectors of migrant workers in recent years, domestic workers have largely been omitted from these discussions. For example, Rachel Silvey discusses how domestic workers in the UAE were excluded from reforms to that country's *kafala* system which allowed greater flexibility of employment, “releasing laborers from some of most draconian aspects of contemporary labor control in the UAE” (2016, 37). Instead, domestic workers in that country still face “physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, inadequate food and living conditions, limited freedom of mobility, underpayment or non-payment of wages, and overwork” (Silvey, 2016, 37). Domestic workers are not required to receive overtime pay in the UAE, and their employers are exempt from requirements to pay via direct deposit (Silvey, 2016). Across the region, there remains a hierarchy of domestic workers delineated by race and class, with Filipina and Indonesian workers deemed more desirable, making higher wages, and often working for upper-class families, and South Asian and African women working for poorer families, earning less (Fernandez & de Regt, 2014). Workers in the domestic sector do not have the legally protected right of freedom of communication, nor do they enjoy a minimum wage (Silvey, 2016).

Social Reproduction and Gulf Migration

Thus far, this paper has demonstrated the nature and purpose of state-constructed labour market segmentation in the Gulf which revolves around extreme exploitation and vulnerability of migrant labour for the formation and maintenance of capital. But what has not yet been discussed are the impacts of actively producing migrant women's extreme vulnerability and the unique role migrant domestic workers play in the production and reproduction of Gulf *Khaleeji* capital. This paper's prior discussion of the creation and maintenance of the *kafala* system has shown that migration is perhaps the most integral aspect of the Gulf economies, social relations, and capital class formation. Further, each individual Gulf government invests an enormous amount in state-funded social goods for Gulf nationals, which are integral to the maintenance of labour market segmentation, migrant labour vulnerability, and therefore to capital class formation and accumulation. What is missing from much of the literature, however, is a discussion of the reproductive role of migrant women of the social relations in the Gulf economies, as well as the reproduction of workers in their own sending households and communities.

In order to expand the analysis of Gulf migration to include the full impact of migrant women and to establish an understanding of social reproduction in these contexts, a feminist analysis is necessary. Scholars have varying definitions of social reproduction. Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill define social reproduction as the acts and labour constituting "biological reproduction, reproduction of labor power, and social practices connected to caring, socialization and the fulfillment of human needs" (2003, 4). They also note that social reproduction can include public policy and the provision of social welfare goods such as housing, education, and healthcare (Bakker & Gill, 2003) – goods provided by Gulf states to their citizens. Bakker and Silvey expand on this understanding by insisting that "domestic labour is necessary for the

reproduction of the labour force, and that capitalist production should therefore be understood as dependent upon the work carried out within the home” (2008, 2). Lise Vogel (2013) describes social reproduction as the reproduction of the conditions of production, which include reproduction of labour power, and of social relations of class (Farris, 2017). Crucially, social reproduction refers not only to that which enables the reproduction of the worker’s capacity to work, and capital’s capacity to accumulate, but also the reproduction of a future generation of workers (Farris, 2017). Bakker & Silvey, and Vogel’s emphases on the reproduction of the labour force and social relations of class are especially important, for without these, capitalist production could not continue to exist. Fundamentally, then, social reproduction including domestic work is *necessary* for capitalism. Finally, Susan Ferguson and David McNally advocate for “a multi-dimensional analysis which, while acknowledging the decisive role of waged-work and other monetized practices, situates these within a nexus of practices through which working-class life is produced and reproduced” (2015, 2). It is not possible to understand the relations of waged work and production without understanding the ways in which social reproduction makes this possible.

Social reproduction and the labour that goes alongside it is inherently gendered and much of this work occurs within the household (Farris, 2017; Vogel, 2013). Traditionally, this has been characterized by a spatial, temporal, and institutional separation between the unpaid care work or domestic labour performed in the home usually by women, and sites of capitalist production and accumulation (Vogel, 2013). In this way, care work involved in social reproduction within the household has often not been considered part of the productive process while separated from waged labour (Vogel, 2013). However, Sara Farris (2017) explains how neoliberalism has changed this articulation of social reproductive work since the late 1980s, where in western

societies it became routine for women to work for wages outside the home. Over the last thirty years, this phenomenon has created an enormous shift in the gender dynamics of the household, leading to a quickly increasing demand for these tasks to be outsourced to migrant women (Farris, 2017). As social reproductive work has historically been viewed as illegitimate or unimportant work which is unproductive to capital, it becomes typically low paid and performed now by racialized migrant women (Farris, 2017). Farris explains that:

Commodified social reproduction in fact not only follows the rules of genderism and the ‘sexual contract’ within the household, which establishes that women are still the subjects in charge of reproduction and care. It also follows the rules of the ‘racial contract’, according to which ethnic minorities and people of colour are still those who perform the least desirable and valued tasks in a society. (2017).

It is imperative then, that we now approach analyses of social reproduction not only with an aim to understand axes of gender relations and oppression within the household, society, and capitalist order, but also its intersections with racialized exploitation (Farris, 2017). Similarly, Ferguson and McNally explain that in the contemporary neoliberal global political economy which is characterized by a transnational labour market, it is imperative to locate our understandings of social reproduction within hierarchies of racism and imperialism which structure global capitalist relations; “we must conceive of the contemporary working class as formed in and through gendered *and* racialized relations” (2015, 12).

In the Gulf context, where women are less likely to work outside the home, the neoliberal trend of feminized migration for domestic work has similarly occurred. Bina Fernandez and Marina de Regt (2014) explain that migrant domestic workers “provide a substitute for the unwaged labor of women within households, allowing the latter to take up more remunerative

employment outside of the household, focus on quality time with her family, and/or enjoy a life of leisure” (2014, 10). Expressions of gendered *and* racialized social relations mean that migrant women from Asia and Africa perform work that is the most undervalued and exploited in the region. Anna Agathangelou (2004) explains that for many racialized women migrants who perform domestic work, their labour is not only commodified within an exploitative capitalist system which seeks to derive surplus value. In addition to this, they are seen to be the ‘properties’ of their employer, and in their subordinate subjectivities as migrant women of colour are commodified themselves (Agathangelou, 2004). From the vantage point of the global transnational labour market, when

states participate in the import of sex and domestic workers they both facilitate the production of their own socioeconomic and political power and that of their upper- and middle-class citizens, whose status is reproduced through the exploitation of the labor and personhoods of women from elsewhere in the peripheries. They actively participate in sustaining a social order that depends on the gendered, racialized, and sexualized exploitation of wage labor, that of migrant women, mostly from countries of the Third world (Agathangelou, 2004, 25)

Agathangelou (2004) is clear that while host states import the reproductive labour of migrant women create and sustain these conditions at the behest of capital, sending states too are complicit in their role in commodifying poor racialized women and their reproductive labour. Thus, when looking at *kafala* and the production of Gulf capital, we see that these economies depend and actively sustain global social orders that exploit and maintain the subordination of women of colour. Sending states like the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia participate in diplomatic relationships, bilateral agreements, and labour brokerage in different ways but are all

complicit in surrendering to neoliberalism's logic which demands that the commodification of poor racialized women. When workers and NGOs demand sending states like Sri Lanka intervene on the behalf of exploited, vulnerable, and abused migrant women, states hesitate because they rely on these very relations of commodified vulnerability. On the other hand, when countries invest enormous funds to skill and 'professionalize' migrant domestic workers, they are investing in the desirability and earning capacity of the product (Ferguson & McNally, 2015) – what Agathangelou (2004) calls the commodified migrant woman. Robyn Rodriguez conceptualizes the state's role in labour brokerage as using institutional and discursive measures to “mobilize its citizens and [send] them abroad to work for employers throughout the world while generating a ‘profit’ from the remittances” (2010, x). While manifested in a variety of ways, contemporary sending states invariably engage in neoliberal strategies of migrant commodification for economic gain.

The commodification of migrant women's domestic care work directly contributes to capital accumulation in the Gulf region, as well as to the maintenance of class relations. Nevertheless, much of the discussion surrounding production and accumulation in the region fails to take into account this type of gendered analysis. For example, Adam Hanieh (2010, 2014) writes extensively on the role of migrant labour in ensuring large-scale productive capacity, capital accumulation, and the growth of *Khaleeji* capital in the region, but his focus remains solely on the role of productive sectors dominated by migrant men like construction. High rates of development and accumulation in the Gulf is predicated on the extreme exploitation and vulnerability of low-wage migrant work, labour market segmentation, and a politically docile class of citizens. Yet it is confounding to note that much of the literature focussing on Gulf capital relations and production fail to take into account the integral role of migrant women in

maintaining and reproducing these social relations. Implicitly, the state is acknowledged as the site of social reproduction in the Gulf, as the provider of social goods, but migrant women are heavily intertwined in the capitalist system of accumulation, and their work “is expropriated for its surplus-value to generate profits for a social capitalist structure who reproduction depends on the strategies of exploitation, violence, and accumulation of profits as well as the social reproduction of power relations within those structures” (Agathangelou, 2004, 5). The logic of capital, and in turn each Gulf state, is invested in keeping wages low for all migrant labourers, with domestic workers being afforded the least protection because the purpose of their labour is not only to enable the reproduction of Gulf citizens through care work in the home, but to produce profits and surplus value (Agathangelou, 2004). Domestic workers enable and sustain the social relations which ensure Gulf citizens are separate and above the migrant working class, ensuring the reproduction of labour segmentation and social relations which create opportunities for large-scale capital accumulation.

The other side of migrant labour in the Gulf not extensively discussed is the reproduction of the migrant labour force itself. The restrictiveness of the *kafala* system not only ensures social separation between the citizens and migrants for surveillance and to ensure a docile exploitable labour force, but by restricting migrant access to citizenship and social goods, Gulf states are required to invest minimally in its labour force (Hanieh 2010; Ferguson & McNally, 2015). Some of the costs of reproducing this Gulf labour force **are** downloaded onto sending states who broker recruitment, bilateral labour agreements, and other aspects of the migration system including training programs and visa facilitation. For many migrants from developing countries, the remittances earned in the country of employment bolster household and community economies. In the global labour market, households exist transnationally, and remittances form

the basis of survival strategies for many (Ferguson & McNally, 2015). Migrants in the Gulf have little access to social services while they are working there, and send most of their earnings home as remittances to provide food, shelter, and education for the next generation of migrant worker (Ferguson & McNally, 2015). Because of the large scale of remittances – for instance, \$83 billion sent from the Gulf in 2012 (Khalaf, 2015) – sending states are encouraged to invest more resources into the commodified migrant worker even when they to lose migrants' potential labour power and thus do not experience returns on their social investments (Ferguson & McNally, 2015). As Arat Koc points out, migrant domestic workers are “workers whose social reproduction is not just privatized in the home but can be totally hidden with the economic, social and psychic costs transferred to a different location and state” (2006, 88).

Conclusion

Gulf capitalist production and accumulation, and thus the maintenance of *Khaleeji*-capital and global economic financial circuits, cannot reasonably be maintained without social reproduction, as this is the basis for the ongoing replication of institutions, processes, and frameworks, which enable proper functioning of capitalist accumulation (Bakker & Gill, 2003). Through this analysis, we see that the understanding of Gulf migrant labour is not a gender-neutral phenomenon, but is rather a structural process of racialized and gendered exploitation, actively engaged in by states, in order to solidify the reproduction of class and economic relations of production in the neoliberal era (Agathangelou, 2004; Bakker, 2003). Domestic workers enable upper and middle-class Gulf national women to pursue careers with children and ensure that their households are looked after (Agathangelou, 2004). Domestic work is useful and

indeed necessary in its efforts to reproduce capitalist social relations of power, and must complicate and nuance our understandings of Gulf class formation.

The *kafala* migrant worker is not only profitable as a cheap, exploitable resource from which a maximum surplus can be extracted, but one which ostensibly reproduces itself with little state investment. Migrant workers have been integral to the formation of the Gulf region as an economic powerhouse globally since the post-war period. By moving immigration and labour market policies towards the import of labour from developing countries outside of the Arab world which are characterized by deep structural poverty, GCC states have been able to ensure an almost infinite supply of poor and racialized labour. Global structures of economic dependence, race, and class are intensified by a set of social relations in the Gulf ensure the extreme vulnerability of migrant workers to their *kafeel* at the individual level, and to *Khaleeji* capital more broadly. Sending states, too, are intertwined even more deeply in relations of economic dependence as they pursue migration policies and bilateral agreements which intensify the scale of labour export as development strategies.

This paper has attempted to place the specific role of migrant women domestic workers in the accumulation of Gulf capital and maintenance of class social relations in the region. As many of the feminist political economist and feminist historical materialist scholars point out, analyses which attempt to capture the scale, scope, and nature of capital accumulation without applying a gender lens or giving thought to social reproduction fail to understand the entire scale of social relations involved. Furthermore, in an increasingly transnational global labour market characterized by neoliberal policies, our analyses must be not only cognizant of class and gender, but need to include the role of racialization and global relations of economic dependency. At the intersections of class, gender, and racialization, migrant domestic workers are perhaps the most

precariously situated in the Gulf labour market. Disposability is experienced acutely, as women of colour whose bodies are seen as replaceable commodities to be consumed, and who experience the least impactful institutional protection at all levels. Racialized migrant women are devalued not only due to the care work they perform, but most simply for existing at the intersections of class, gender, and race, they are subject to the most abject exploitation and extraction of value within the Gulf economic system.

The adoption of a feminist analysis involving the consideration of social reproduction alongside and essential to capital accumulation is important, but the discussion undertaken in this paper is not sufficient to understand the scope of migrant women's impact in Gulf economies. Many researchers interested in migration and care work are now looking to the Gulf to document women's experiences as domestic workers in GCC economies. Outside the scope of this paper is a discussion of the care chains involved in transnational households of migrant women in the Gulf. What other reproductive work is conducted transnationally to produce the migrant worker herself, and her own household and family abroad? Of particular interest and consequence to this discussion are the questions that arise about the labour organizing and protections for migrant domestic workers in the Gulf. Much of this paper has been concerned with the structural aspects of women's migration and domestic work in the GCC countries. With global capital relations articulated such that sending states, NGOs, and international organizations all have limited capacity to create substantive changes for Gulf migrants, what set of circumstances would enable a shift in power beyond agentive choices at the individual level? Clearly, there is limited traction with efforts at reform and organizing which aim to create change within the given system. Perhaps the answer to neoliberal migration systems and the exploitative logic of capitalism is counterhegemonic transnational organizing. Migrante International, the transnational Philippine

migrant workers' movement is a particularly successful example of this. Migrante were able to conduct successful political action in solidarity with Jennifer Dalquez, a domestic worker in the UAE (Lee-Brago, 2017), and Angelo de la Cruz, a migrant worker in Iraq, influencing the Philippine government to act on their behalf (Rodriguez, 2010). Mobilizing in direct contestation of their home states' neoliberal migration policies and exploitative working conditions in host countries, Migrante chooses to engage in transnational solidarity efforts with other radical movements rather than aligning themselves with capital, bureaucracy, or political institutions and actors (Rodriguez, 2010). Rodriguez speaks of Migrante's particular traction as an activist organization: "If Migrante calls for an end to migration, it is a call for the end of structural inequalities within and between states that effectively force people to migrate. It is full citizenship that Migrante women (and men) activists fight for. Indeed, it is a radical revisioning of citizenship based on a noncapitalist order" (2010, 151). This is perhaps at the heart of future possibilities to contest *kafala*, and indeed migration structures more tangibly going forward. Confronting the contradictions of capitalism and neoliberalism that enable migrant women's subordination and extreme vulnerability will require direct contestation by grassroots, transnational mobilization.

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