

**Critical reflections on Immigration in Saudi Arabia**

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**Introduction**

Demographically, Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman) have undergone one of the most rapid population growths in the world, not as a result of the growth in the indigenous population, but rather by the influx of foreign workers to the region (Kapiszewski: 2006, De Bel-air: 2013). Also, Saudi Arabia is the second country after India to host the largest numbers of foreign-born persons in 2000 (UN: 2002). Indeed, foreign workers are a structural imperative in Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries, as they have helped the in the rapid transformations of the infrastructure as well as the institutional development in the gulf region (Shah: 2006, Kapiszewski: 2006). De Bel-Air (2014) notes an estimated 9.4 million non-nationals residing in Saudi Arabia alone, making it one of the five migrant destination countries worldwide.

Given that Ethnic relations and racial hierarchies are propelled and determined by various patterns of migration and immigration (Law: 2010), it would be reasonable to suggest that as a result of globalisation and nationalist state agendas, the deeply embedded nature of race has been entrenched, with powerful dominant groups acquiring privileges that effectively lead to devastating consequences for others (Weiner; 2012); and the sharp classificatory distinction and demographic variances between nationals and expat/migrant, it would be reasonable to suggest that Saudi Arabia harbors a unique and complex racialised context (Shah:2006, Kapiszewski:2006, Chalcraft:2010, Al-Khouri:2010, De Bel-Air:2014). From here there, the aim of this article will be to critically explore the shift in patterns of migration that gradually took place since the oil boom, the various policies and practices that the Saudi government has deployed in order to manage migrant workers and thus a threatened national identity and rising unemployment; as well as the devastating discriminations faced by various groups of migrants, with a particular focus on Saudis treatment of Ethiopian migrants – from a Critical Race Theory perspective.

Critical Race Theory centralizes the role of power, the power of a dominant group to shape the construction of racialised identities, knowledge and ideologies; and consequently affect the life chances of oppressed racial groups ideologically, through coercion as well as violently (Weiner: 2012). Accordingly an emphasis will be placed on the role of power, the power to include, manage and exclude, according to Saudi Arabia's regional and international economic, political and national interests; and the analysis will seek to explore and draw out the intricate connections between the effect of restrictive immigration policies on migrants workers rights, as well as their implications and effects on the manifestation of Racism, racial discourse and thus stringent processes and practices of racialization, as faced by various groups of migrant workers.

The article will begin by exploring the various patterns, needs and responses to migration

to Saudi Arabia, by focusing on the political, economic and social reasons for the change in the composition of the labor force; secondly, the consequence of large flows of migration, in terms of how they are managed through restrictive/exploitative policies and laws which constitute the grounds for the manifestation of racism, whilst the final section will analyse the devastating discriminations faced by domestic worker, with an additional focus on Saudi Arabia's recent treatment and crackdown on Ethiopian migrants.

In order to assess and explore processes of Racialisation and Racism in Saudi Arabia, this article will draw its theoretical underpinnings from Grosfoguel et al (2014) work "Racism", intersectionality and migration studies: framing some theoretical reflections'; and Weiner's (2010) work in 'Towards a Critical Global Race Theory'. David Theo Goldberg's (1990,2002,2009) reflections on racial discourses, expressions and practices will also inform parts of the analysis in terms of underlining racial discourses arising out of *discursive formations*, which are a result of a totality of ordered relations and correlations; of subjects to one another; as well as economic production and reproduction and thus cultural symbolism and signification; as well as laws and moral rules for social, political and economic exclusions (1990:297). This will allow for an exploration of Racism as an effect of established relations between subjects and institutions, which further inform economic and social practices, in and through principles and patterns of conduct, classificatory systems and technologies of power (ibid). This essay may present some limitations, as sources drawn upon are not based in academic discourses. Nonetheless, they are useful as they detail the current environment and will thus allow for the generation of discourses surrounding this articles area of interest.

### **Context – in brief**

*"Latent in the reality of the crisis of state in Saudi Arabia are numerous factors: the absence of mechanisms for the natural rotation of authority and power; the monopoly of centers of leadership by elites that, most of the time, do not manifest even a minimum level of transparency or professional credentials; the absence of public freedoms; worsening human rights violations; the imposition of political and intellectual surveillance (and censorship) on individuals; intermixing of state and tribe; the spread of arbitrary political and legal procedures; discrimination between citizens; and the alienation of society from the state"*

(Makki: 2011:3)

Following the discovery of oil within the region, the prevailing economic system in Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries is Rentier (Makki: 2011). The typical dynamics of Rentier states constrain the economy, whilst directly impacting and influencing the political and social development of whole regions (Fagotto: 2013); as they are characterised by a mixture of theocracy and autocracy, and with the absence of constitutional and legislative institutions, civil institutions that are in a position to pressure and influence are obsolete, as the centralisation of power is contained amongst the ruling elite, whilst laws are stifled with no room for freedom of expression (Makki:2011). This dynamic has created a paternalistic relationship between rulers and citizens in GCC countries, where citizens are not requested to pay any tax, whilst governments assume total rights in deciding on the reallocation and distribution of wealth; and In return for the principle of "*no taxation, no representation*", GCC monarchs have granted their citizens with various social benefits and powers, in return for absolute political loyalty (Fagotto: 2013:3). From this picture then, we can begin to consider the simultaneous advantages and alienating characteristic of citizenship in GCC societies, as not just a national identity, but an

entitlement to a comfortable life, with social rights such as: free education, healthcare, housing and employment - a life that those who are not citizens i.e. expats/immigrants are *not* entitled to (Fagotto: 2013). However, such privileges do come at a cost, as noted above.

From a critical perspective, the allocation of rights towards citizens is a form of racialisation, as citizenship laws in many nations fundamentally constitutes the institutional barriers and social practices that that exclude other non-national minority groups, explicitly and implicitly in racial terms (Weiner: 2012). Particularly if we consider citizenship/nationalization as a process in which bodies are marked, with some being marked as superior, others as inferior; and thus classified as in the 'zones of being' and 'not being', which is a positionally in racial/ethnic hierarchies, that effectively results in lived experiences of varied oppressions amongst subjects living in the diverse zones of being and non being (Grosfoguel et al: 2014).

However, the unequal and restrained allocation of power suggests, despite nationals being racialised as superior, the quote above reasonably suggests that they are subject to class and gendered oppressions, whilst experiencing racial privilege, whilst non-citizens on the other hand would be more prone to racial oppression as opposed to racial privilege (ibid: 2014). Furthermore, the stark divide of rights and entitlements between nationals and foreigners can also be seen as evidence of Saudi Arabia's *power* to include and exclude in racially ordered terms, to set aside and hierarchically categorize (Goldberg: 2002); and thus form the constitutive grounds for the emergence of Racism in a field of, locally specific and regionally competing, discourses surrounding nationalism and citizenship Saudi nationals, particularly if we consider that "*Discourses like racism are the products of the economy of power, the interrelations of bodies, produced and refined in practice*" (Goldebrg:1990:309).

### **Migratory Patterns - shifting needs, exclusions and discourses**

Prior to the second world war in 1930s/40s, the British had imported large numbers of Indian laborer's to the region to work in the newly developing oil sector to secure their interests and economic supremacy in the region; and this was made possible through the 1820 Treaty which put Gulf States/Sheikhdoms under British administration for commercial and strategic matters (Thiollet: 2011). Consequently, the breakup of the empire after the second world war played an important role in two ways, it loosened labor migrant ties with India as a result of Indian independence in 1947; and with the expiry of British Mandate of Palestine in 1948 and Arab-Israeli war of 1948, the mass disposition of Palestinians at the hands of Zionists resulted in 1.5 million Palestinians seeking exile in other neighboring Arab states (Chalcraft: 2010). Nonetheless, the increase in demand for labor and foreign migrant workers in the newly developing oil industry and region was predominantly met with migrant inflows from Yemen, Egypt and displaced Palestinian refugees (Kapizewski: 2006, Chalcraft: 2010, Thiollet: 2011).

Whilst some Arab Migrants worked in the oil industry, the majority of Arab migrants worked in education, health and social services, as well as in the construction, staffing and maintenance of the physical infrastructure sectors (Chalcraft: 2011); and they helped build the necessary infrastructure for the rapidly developing countries at the time (Kapizewski: 2006). Initially, Arab migrant workers were particularly welcome and their religious, cultural and linguistic compatibility with the local population resulted in the being perceived as a more attractive option than other immigrants (Kapizewski: 2006). Using Grosfoguel et al (2014) conceptualization of Racialisation, which involves marking bodies according to the meanings and connotations

ascribed to various ethnic, cultural, linguistic and/or religious groups or individuals, we can begin to see that at this point, Arab migrants in the ethnic/racial hierarchy of superiority and inferiority, were racialised by being incorporated into the 'zone of being', as a result of marking their linguistic, cultural and religious values - their *bodies*, as compatible (Grosfoguel et al: 2014). Worth noting also, is the process of 'Naturalization' that was opened to ethnic Arab migrants in the oil rich countries during the 1960s/1970s (Thiollet; 2011) in relation to Goldberg's (2002) theory that Racial States fashion themselves in terms of their power to include just as much as exclude, in racially/ethnic defined terms, particularly if we consider how this context changed for various social, economic, political and historical reasons.

Arab Migrants did not just bring manpower they also bought politics; and migration within the region was materially related to Pan-Arabism (Chalcraft: 2010). Thus the Arab Diaspora constituted a transnational network in which political issues and action could travel and be organized (Thiollet: 2011). This threatened and challenged the hegemony of ruling monarchs and power structures, which had traditionally got support from Britain and imperialist camps (Fagotto: 2013, Chalcraft: 2010, Makki: 2011). The central artifact that appealed to many Arabs was the idea that borders of the gulf states were artificially fixed by imperial/colonial powers to dominate an Arab nation divided as 'dawliyaat' (ibid: 13), and they should be eliminated to allow the development of Arab nations in which labor circulates freely, to consequently undermine dependency on and subordination from the west (Kapizeweski: 2006, Chalcraft: 2010:13). In other words, the banner of Pan-Arabism allowed locals and migrants to identify themselves as 'brothers', who found themselves in opposition with sovereign rulers pursuing rentierism, exclusion and Nationalism (Chalcraft: 2011).

Arab migrants, as a result came to be seen as a threat to the regions national identity; and the process of Naturalization, which was open to 'ethnic' Arabs, that allowed them to enjoy economic and social privileges within the 'Zones of being' (Grosfoguel et al 2014) in GCC countries was revoked, to the point where it was virtually impossible, as strict nationality and citizenship laws based on lineage were enforced, to directly exclude non-nationals access to socioeconomic and political rights (Thiollet:2011). From the 1970/1980s, numerous Arab migrants were prosecuted, jailed and deported, as the internal stability of GCC countries was shaken by the Arab expatriate-led labor strikes (Kapizeweski: 2006); and the combination of regional and local politics at the time, resulted in the generation of negative stereotypical attitudes towards Arabs that directly affected them in the labor market (ibid). The number of those expelled from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in total came up to 1.5 million: 1million Yemenis, along with 200,000 Jordanians and 150,000 Palestinians (ibid). This context allowed Saudi and Kuwaiti authorities to openly state that the composition of nationality and ethnicity should be carefully considered to prevent any one group from controlling the labor market (Chalcraft: 2010). GCC countries were now in a position to openly pursue their preference for Asian labor and out rightly discriminate and exclude Arab labor migrants, as they presented less of a threat to Saudi Arabia and its nationals (Kapizeweski: 2006). Mohammed Al-Fahim (1995 cited in ibid: 2006:7), a UAE businessman notes the shift in perception towards Arab migrant workers as follows:

*"Because we had a common religion and for the most part, a common language, we felt we were dealing with friends not foes. In the case of our neighbors, we shared the same Arab perspective on life and the world. Or so we believed. Unfortunately, we found to our dismay that it took more than such commonalities to build a solid foundation for a trustworthy relationship".*

From here, we can begin to see that Arab migrants went from being incorporated into the 'zones of being', as a result of racialising their familiar linguistic, cultural and religious characteristics, to being relegated to the zones of non being', as a result of regional politics and processes of expulsion (Grosfoguel et al: 2014). Moreover, if we conceive the expulsions of large numbers of Arab migrants, as the Saudi State managing difference to construct homogeneity through state control, we can begin to comprehend the regional politics at the time as simultaneously maintaining and enforcing racial boundaries and perceptions, which were assigned to groups based on political, social and national hierarchical categories, thus exasperating their new inferior position in the work force (Weiner: 2012).

In addition, Kapizeweski (2006) and Juerdini (2003), note that the shift in preference for Asian labor was also underpinned by the ideas that Asian labor was less expensive, more manageable and thus easier to lay off; Asian laborers were less likely than Arab laborers to send for their families and request citizenship rights. Thus, they were racialised as result of being perceived as culturally inferior in comparison to Arab workers, when read from Weiner's (2012) conceptualization of racialization, which she identifies not without its definitional problems, as a process in which groups are assigned to "*different hierarchical categories reflecting perceptions of inferiority and superiority based on perceived biological and/ or cultural differences*" (Weiner: 2012:334). Furthermore, the demand for foreign workers in GCC states, along with the tense political relationship in the region, meant Asian governments outstripped Arab governments ability to supply workers and meet the Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries labor demands (Kapizeweski: 2006).

These factors and context can be theoretically located within Goldberg's (2009:70) reflections on Racial Americanization, which he characterizes as being produced by "*seeming to do nothing special. This doing nothing special consists of a mix of being guided by the presumptive laws of the market, the determination of the majorities personal preference, and silencing of all racial reference with the exception especially of racial profiling for purported purposes of crime and terror control.*" Particularly if we consider the shift in the demographic of the workforce as being simultaneously driven by wider political issues and the ongoing labor demand in the post 1973 oil-boom, which systematically saw a reduction in the Arab expatriate population from 72% in 1975, to 56% in 1985, whilst non Arabs represented 12% in 1970, increasing to 41% by 1980, a figure rising to 63% by 1985 (Kapizeweski: 2006).

Finally, it worth noting also that neoliberal discourses and economics in the region underpinned the disarticulation of pan-Arab discourses that sought inclusion and non-discrimination, by challenging the economic links between rentierism and exploitation; as well as the dramatic shifts in the national make up of the migrant workforce; (Chalcraft: 2010). Neoliberal economist advised gulf rulers that in order to ensure continued economic growth, they should not only allow more migrants to the region, but that they should specifically allow migrants in with less unfavorable dependency rates, thus making it easier to exclude them from citizenship and nationality laws (ibid).

Whilst neoliberal theories of the market do not appear to racialised (as a result of the narrative within it that stress labor instead of human beings), the ways in which they function and manifest in contemporary economies are entrenched in the histories and practices that underpin the materialization of racism (Davison and Shire: 2015). This view, marries well with

Goldberg's (2007,2009) critical theorization regarding racelessness and/or colourblindness in the age of neoliberal economic discourses, as coming to conjure "*the perfect cultural corollary for emergent neo-liberal economies*", that effectively undermine and diminish the naming and visibility of racism, as it rampantly persists. (2007:80). This neoliberal formulation was also critically observed by Jordan Crown Prince Hassan Bin Talal (1984 cited in Chalcraft: 2010:28) who found it disheartening to witness that

*"Many of the decision-makers involved with problems of manpower migration would rather relegate their resolution to the non-human invisible hand of the market forces that put up with the implications and complications that can ensue from viewing such problems from a human or at least a regional [read pan-Arab] perspective".*

### **Discriminating laws and racialised policies**

Having established that a mixture of regional politics and neoliberal economic discourses underpinned the shift in the national makeup of the migrant workforce, it can be argued that Racism in Saudi Arabia can reasonably be accounted for by Grosfoguel et al (2014:2) characterization of Racism as "*a global Hierarchy of human superiority and inferiority, politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of 'capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world system'*". Whilst Weiner's (2012) definition of Racism on the other hand can be put to use to critically delineate Racism as existing in many simultaneous forms: benevolent (altruistic), benign (paternal and culturally ethnocentric), and malignant (oppressive and violent); whilst acknowledging that malignant and overt racism is socially unacceptable/or outlawed in many countries and nations, Wiener underlines that 'New Racism' - exists.

This section in line with Critical Race Theory's commitment to underlining regional differences and discussions of both oppressive racialising processes and practices; as well as resistance towards both racialising practices and processes (Weiner: 2012), will explore the laws and practices that alienate, subordinate and thus exacerbate the racial discrimination faced by foreign workers in Saudi Arabia; as well as the emergence and effect of various policies aimed at reducing the number of foreigners in the workforce to help tackle rising unemployment in the kingdom. The analysis will be informed by Weiner's (2012) definition of racialization mentioned in the previous section. Embedded within this definition is the acknowledgment that social policies and practices simultaneously maintain and enforce racial boundaries, power relations and structurally embedded racialised meanings and practices, that effectively serve to contain and permit the manifestation of intentional and unintentional actions – that further perpetuate, justify and/or exacerbate racial hierarchies (Weiner: 2012).

The Basic Law adopted in 1992 obligates Saudi Arabia to protect citizens and foreigners alike from discrimination, human rights abuses and arbitrary arrest; and Saudi Arabia is a state party to the international convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination (CERD) (HRW: 2004). However, HRW (2004) is unaware of how the Saudi government has operationalized this treaty, as the Saudi governments report to the UN made no reference to its implementation of the treaty; and given the high proportion of foreign workers in the kingdom CERD (2003 cited in HRW: 2004:16) explicitly expressed concerns regarding allegations of "*substantial prejudice against migrant workers, in particular those coming from Asia and Africa*"; and requested the government provide more information regarding the situation and

discrimination facing female migrant workers. The committee also emphasized that insufficient information contained in the report, as it did not explicitly outline the various factors and difficulties that affect the implementation of the convention; and added that the “the mere statement of the general principle of non-discrimination” evident in the Kingdoms basic Law “*is not a sufficient response to the requirements of the Convention.*”(HRW: 2004:16)

There are number of factors that contribute to the discriminatory conditions and exasperation of vulnerable conditions for migrant workers in Saudi Arabia. Most notably it is the contradiction inherent in the Basic Law, mentioned above, in relation to the labor law in Saudi Arabia, in effect since 1969, which requires every foreign worker status to be guaranteed by a kafeel and/or be regulated via the Kafala system (Jureidini: 2003, Walker: 2013). It emerged as a system that would regulate the relationship between employers and migrants, and allow for the import of temporary, rotating labor to suit the country economic needs and requirements (HRW: 2004): and it has come to be undeniably regarded as the root cause of most migrant right and/or exploitation issues. Furthermore, reports have shown that given the fact that the labor law requires all migrant workers status to be guaranteed by a kafeel, migrant workers can be broadly divided between those that are afforded protection under the 1969 labor law and those who are not, with devastating consequences for the both groups (HRW: 2004). In addition, the labor law specifically excludes the protection of men and women in the domestic service sector, with many being workers from countries like Asia and Africa (HRW: 2004). Secondary labor markets have become racialised as a result of foreign workers from Asian and African countries being perceived as ‘cheap’ labor and thus fulfilling what is regarded as dirty, difficult and dangerous jobs that nationals refuse to undertake (Jureidini: 2003).

Another way in which Saudi Arabia differentiates its citizens from non-citizens is through a government issued residency permit, known as an Iqamaa; foreigners are required to carry their iqamaa at all times and the law stipulates that those without an Iqamaa have no freedom of movement (HRW: 2004). In addition, Walker (2013) notes that Kafala system which requires that all migrant workers have a job before entering the country, in order to obtain an Iqamaa, has resulted in the emergence of a rampant black market selling ‘free visas’, which are illegal according Saudi Law (HRW: 2004). This has not only created a dynamic in which migrant workers are more likely to be criminalized if found working for anyone other than their sponsor, but also a process in which the already peculiar status of migrant workers is partial to exploitation (Jureidini: 2003, Walker: 2013). Most remarkably by the legally attributed and systematic power, and thus discourses, yielded by individual employers that act as sponsors and recruitment agencies.

Both the Human Rights Watch Report (2002) titled *Bad Dreams: Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Workers in Saudi Arabia* and Jureidini (2003) report on *Migrant Workers and Xenophobia* underline the role of Recruitment Agencies in perpetuating the inequalities faced by Domestic Servants and Agricultural workers. Whilst the HRW (2004:47) report notes that recruitment companies are an area of concern in relation to Saudi Arabia’s Legal obligation under the ILO convention (No.29) concerning forced labor, which was adopted by Saudi in 1930; Jureidini (2003) on the other hand, underlines the role that recruitment companies play in exacerbating the discrimination and denial of freedom faced by migrant workers at the hands of their individual employers. Recruitment companies encourage clients to withhold workers passports and put constraints on their freedom to form social relations by not letting them leave the house unaccompanied, whilst at the same time potentially exacerbating the violence faced

by workers, through their guarantee of replacement workers if deemed to be unsuitable.

Using Weiner's (2012) identification of External Ascription and Boundary Permeability as a racializing process that emphasizes examining who exactly exerts the power to categorize and enforce categorization, we can reasonably argue that the categorization of migrant workers in Saudi Arabia (via the laws and processes outlined), results in the simultaneous homogenization of heterogeneous groups and individual differences, with the effect of dehumanizing members within it. Moreover, Weiner's (2012) underlining of this particular process of racialisation highlights how power differentials in Saudi Arabia block some migrant groups ability to articulate their identity, further revealing the operational intensity, existence and/or stability of racial boundaries between citizens and migrant workers within the region. Also worth noting, is Goldberg's (1990:307) assertion that racist discourses are embedded in the domain of legal and statutory frameworks as a set of foundational claims, that effectively establish difference as the foundation for inclusion and exclusion – permits us to underline how discourses of racism, not only justify the exclusion of 'others' by denying them their rights and claims, but more crucially by also establishing what the excluded are entitled to and can expect. In relation to the context under analysis, that is how the legal exclusion of migrant workers, by denying them their rights and entitlements, also serves to inform them of what they can and cannot expect – as a result of racialised discourse that underpin Saudi Arabia policies and laws.

Despite the legally and material subordinate position of migrant workers, Saudi Arabia has repeatedly stated its intention to reduce the number of foreign workers and replace them with unemployed Saudis, a process known as 'Saudization' or 'indigenization' of the labor force which was initially announced in 1994 (HRW: 2003, Jueridini: 2003, Walker: 2013). Although the issue of indigenization has been periodically revived since the 1990's, De Bel-Air (2015:5) notes that it has been met with fierce opposition from business owners, who claim Saudi workers are "*costly, hard to lay off and unwilling to engage in low skilled tasks*". The government's Saudization policy, introduced a voluntary policy referred to as Nitaqat in 2011, which is a combination of incentives and sanctions that are designed to encourage companies to hire more nationals and they are accordingly categorised as Red, Yellow, Green or Platinum (Walker: 2013, De Bel-Air: 2014). In theory, this meant that whilst red companies were forbidden renewing permits and employing immigrants with the added prospect of facing a fine of SR2,400 for every redundant worker; platinum companies on the other hand could not only continue to employ immigrants, they could also poach new employees from red companies (Walker: 2013, De Bel-Air: 2014:5). The implementation of this scheme was also met with rigorous campaign geared towards the regularisation of the status of those not working for their sponsors and illegal undocumented workers (Walker: 2013, HRW: 2013a, HRW: 2013b), a practice which has become accepted and normalised amongst employers, recruitment agencies, foreign embassies and not least by the state (Jureidini: 2003). None the less, this particular crackdown was pronounced as the gap between discourse and reality showed itself, as neither the government or consular services had the resources and capacity to meet the initial deadline which was extended from the 4<sup>th</sup> April 2013 to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 2013, a date which was further extended to the 4<sup>th</sup> of November of that same year (Walker: 2013, HRW: 2013a)

### **Devastating discriminations**

It is worth stating here that although the response outlined in previous section, in terms of the Saudi government's processing of migrants through the Kafala system, as well as initiating



periodic crackdowns may be read as perfectly rational responses, contemplating their material effects indicates that such process are far from moral (Goldberg: 1990). Particularly when read from Goldberg's (2002) position that the principal charge facing modern/nation states that exclude to construct homogeneity – lies in the way they manage their heterogeneous population. This section, following on from the previous sections analysis will explore the material effects of the various laws, policies and practices on Domestic workers and Ethiopian migrants in particular. Furthermore, the analysis will also underpinned by Grosfoguel et al synthesis of Boaventara de Sousa Santos (2007,2009 cited in Grosfoguel et al: 2014:4) position that modernity is characterised by inhabitants living below and above the line and the Fanonian concept of 'zones of being and zones of non being', to enrich our understanding of racial/capitalist/colonial/patriarchal world system we inhabit. Such a position requires critically acknowledging that subjects below the abyssal line – in the zones of non-being, are dehumanized and thus exposed to violence, overt appropriation and dispossession. Moreover, as the humanity of those relegated to the zones of non-being is not normally recognized they are treated as subhuman and are subject to violence, rape and outright appropriation in ways that would be unacceptable in the 'zones of being' (Grosfoguel et al: 2014).

Comprehending the discrimination, violation and abuses faced by female domestic migrant workers, requires acknowledging that their position is undoubtedly compromised by restrictions on freedom of expression and movement; as well as gender segregation and inequality in Saudi Arabia (HRW: 2004) In other words, the forced confinement of female domestic workers can be read as an extension of the power that Saudi men can and do wield over Saudi women.

In a discussion on how Arabs view the other, Tahar Labib (2008:viii) notes, *"Like any other culture, the Arab culture has its own scapegoat. Historically it is the black"*; and on a contemporary level, this still appears to be the case. With the death of three Ethiopians in the Saudi capital of Riyadh on the 9th of November 2013 (HRW: 2013), and Saudi authorities giving no hint or reason why such deaths occurred and a rhetoric that this crackdown was a result of immigrants illegal statuses; and in line with the governments 'Saudization' campaign being put forth by Saudi government officials, Saudi Arabia's management of its foreign migrant workers rightfully came under International scrutiny in 2013. Transnational advocacy groups; Global protests against the Saudi governments treatment of foreign workers, particularly Ethiopian migrants, took place across the globe in Ethiopia (with dozens were arrested in Addis Ababa outside the Saudi embassy), New York, London, Los Angeles - all calling for an end to the dehumanizing, discriminatory and violent nature of the crackdown, served to put Saudi Arabia under international scrutiny and raise global awareness of the issue (HRW: 2013a, HRW: 2013b Shobokshi:2013). Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director for HRW said

*"Saudi authorities have spent months branding foreign workers as criminals in the media, and stirring up anti-migrant sentiment to justify the labor crackdown... Now the Saudi government needs to rein in Saudi citizens who are attacking foreign workers"*

(Cited in HRW: 2013b)

During the crackdown in 2013, Saudi Arabia imposed a ban on the recruitment of 40,000 Ethiopian domestic workers and reports show that the move has been accompanied by stream of xenophobic practices and discourses that have served to single out Ethiopian domestic

workers as dangerous, with the added tales of crimes that Saudi families have had to endure at the hand of Ethiopian migrants proliferating in various media outlets in the kingdom (Rana: 2014). Rana (2014) also underlines that whilst Ethiopian female domestic workers form the bottom of the rung in comparison to their Philippines and Asian workers, their labor is considered a good alternative most likely due to their acceptance of cheaper wages. Using Grosfoguel's et al (2014) analysis above, we can see that the positionality of Ethiopian domestic workers operates within the zones of non being and below the abyssal line; whilst Goldberg's (2002) considerations on the various ways in which racial states fashion themselves by employing physical force, violence, manipulation, repressive apparatuses, ideological mechanisms, as well as the media, allows us to readily delineate and foreground the ways in which Saudi Arabia can be characterised as Racial state.

## **Conclusion**

It is worth emphasising that not all migrant workers are treated badly and dehumanized in Saudi Arabia; and many are treated with dignity and respect, returning to their countries of origin having earned a lot more than what they would have been able to be in their own countries. That said, critically comprehending the constitutive economic and structural conditions discourses that separate and privilege citizens from non citizens, allows for a critical comprehension of the conditions that simultaneously deny citizens freedoms of expression, with devastating consequences on the unequal manifestation of power retained and exercised by the dominant group over subordinate migrant groups. It also appears that Saudi Arabia, despite denying that their manipulation for the shift in the national makeup of the migrant workforce was not for political reasons, it appears as though the shift was inextricably connected to wider neoliberal and thus racialising economic discourses. Such discourses also permitted the large, undisturbed influx of cheap labor to flow to the region, and thus draw attention to the contradictory implications of the kafala system in relation to the Basic Law in Saudi Arabia. A system that positions migrant workers as legally and systematically living below the line, in the zones of non-being, with little in the way of international and regionally specific conventions and laws that can intervene and help. Grosfoguel et al (2014) theoretical analysis allowed for the teasing out of processes of racialisation and an examination of how racism operates within a global western centric framework, albeit in a regionally different context, through the marking of bodies within the zones of being and non being, as inferior and superior. Whilst Goldberg work allows us to conceive the ways in which discursive discourse formations, as a result of legally authorized and embedded rationalization, are never moral; and they are underpinned by racist discourses that allow states to include and exclude various groups seemingly colorblind, neoliberal, raceless dynamic. Female domestic workers are the group most likely to experience racial oppression and exploitation as result of their subordinate position legally, socially, racially and culturally. In addition, the way in which the Saud Authorities treated and handled the case Ethiopian migrant workers throughout the crackdown is evidence that racialised, interiorized and dehumanizing discourses are ferociously at work, with little in the way of any formal and/or legal resistance challenging the xenophobic attitudes and experience that they have to endure and face.



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