

## **Contract Enslavement of Female Migrant Domestic Workers in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates**

**By Romina Halabi**

Slavery was not abolished in Saudi Arabia until 1962, and in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) until 1963. It is unsurprising, then, that contract slavery of domestic servants continues to thrive in much of the Persian Gulf, where local economies prosper on the immigration of foreign workers. Economic incentives on the part of the sending and receiving nations encourage the migration of female workers from their home countries to Saudi Arabia and to the UAE. These incentives, coupled with restrictive contract systems, bind the female domestic worker to her employer and create an environment conducive to exploitation and involuntary servitude.

The surge of migrant workers into the Middle East began in the early 1970s, when increased petroleum production brought with it a demand for skilled and unskilled labor. As living standards rose for nationals, opportunities in the service sector for female labor expanded. It is no coincidence that once the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) started raising oil prices, oil-importing states began sending migrant workers to the Gulf. Currently, Saudi Arabia is the largest recipient of migrant domestic labor, with the UAE close behind with over seventy-five percent of its population classified as migrant workers. Today, domestic workers primarily emigrate from Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines, choosing to leave their families and migrate for a number of economic and social reasons.

Contrary to what may be understood traditionally, the women who migrate to the Middle East do so willingly. Many are educated and skilled and are not on the edge of abject poverty; in fact, many of these women come from lower-middle class families and take a proactive role in leaving the household in search of work. Although there is a key financial incentive to migrate, many women also do so because they are seeking adventure, independence, training, and upward social mobility. Pushed by these factors, women often incur substantial debts and pay recruitment agencies exorbitant fees to finance their migration. Relying on employment agencies and brokers, migrant domestic workers enter contractual bondage with employers whom they have never met before, leaving themselves vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Because slavery is illegal, slave-holders often use contracts as a means to legitimate and disguise the practice. In order for a migrant to work in Saudi Arabia or the UAE, she must first secure a visa through a method of sponsorship known as *kafala*, which legally binds the worker to her employer. Although both the sponsor and worker are capable of breaking contract, this ostensible equality is merely a ruse, because if the worker breaks her contract, she must pay the cost of her return ticket (a charge that would have otherwise been paid by the sponsor). She may also be fined or forced to pay debts to the recruitment agency. Through this system of sponsorship, the fate of the migrant worker is entirely dependent upon the goodwill of an employer who, at any time, can threaten her deportation if unsatisfied. Once in their host countries, these migrants are immediately required to surrender their passports to their employers. Thus, even before the worker steps foot in her host country, the systems of exploitation are already in place.

Lacking documentation and in a foreign country, migrant domestic workers find themselves under the charge of their female employer. Because Middle Eastern households often consist of

extended families, work can be arduous. It oftentimes includes tasks such as cleaning, washing, cooking, tailoring, and taking care of children and the aged. Working hours are long, between eleven and twenty hours a day, with the maid subject to work both day and night at the whim of her employers. Since foreign maids can easily influence the upbringing of the children, cultural conflicts are numerous, and are complicated further by the potential for sexual relationships between the maid and the husband or adult male relatives. Racial discrimination and symbolic forms of prejudice against the migrant worker are also common.

Due to the individualized working environment of household labor, female domestic servants are the group most vulnerable to exploitation in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Domestic workers are often denied freedom of movement, and are either locked inside or forbidden to leave the home without permission. Violence against maids includes physical attacks ranging from rape to slapping; other forms of violence include overwork, including forcibly working in more than one household and the refusal of days off, non-payment of wages or a reduced salary. Maids also often experience poor living conditions, such as lack of food and privacy. Physical violence is usually perpetrated by the female employer, or madam of the household. Most workers have reported suffering from more than one type of violence during the course of their employment, and many are so traumatized by the experience that it even negatively affects their ability to reintegrate into society upon returning home.

For foreign domestic servants, there are few options available to deal with abuse. If escaped maids file police complaints against their sponsors, they are often arrested for running away, or are accused of lying. Government-run shelters for “runaway” domestics are a common destination for migrant women in Saudi Arabia. However, this supposed charity is only provided until their cases are settled—either by returning the women to their sponsors or by deportation. Reminiscent of the fugitive slave laws in the United States, Saudi newspapers run bounty ads for “escaped” domestic workers. Since the employers hold the migrant’s passport, changing jobs is a nearly impossible task. Thus, fearing the termination of their employment, domestic servants often endure continued exploitation and mistreatment rather than complain and face deportation.

Due to the seemingly voluntary nature of migrant labor, it is an unfortunate reality that many of these women effectively enslave themselves abroad in hopes of improving their economic situation at home. This is not to suggest that migrants are to blame for their plights; once the choice has been made and the contract signed, all future choices are restricted or nonexistent. Most of these domestic servants are unaware of what they are getting into, expecting to be paid the equivalent of \$800 per month and instead finding their pay to be \$100 a month, if anything at all. This deception, combined with the contract system, limits the mobility of the migrant domestic worker and leaves her at the mercy of employers who may also beat or sexually assault her. Because many of these migrants incur substantial debts to emigrate, it is common for women to return to the Gulf after their contract expires, thus continuing the sequence of exploitations and contract slavery.

The recruiting agencies sending the domestic servants to the Persian Gulf are well aware of the abuses these women face, as are the labor-sending countries themselves. Despite this knowledge, countries such as the Philippines, with growing populations and economic instability, continue to send female domestic workers abroad because the financial benefit of remittances cannot be ignored. For these countries, sending workers to the Middle East and to the Persian Gulf reduces the number of unemployed, and lowers the danger of social dissatisfaction. In Sri Lanka, domestic

service workers are the most lucrative “export commodity.” This commodification of the transnational “maid trade” provides a cheap and flexible labor force willing to endure low wages—an attractive feature for both sending and receiving countries—and also reduces migrants to mere objects to be bought and sold in the global marketplace.

In comparison with other forms of slavery, the involuntary servitude of migrant domestic workers is difficult to eradicate because it is so deeply embedded in the global markets of the labor-sending and receiving countries. The women who migrate to the UAE and Saudi Arabia do so voluntarily, submitting themselves to their sponsors with the hope of bettering both themselves and their families. Unfortunately, survival itself becomes the greatest hurdle, and thoughts of visiting family and sending remittances become fantasies. Without international pressure, the exploitation of migrant domestics is certain to persist.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

### *Globalization and Economic Reasons for the Maid Trade*

Anti-Slavery International. 2006. “Trafficking in Women: Forced Labour and Domestic Work in the Context of the Middle East and Gulf Region.” Anti-Slavery International.  
<http://www.antislavery.org/homepage/resources/PDF/traffic%20women%20forced%20labour%20domestic%202006.pdf>

Annotation: In this detailed report, which is comprised of an analysis of over seventy scholarly reports and field interviews, the author confronts the issues of forced labor and domestic servitude in the Middle East, primarily of migrant workers. Interspersed with horror stories from exploited women, this article examines the various “push and pull” factors associated with the enslavement of migrant workers and identifies possible responses and preventative strategies. Although the article mentions cases of enslavement in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the main focus is on trafficking, especially in the Horn of Africa. The article concludes with an analysis of trafficking in Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Sudan, and Yemen.

Brochmann, Grete. 1993. Middle East Ave: Female Migration from Sri Lanka to the Gulf. Boulder: Westview Press.

Annotation: With a theoretical, detached tone, Brochmann analyzes the dynamics of the “migration connection” of foreign labor between Sri Lanka and the Persian Gulf. The author compares the status of women in Sri Lanka to that of Sri Lankan women in the Gulf, underlining the working conditions and maltreatment that these housemaids often face when they migrate to the Middle East. Primarily a socioeconomic study, the author focuses on the surge of foreign labor in the Gulf and its effects on both the Arab community and the domestic servants. While well-researched and informative, this study addresses the suffering of female migrants with scientific neutrality for the sake of understanding migration—not understanding slavery.

Buijs, Gina, ed. 1993. Migrant Women: Crossing Boundaries and Changing Identities. Oxford: Berg.

Annotation: An analysis of case studies from around the world, this book is an intriguing anthropological examination of gender dynamics among migrant women. As the title suggests, the focus is on how transnational migration affects women in the world, especially in such areas as Peru, Chile, West Berlin, and Britain, and how their experiences shape their identity. While useful to anyone interested in exploring gender issues tied to transnational migration, there is no particular mention of migrants in Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates.

Chin, Christine. 1998. In Service and Servitude: Foreign Female Domestic Workers and the Malaysian “Modernity” Project. New York: Columbia University Press.

Annotation: Focusing on what Chin calls “the maid trade,” this book covers the domestic servitude of Filipina and Indonesian women in Malaysia, using field research to outline the relationship between contemporary domestic service and development. Unlike many other researchers, Chin, a scholar and Malaysian, has personal experience with domestic servitude and the mistreatment migrant workers are forced to endure during their employment. From this rare perspective, the author analyzes both sides of the issue and portrays domestic servants in a sympathetic light, while also explaining how the employers themselves view their maids. This study is useful for anyone eager to understand the role of domestic servitude in modernity and globalization, but unfortunately does little to illuminate how migrant domestic workers are treated in the Middle East.

Cremer, Georg. 1988. “Deployment of Indonesian Migrants in the Middle East: Present Situation and Prospects.” *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 24(3): 14.

Annotation: This article, while nearly two decades old, offers an interesting analysis of labor migration in the Middle East. When this article was written, international migration to the Middle East was a relatively new phenomenon; the author analyzes the causes and effects of the surge of Indonesian migrant workers. In 1988, the majority of Indonesian workers in the Middle East were housemaids and drivers. The author analyzes the Middle East’s push to hire more skilled migrants, and even describes how many Indonesian women were treated like slaves in Saudi Arabia. While not particularly useful on its own, this article, when compared to more contemporary studies, offers an intriguing historical perspective on Indonesian migrants in the Middle East.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Arlie Hochschild, eds. 2003. Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Annotation: This collection of essays offers a comprehensive analysis of the role of female domestic workers around the world, and discusses how globalization drives the trend for women

to leave their home countries in search of work. Most of the essays are built around interviews with migrant women and, as a result, there are many insights into how migration changes gender roles in the villages the women leave behind, as well as the effect of migration on families. Many chapters deal with issues of slavery and abuse, but none explore the region of the Middle East in great depth, instead concentrating on countries of origin and receiving nations such as the United States.

Harzig, Christiane. 2006. "Domestics of the World (Unite?): Labor Migration Systems and Personal Trajectories of Household Workers in Historical and Global Perspective." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25(2/3): 26.

Annotation: The author of this article discusses the system of "international debt politics" that creates incentives for women to migrate, and evaluates how migration into domestic service tends to be "invisible" to both sending and receiving governments. Framed from a historical perspective, the article goes on to examine gender issues associated with migration, including how the four major migration trends (one of which is South Asia to the Gulf) emerge and are maintained. Slavery and specific case studies are not mentioned, but the article remains useful for understanding the underpinning forces driving labor migration.

Ismail, Munira. 1999. "'Maids in Space' Gendered Domestic Labour from Sri Lanka to the Middle East." In Gender, Migration and Domestic Service, edited by J. Momsen. New York: Routledge.

Annotation: This compilation of case studies is a conscientious analysis of migrant women, encompassing research on the experience of domestic workers across continents. Ismail's study of domestic workers from Sri Lanka is of particular interest, going into great detail about the social and economic reasons why the women migrate to the Middle East and what type of exploitation they endure. The research is based on interviews of migrants before they depart to the Middle East and after they return to Sri Lanka. The study draws clear conclusions that contractual bondage often leads to exploitation, yet the author doesn't paint the migrants as victims. Instead, these migrants are portrayed as women who make difficult choices to emigrate for the sake of their families.

Khalaf, Sulayman, and Saad Alkobaisi. 1999. "Migrants' Strategies of Coping and Patterns of Accommodation in the Oil-Rich Gulf Societies: Evidence from the UAE." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26(2): 28.

Annotation: Drawing on globalization theory and case studies from both Asian and Arab migrant groups, this ethnographic article analyzes the differing political economies of labor-sending and labor-receiving countries in order to explain differences in coping strategies among migrants. Although the article was published in 1999 and does not link the exploitation of migrants to slavery, the fact that the authors are an anthropologist and sociologist in the United Arab Emirates and not Western observers adds a compelling perspective to the topic of globalization and its effect on workers migrating to the Gulf.

Lan, Pei-Chia. 2006. Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domestic Workers and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan. Durham: Duke University Press.

Annotation: Although the central aim of this book is to analyze the transnational migration of Indonesian and Filipina domestic workers to Taiwan, the author's ethnographic study—outlining how economic disparities, immigration policies, race, ethnicity and gender intersect in the relationship between migrant workers and their employers—is applicable to the Middle East as well. Drawing on extensive fieldwork and peppered with vignettes, this book builds an informative study on the institutional mechanisms that organize migration between Taiwan and the labor-exporting countries. The book also compares the case of Taiwan to other host countries such as Saudi Arabia. Although the author does not frame her study of migrant workers as an investigation of slave-like practices, she does outline how contract laborers are often exploited under the transnational maid trade.

Moya, Jose. 2007. "Domestic Service in a Global Perspective: Gender, Migration and Ethnic Niches." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33(4): 20.

Annotation: Taking a historical perspective, this article offers a definition of domestic service and discusses how the occupation has transformed significantly, both socially and economically, in the past two decades as a result of capitalism and industrialization. What was once slavery and bonded labor became contractual agreements and wage labor. In great detail, the author analyzes issues of gender, migration, and ethnic niches from a global perspective. While the role of maids in the Middle East is briefly addressed, the article does not delve into slavery, and it is useful only for its historical and sociological view on domestic service.

Parrenas, Rhacel Salazar. 2001. Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Annotation: Drawing on interviews collected between 1995 and 1996, this book offers a comparison on the dislocations migrant Filipina domestic workers face in Rome and Los Angeles, the two cities with the highest percentages of Filipina migrants in Italy and the United States, respectively. The author discusses the role of transnational agencies, class mobility, gender relations, and the effects of migration on the family. This study does not delve into the actual work that migrant domestic servants do, nor does it discuss the abuses they may face at the hands of their employers. Instead, the author examines the perceptions of non-belonging among migrant Filipinas.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2001. "Transgressing the Nation-State: The Partial Citizenship and 'Imagined (Global) Community' of Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers." *Signs* 26(4): 28.

Annotation: In this article, the author argues that Filipina workers have come to constitute a "female labor diaspora" and blames the export-led development strategy of the Philippines, the feminization of the international labor force, and the demand for migrant women in low-wage service work, as the cause of this trend. Because the author describes Filipina workers in countries throughout the world, much of this article is irrelevant to the topic of household slavery in the Middle East. However, this article is useful for anyone who wants to understand the situation of migrant work from a Filipina perspective.

Shah, Nasra M. 2004. "Gender and Labour Migration to the Gulf Countries." *Feminist Review* 77(1): 183-185.

Annotation: In this short article, the author briefly describes the surge of female migration into the Gulf in the past thirty years, especially in the domestic service sector. The "Asianisation" of the Gulf labor force is also analyzed, as well as the lack of government restrictions in sending nations, making migrants vulnerable to exploitation. The insufficiency of labor laws in the labor-receiving Gulf states is only obliquely mentioned. Although this article fails to go into substantial detail, it remains a good introduction to the topic of female migration in the Middle East.

Silvey, Rachel. 2006. "Consuming the Transnational Family: Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers to Saudi Arabia." *Global Networks* 6(1): 18.

Annotation: In this article, Silvey analyzes the effects of Indonesian women's transnational migration on their families from an anthropological perspective. While Silvey does refer to the abuses migrants face in Saudi Arabia (rape, torture, sexual assault, overwork, and non-payment of wages), the reference is brief. The primary focus is on the women workers themselves and their motivations for migration, using fieldwork to evaluate the ramifications of "how women migrants frame, oppose and rework the meanings of motherhood and consumption." This study is useful to anyone interested in gender and transnational migration research, but contributes little toward understanding the practice of domestic slavery in Saudi Arabia.

United Nations. 2003. "The United Nations on Levels and Trends of International Migration and Related Policies." *Population Development Review* 29(2): 5.

Annotation: The goal of this article is to provide information on international migration levels, trends, and policies, in order to better understand the causes of the flows of international migration and their relationship to development. Using charts and graphs, this article illustrates the size and growth of migrant populations worldwide between 1990 and 2000. According to the article, while the United States has the largest population of migrants, the United Arab Emirates has the highest percentage. While the article does not discuss human rights abuses against migrants, it offers a useful comparison of migrant populations between countries and also

describes the conventions and protocols adopted by the international community that protect migrants.

Wickramasekera, Piyasiri. 2002. "Asian Labour Migration: Issues and Challenges in an Era of Globalization." In *International Migration Papers*. Geneva: International Labor Office.

Annotation: This report analyzes the causes and origins of labor migration, identifying many economic and structural factors that give migrants an incentive to leave their home nations. It additionally deals with trends and patterns associated with migration. Women migrants in the field of domestic service and entertainment are given particular attention, as well as irregular migrants who are undocumented. Of notable interest is the section of the report where the author seeks to dispel common "myths" regarding migrant workers. Although the Middle East is not discussed in detail, this article is useful for its description of the feminization of the migrant labor force.

Winckler, Onn. 2002. "The Demographic Dilemma of the Arab World: The Employment Aspect." *Journal of Contemporary History* 37(4): 22.

Annotation: This article takes a historical approach to the population explosion in the Middle East, the oil boom, and the consequences on the labor markets. While the article does address the reliance on foreign workers and the wage gap between foreigners and nationals, the author fails to make any relevant assessment of worker abuse, and does not broach the topic of slave-like practices in the Middle East. Instead, the author focuses on the effect of population growth on unemployment within various demographics.

### *The Recruitment and Migration Process*

Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women. 1999. "The Migrating Woman's Handbook. Bangkok: Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women."  
[http://www.gaatw.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=9&Itemid=78](http://www.gaatw.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=9&Itemid=78).

Annotation: Written by the non-governmental organization (NGO) Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), this manual provides recommendations to female migrant workers in an effort to help these women know and protect their rights while traveling abroad. The manual describes the process of immigration in great detail, outlining such issues as work permits, detention and deportation, contracts, and travel documents. Although this is not a scholarly report and no specific states are mentioned, the information is concise and offers an NGO's perspective on how to protect female migrant workers from becoming victims of exploitation.

Human Rights Watch. 2006. "Building Towers, Cheating Workers: Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers in the UAE." <http://hrw.org/reports/2008/bhr0208/3d.htm>.

Annotation: Drawing on over sixty interviews, this extensive report from Human Rights Watch describes the exploitation of migrant construction workers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), explaining the recruitment process, the confiscation of passports, the safety and health hazards, and the low or unpaid wages in particular. The article begins with recommendations to both the sending and receiving nations of migrant labor, and continues on to analyze UAE labor law and the government's human rights requirements under international law. Although the article does not address domestic servitude, it does represent another group of migrant laborers in the Middle East—a group equally subject to abuse and exploitation.

Longva, Anh Nga. 1999. "Keeping Migrant Workers in Check: The Kafala System in the Gulf." *Middle East Report* 211(Summer).

Annotation: In this short article, the author examines the international labor migration of workers from the Middle East and Asia into the "Gulf Cooperation Council" (GCC). The primary focus of this article is to describe the system of recruitment and Kafala (sponsorship) that allows migrants to work in the GCC. This article is useful in understanding the underpinning laws and social systems that make migrant workers subject to discrimination and abuse.

Pearce, Natasha. 2003. Migrant Workers' Rights: The Passport Issue. London: Kalayaan.

Annotation: Citing case studies and statistics, this report examines the withholding of the passports of migrant domestic workers by employers, particularly in the United Kingdom. It is a practice also common in Saudi Arabia and in the United Arab Emirates. The report features many testimonies from migrant workers worldwide, the passports of whom have been withheld, sometimes for several years. It also exemplifies the havoc that the loss of identity and status wreaks on these workers' lives. The author provides many recommendations on how the practice can be mitigated by the intervention of governments, embassies, NGOs, trade unions, and other groups.

Zachariah, K.C., B.A. Prakash, and S. Irudaya Rajan. 2003. "The Impact of Immigration Policy on Indian Contract Migrants: The Case of the United Arab Emirates." *International Migration* 41(4): 12.

Annotation: Examining the immigration policy of the UAE, this brief case study addresses the impacts of these policies on Indian contract workers from the 1990s onward. Data was collected from officials in the UAE as well as from Indian migrant workers themselves. The first half of the article explains the cause of the surge in Indian migrants, while the second half addresses the resulting impact of immigration policy on Indian expatriates. Slavery is not directly addressed; the main focus is on the reduction of wages and the misuse of the sponsorship system for

exploiting workers. While this article does not mention slavery, it is a rare description of Indian migrant workers in the Middle East.

*Forms of Abuse and Framing Exploitation as Slavery*

Chammartin, Gloria. 2002. The Feminization of International Migration. International Migration Programme: International Labour Organization.  
[www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actrav/publ/129/7.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actrav/publ/129/7.pdf).

Annotation: This article focuses primarily on how the opportunities of migrant women differ from those of men, citing gender-biased migration policies and sex stereotypes as root causes of discrimination. Female domestic workers are the group most vulnerable to discrimination and abuse, due to individualized working environments and to the role of intermediaries such as brokers, agents, and recruiters. This article offers a good summary of what migrant domestic workers face in the Middle East, but does not go into great detail.

Degorge, Barbara. 2006. "Modern Day Slavery in the United Arab Emirates." *European Legacy* 11(6): 9.

Annotation: In this article, Degorge uses the UAE as a case study to examine three types of slavery in the Middle East: the use of children as camel jockeys, the sexual enslavement of women, and the migrant workers who "enslave themselves." Framing the article from a historical perspective, the author identifies the situations of these various groups as examples of slavery and concludes that what is needed is a deeper awareness of the scope, nature, and forms of modern day slavery, if there is any hope of abolishing it. The author's definition of slavery and her explanation of the related U.N. Convention make this article a valuable, succinct read.

International Labour Office. 2005. A Global Alliance Against Forced Labour. In *International Labour Conference*. Geneva: International Labour Office.  
[www.ilo.org/dyn/declaris/DECLARATIONWEB.DOWNLOAD\\_BLOB?Var\\_DocumentID=5059](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/declaris/DECLARATIONWEB.DOWNLOAD_BLOB?Var_DocumentID=5059)

Annotation: This report from the 2005 International Labor Conference provides a comprehensive account of forced labor around the world. Part I begins with definitions of the various characteristics of forced labor: the terminologies, the legislation, and the differences between forced labor and slavery. Part II focuses on the situation of forced labor in selected nations, while Part III proposes the ILO global action against forced labor. Unfortunately, the scope of this report is expansive, and as a result, no subject is covered in detail. However, the report excels in quantifying statistics in charts and graphs, presenting hard data clearly and concisely. This report is useful to anyone interested in understanding the full scope of forced labor around the world.

Jureidini, Ray, and Nayla Moukarbel. 2004. "Female Sri Lankan Domestic Workers in Lebanon: A Case of 'Contract Slavery?'" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30(4): 27.

Annotation: Drawing on over seventy interviews with Sri Lankan women in Lebanon, the authors argue that the situations of these domestic workers fall under the category of "contract slavery" as defined by Kevin Bales. This categorization is based on the workers' living conditions, how they are treated by employers, and how the legal and administrative arrangements have facilitated the entrapment they encounter. Although the study deals with contract slavery in Lebanon, it is clear that the same situation exists in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and elsewhere. This provocative study is essential reading for framing the abuses of domestic servants as slavery.

Kaur Gill, Amardeep. 2007. "Today's Slavery." *Canadian Dimension* 41(3): 4.

Annotation: In this brief article, the author succinctly outlines the differences between popular conceptions of contemporary slavery and its realities, pointing to such issues as environmental degradation, conflict, economic violence, societal oppression, and the marginalization of the poor as common factors that drive the impetus for many people to take serious risks and work "illegally." Also discussed are the strategies of deceit and manipulation used to entrap workers, especially migrant domestic servants, into slavery. The article is peppered with brief narratives from exploited workers, and although the article does not go into any detail about specific regions, it offers a good overview of contemporary slavery.

Sabban, Rima. 2001. Migrant Women in the United Arab Emirates: The Case of Female Domestic Workers. In *Series on Women and Migration: International Labor Office*. Geneva: International Labor Office. [www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/download/swmuae.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/download/swmuae.pdf).

Annotation: A working paper from the ILO, this article uses fieldwork conducted in the years 1995 and 2001 in order to illustrate examples of domestic slavery in the UAE. The author interviewed both domestic workers and their employers in real situations of employment. In great detail, the author describes the reasons why female domestic workers emigrate to the UAE, under what conditions they work, the types of abuse they endure, and the legal framework responsible for perpetuating these abuses. The author, while careful to analyze the issue from many perspectives, fails to draw any substantial conclusions on what is to be done about these abuses. Despite this omission, the article is an informative study.

Schwenken, Helen. 2005. "Domestic Slavery versus Workers Rights: Political Mobilizations of Migrant Domestic Workers in the European Union." The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies.

Annotation: Although this article doesn't examine the treatment of migrant domestic workers in the Gulf region, instead focusing on the exploitation of migrants in the European Union, its analysis offers an intriguing comparison between the two labor-receiving regions. The article

describes the role of NGOs and their political mobilizations as they strive to improve the living and working conditions of migrant domestic workers in the European Union and discusses political efforts to frame these abuses in terms of slavery and human trafficking. Of interesting note is how the abuses migrant women face in the European Union are nearly identical to those faced by migrants in the Gulf.

Sherry, Virginia N. 2004. *Bad Dreams: Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Workers in Saudi Arabia*, edited by W. Brown and J. Saunders. Human Rights Watch.  
[www.hrw.org/reports/2004/saudi0704](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/saudi0704)

Annotation: This lengthy report from Human Rights Watch describes abuses against migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, covering all sectors of the workforce, not just domestic labor. The author interviewed migrant workers in their home countries after they had recently returned from Saudi Arabia. This report depicts in often-chilling detail the level of exploitation, discrimination, and abuse these migrants face by their employers and by the Saudi criminal justice system. Sherry's disgust with the treatment of these migrants is obvious. The author begins her report with set recommendations on how the Saudi government should act in response to these abuses. Despite not visiting Saudi Arabia, the author's investigation is thorough and invaluable to the study of forced labor in the region.

Sunderland, Judith, and Nisha Varia. 2006. "Swept Under the Rug: Abuses against Domestic Workers Around the World." Human Rights Watch.

Annotation: An inverse to Sherry's report detailed above, this comprehensive article focuses on the issue of domestic labor throughout the world, and follows a similar format. Relying on interviews from domestic workers, the author assesses: (1) the scope of criminal abuses against domestic workers as a whole; (2) the exclusion of domestic workers from labor laws; (3) the forms of child labor; and (4) the recruitment, training, and abuse of migrant domestic workers. Each section concludes with the author's special recommendations for correcting each crisis. Although the report examines the plight of domestic workers worldwide, a great deal of emphasis is placed on Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular.

Toppert, Leigh, and Sameena Nazir, eds. 2005. Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Citizenship and Justice. New York: Freedom House.

Annotation: An excellent comparative study, this book is indispensable for understanding women's rights in the Middle East as a whole. Comprised of twenty months of research gathered from field consultations with women's rights leaders in the Middle East and with focus groups, the researchers seek to analyze the changing attitudes, obstacles, and opportunities for women in the Middle East and in Africa. Each country has its own chapter dedicated to its unique situation, including both the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The various Middle Eastern and African countries are ranked relative to their neighbors in graphs that clearly illustrate how women are treated with regard to access to justice, autonomy, civic voice, and so

forth. Attention is placed on the laws that protect women; while most consideration is given to nationals, migrant women who work as domestic helpers are mentioned as the group most vulnerable to abuse.

U.S. Department of State. 2007. Trafficking in Persons Report.  
<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2007/>

Annotation: Although this report from the U.S. State Department concerns human trafficking, enough emphasis is put on slavery to make it useful for the analysis of domestic slavery in the United Arab Emirates and in Saudi Arabia. Both countries are discussed in this report and Saudi Arabia is ranked as a Tier 3 offender, a title bestowed upon nations who do not comply with the minimum standards of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVP). The report gives an overview of almost all types of modern slavery, including involuntary domestic servitude, sponsorship laws, and forced servitude. The majority of the report is dedicated to country narratives, describing the unique trafficking situation in each nation.

#### *Legal Recourse and Redress for Abuses*

Abu-Habib, Lina. 1998. "The Use and Abuse of Female Domestic Workers from Sri Lanka in Lebanon." *Gender and Development* 6 (1): 6.

Annotation: This brief article analyzes possible reasons why international NGOs fail to take action against the abuses faced by female domestics from Sri Lanka in Lebanon. Drawing on her own experiences and observations from direct contact with domestic workers, the author details the role of employment agencies in treating these women like property. Also addressed is the fact that many NGOs either deny the existence of abuses, or demonstrate a lack of interest in the problem. Abu-Habib goes on to explain that many Lebanese nationals scoff at any reports of abuse and contend that these women migrate of their own volition. Although this article does not deal with Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates, the issues are easily transferable.

Amnesty International. 2000. "Saudi Arabia: Gross Human Rights Abuses Against Women."  
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=D2C1FC0DC59EC51C802569610071BFEC>.

Annotation: This lengthy and informative report focuses on the human rights violations women face under the Saudi justice system, in addition to addressing the plight of migrant domestic workers, who are both foreign nationals and women. More than forty domestic workers from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka were interviewed by Amnesty International for this well-researched report, which helpfully outlines the various international human rights and labor conventions that Saudi Arabia has approved. Narratives from both female nationals and domestic workers who have witnessed discrimination, arbitrary arrest, torture, and other human rights violations are interspersed throughout the report.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2000. "Saudi Arabia: A Woman Migrant Worker Sentenced to Death." *Amnesty International Women's Rights Action 2000*, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=BF2B01B339C57943802568790040AB76>.

Annotation: Illuminating the many inadequacies of the criminal justice system in Saudi Arabia, this brief article describes the imprisonment of a migrant domestic worker from the Philippines after she was found guilty of murdering her female employer, despite being barred from providing a viable defense. According to the article, those without access to money or influence are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. Because many domestic workers do not speak or read Arabic, they are often unaware of the laws and can be easily tricked into signing confessions.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2000. "Saudi Arabia: Gross Human Rights Abuses Against Women." <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=D2C1FC0DC59EC51C802569610071BFEC>.

Annotation: This lengthy and informative report focuses on the human rights violations women face under the Saudi justice system, in addition to addressing the plight of migrant domestic workers, who are both foreign nationals and women. More than forty domestic workers from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka were interviewed by Amnesty International for this well-researched report, which helpfully outlines the various international human rights and labor conventions that Saudi Arabia has approved. Narratives from both female nationals and domestic workers who have witnessed discrimination, arbitrary arrest, torture, and other human rights violations are interspersed throughout the report.

Center for the Study of Human Rights. 1996. Women and Human Rights: The Basic Documents. New York: Columbia University.

Annotation: This book is a comprehensive compilation of declarations and conventions over time regarding the human rights of women. The scope is historical and encompasses aspects such as marriage, health, education, and of particular interest in the study of slavery—employment and trafficking in persons. Also covered are the components of the International Bill of Rights and other instruments of human rights legislation.

Human Rights Watch. 2007. "Saudi Arabia: Migrant Domestic Workers Killed by Employers." *Human Rights News*, <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/08/17/saudia16699.htm>.

Annotation: This article from Human Rights Watch describes the killing of two Indonesian migrant domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, and discusses how government inaction in Saudi Arabia leaves migrants vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by their employers. Along with

summarizing the types of abuse migrant domestic workers face, this article also delves into how the Saudi criminal justice system prevents migrants from seeking redress and often works against them as employers bring up countercharges.

Mowbray, Joel. 2003. "Maids, Slaves, and Prisoners: To be Employed in a Saudi Home." *National Review* 55(3): 5.

Annotation: Addressing the slave-like abuses migrant domestic servants face at the hands of Saudis both in Saudi Arabia and also on American soil, this article details how these women are treated under Saudi law, and addresses the actions they take in attempting to escape their bondage. These actions oftentimes include accessing government-run shelters or using the "underground railroad." The author goes on to scrutinize how the U.S. State Department willfully fails to hold Saudi diplomats accountable for the involuntary servitude of domestics in America (for fear of angering the "politically connected"), and how their treatment in America is often equally as atrocious as in Saudi Arabia.

Ofreneo, Rene, and Isabelo Samonte. 2005. Empowering Filipino Migrant Workers: Policy Issues and Challenges. In *International Migration Papers*. Geneva: International Labour Office.  
[www.ilocarib.org.tt/oldwww/infosources/migration/FilipinoMigrantWorkersimp64.pdf](http://www.ilocarib.org.tt/oldwww/infosources/migration/FilipinoMigrantWorkersimp64.pdf)

Annotation: This report by the International Labour Office addresses ways in which Filipino migrant workers can redress abuses they face in their host countries. In great detail, the authors describe the general problems migrant workers face and the challenges NGOs must overcome in order to empower Filipinos. The report concludes with the case studies of Filipino migrant workers in Japan and in Hong Kong. Although not particularly useful in the study of domestic slavery in the Middle East, this report is valuable for understanding what measures are being taken to reverse the exploitation of migrant workers.

U.S. Department of State. 2007. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Saudi Arabia.  
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78862.htm>.

Annotation: This report by the U.S. State Department offers an all-encompassing view of human rights in Saudi Arabia and puts the issue of domestic slavery in perspective. The report begins with an overview of Saudi Arabia's governing system, and then goes into greater detail on each human rights violation, ending with the country's strict limitations on workers rights, especially as pertaining to foreign workers. Discrimination, societal abuses, and human trafficking are addressed in section five, which compares Saudi law to practice. Of particular interest is how the report mentions that racial discrimination is illegal in Saudi Arabia, while discrimination based on nationality is not.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2007. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: United Arab Emirates. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78865.htm>.

Annotation: Much like the U.S. State Department's report on Saudi Arabia, this report details the human rights abuses most common in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). While Saudi Arabia is deemed a Tier 3 nation by the U.S. State Department, the UAE is on the Tier 2 Watch List, a lesser category. The introduction of the report gives a brief overview of the structure of the UAE government and is useful to anyone unfamiliar with the Emirates. According to this report, the UAE has made progress since 2005 in addressing the problem of human trafficking and repatriated children who had been used as camel jockeys. The rest of the report is an analysis of UAE law and human rights from a U.S. perspective.

Wickramasekera, Piyasiri. 2004. Rights of Migrant Workers in Asia: Any Light at the End of the Tunnel? In *International Migration Papers*. Geneva: International Labour Office. [www.forum-asia.org/index2.php?option=com\\_content&do\\_pdf=1&id=51](http://www.forum-asia.org/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=51).

Annotation: This comprehensive report from the International Labour Office outlines the key features of the Asian labor migration, migrant worker rights in practice, the international legal instruments for protection of migrant workers, and what is currently being done by NGOs, the ILO, and other organizations to resolve human rights issues. The slave-like conditions many migrant workers face in the realm of domestic service in the Middle East is addressed at length, as are human rights abuses in other labor-receiving nations. This report is of particular utility to anyone seeking a broad understanding of forced labor of migrant workers.