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Commodification and Resistance: Migrant Labor in Jordan

Matthew Walleser

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A Master's Paper

**Submitted to the faculty of Clark University,
Worcester, Massachusetts,
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the degree of Master of the Arts
in the Department of International Development Community and
Environment(IDCE)**

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ABSTRACT

Matthew Walleser

Neoliberal globalization, which has guided the economic system of the world for the last forty years, claims to offer opportunities for equality and wealth for all citizens. However, I argue that the structural violence inherent in the neoliberal system and its drive for maximizing profits leads to cycles of abuse and discrimination, as well as a transfer of wealth and power toward elites and away from average citizens. I discuss how Jordan, like other developing countries, has been a locus for this violence. Through the lens of migrant workers within Jordan, this research paper traces the effects of these policies on migrant laborers and looks at how some seek to oppose these forces and advocate for increased rights. The paper shows that these workers have reacted to these dispossessions by creating networks of resistance and support, both informally and through the auspices of NGOs, labor organizations, and religious institutions.

Keywords: Migrant Labor, Migrant Domestic Labor, Garment Sector, Jordan, Neoliberalism, Globalization, Middle East

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Methodology	3
Frameworks and Literature Review	4
A Note on Word Usage	8
Globalization in the Neoliberal era	9
Jordan's Role	12
Jasmopolitanism	13
Labor Hierarchy in Jordan	18
Jordan and Migrant labor in the era of Neoliberal Globalization	20
Kafala System	22
Perceptions	23
Labor Abuses	25
Fear, Escape and Illegality	26
Differences in Migrant Labor Experiences	27

Modes of Resistance	30
Protests, Labor Unions and Strikes	30
Networks of Survival	31
NGOs	31
Religious Approaches	33
Other Actions	34
Conclusions	35
Bibliography	36

Introduction

My interest in the migrant labor movement in Jordan came as an undergraduate while studying in Amman. One day a fellow student, who was staying with Jordanian hosts, told us that the family's Filipino maid had escaped in the night. She also had added that this was an ongoing problem with this particular maid. I soon learned that this was not an uncommon occurrence in Jordan. What I took away most from this situation was the dissonance that seemed to be prevalent among those who had maids or other migrant workers. They seemed genuinely confused as to why someone would want to escape that situation. They had paid for a service and expected it to be done. There was no thought to what was under the surface and the varied machinations that had brought this woman thousands of miles from her home and away from her family to work as a domestic servant in a stranger's home.

Many migrant laborers around the world must navigate spaces that severely restrict their agency. These forces are social, economic, and political in scope and vary between different countries. How do migrants deal with these forces? Why are systems in place that would cause a young woman to leave her family, migrate halfway around the world to work in a strange land in a stranger's home (a typical experience within Jordan)? What, after all of this, would make her want to resist this enterprise? Might there be inherent structures that rather than circumscribe these instances, actually promote them? How do these migrants challenge these structures, public perceptions,

and status quo to seek new avenues to gain their rights and equality among other workers and society at large?

Thinking back, almost ten years after my first exposure to migrant labor in Jordan, I was compelled to look deeper into this incident for my master's research. Looking more closely, this woman's escape attempt could be seen as a form of resistance to an entrenched system which governed much of her and many other migrant laborer livelihoods. I wondered how this system could perpetuate itself in the face of human rights violations and grossly unfair labor practices. I quickly discovered that this was one example of how globalization relies on violence and dispossession to operate at its full capacity and maximize profits.

Despite the narratives espoused by free market advocates surrounding migrant labor in the era of globalization, which tout it as an opportunity to escape poverty and foster equality, the commodification of migrant labor due to Neoliberal market policies belies this, leading to resistance due to poor working conditions on the part of migrant laborers in Jordan, many of whom have experienced abuse, have few labor rights, and live in a constant state of fear.

With this restriction of agency however, have also come new forms of agency and resistance among migrant laborers within Jordan. In all sectors of Jordanian migrant labor, there are movements that seek to advocate for stronger rights and increased awareness of the plight of migrant laborers

It should be noted that this is not a comprehensive study but rather an exploratory look at the particular modes of resistance available to migrant laborers in Jordan as they seek to amplify their struggle. This study will be divided into four sections. The first will explain the dynamics of globalization in the neoliberal era. The second section will seek to situate the role of migrant labor as one of the machines of global capital flow. The third section will look at Jordan's role in this project, as well as the structure of its economy and labor hierarchy. The fourth will look at migrant labor in Jordan, and the forms and means of resistance.

Methods

In conducting my field research in Amman, Jordan over the period of a month in the summer of 2017, I relied heavily upon the collection of qualitative data. I performed approximately fifteen interviews, both structured and unstructured, conducted in person as well as over Skype with aid workers, employers, and researchers. This was conducted under the auspices and approval of Clark University's Institutional Review Board, which monitors research on vulnerable populations. As is common, I also drew a great amount of information from participant observation as well as various conversations with everyday people that I ran into during my research. These ran the gamut from taxi drivers, migrants, madams, professors, aid workers, and urban professionals and contributed to my learning a great deal about the knowledge of and perceptions toward migrant labor in their country. My research also draws upon

secondary sources. Annual and other reports provided by international and regional NGOs have significantly added to the literature regarding migrant labor in Jordan over the last fifteen years and have been tremendously helpful in framing this research.

Frameworks & Literature Review

Most of the narratives utilized by those who perpetuate neoliberal policies attach to it the idea of emancipation and opportunity for every individual, rich or poor. However, it can be argued that the neoliberal project is simply a redistributive effort that re-assert's the role and power of elites within our society (Harvey, 2007). In order to reap this reward, elites, politicians, and the business class have sought to erode many of the rights that workers had won in the early and middle parts of the twentieth century.

One of International Labor Organization's main purposes, as stated in the Philadelphia Declaration of 1944, was to declare that "Labour is not a commodity," and that workers throughout the world should possess inalienable rights such as the "freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity" (ILO Constitution).

A commodity, as defined by Marx, is any item in which humans may acquire to fulfill a need or desire (Marx, 1990). One of the foundational basis for global capitalism was and remains to acquire cheap or free labor to utilize in the accumulation of assets, or more commonly referred to as the production of capital. The legacy of indentured servitude and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade demonstrate that humans are more than capable of commodifying the individual for need or desire, in this case to extract profit

from the work of others. Thus, labor itself is a commodity, bartered and negotiated for. I argue that this type of commodification presents itself in the current form of migrant labor within the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan.

In his landmark study, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey explains that with the commodification of labor, that workers, having been

“Stripped of the protective cover of lively democratic institutions and threatened with all manner of social dislocations, a disposable workforce inevitably turns to other institutional forms through which to construct social solidarities and express a collective will.” (Harvey, 2005, 171)

In another study Harvey posits that inequality and social reproduction, such as is equated with wage and migrant labor, presents one of the contradictions of Capitalism. He terms this contradiction “freedom and domination.” As the free market professes the opportunity it provides for the world’s poor, where they can send remittances home or have an opportunity to become more entrepreneurial, a trail of domination also follows them, in the form of the state, employer, violence, and segregation (Harvey, 2015). This is a pattern which is extremely prevalent today in the developing world, including within Jordan, where human and labor rights for individuals are fewer relative to the Global North. Where there are fewer rights, wages will also remain low. This follows the prevailing trend of neoliberal globalization, where businesses seek out markets which can maximize profits to the fullest extent, and

by extension, poorer countries seek to offer tax incentives to businesses in order to make foreign investment more attractive. This “race to the bottom” not only fuels an environment more attractive to investors but can also be more detrimental to workers due to limited oversight and a roll back of labor rights which facilitates increased profits (Davies & Vadamannati, 2011).

Researchers have long documented how the indigenous and dispossessed have fought back against this neoliberal tide throughout the world, particularly within South America (Petras, 2013). This points to the global, if informal, struggle against policies that have reshaped the lives of so many of the world’s poor and dispossessed. Migrant laborers however, are not connected to the land, insomuch that they are foreign nationals, their rights and options for opposition are fewer. How do they then advocate for their rights?

Among the literature of resistance, an important contributor has been James C. Scott. His conceptualization of resistance comes from his work researching peasants and their relationship with the state:

Most of the forms this struggle takes stop well short of collective outright defiance. Here I have in mind the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth. These Brechtian forms of class struggle have certain features in common. They require little or no

coordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms (Scott, 1985, 29).

From this Scott, in later works, conceived the idea of infrapolitics which refers to the collective and individual actions that occur in the shadows outside of the knowledge of the employer (Scott, 1990). Mittelman and Chin go further to surmise that these infrapolitics cannot be said to only revolve around class as Scott sees, but the whole of life experience, stating that we must recognize also that “...*the symbolic and material dimensions of class are intertwined with other modalities of identity such as age, gender, race-ethnicity, religion, and nationality*” (Amoore, 2005, 24).

One of the key aspects that this paper will discuss is how minority or marginalized groups confront their existence within the violent structures of neoliberal globalization. In his work researching human security studies in the Global South, particularly in Cairo and Rio de Janeiro, Paul Amar details the methods that traditionally restricted groups, particularly women and sexual minorities, have utilized to carve out their existence and combat restrictions imposed upon them by the increasingly militarized neoliberal state (Amar, 2016). This too, holds true in many respects for migrant laborers within Jordan, who seek to magnify their plight in the face of the repression of their agency, which hides behind the narrative of a connected, globalized, and emancipated

world that neoliberal states utilize to deflect responsibility for the inherent violence of the neoliberal system.

The advent of neoliberal governance around the world has also given rise to a “politics of the dispossessed.” Through the process of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey, 2004), Neoliberal structures of violence have created new avenues in which the dispossessed have made their voices heard (Petras, 2013). This paper will describe how migrant laborers in Jordan utilize their own set of methods, relative to the Jordanian experience to highlight their plight and advocate for rights.

A Note on Word Usage

Global North is a term utilized to denote those developed countries who are at the forefront of power in global economic and political affairs, such as the United States. One could also refer to these countries as extractors, who produce capital through extraction of wealth. Global South is a term utilized to denote countries that are developing or underdeveloped, behind the Global North in terms of growth indicators. The Global South is also the site of tremendous extraction of capital by the Global North, and this will be a theme which is touched upon in my paper.

Madame is the term of address that domestic workers use when talking with their female employers.

Globalization in the Neoliberal Era

Neoliberalism is a group of principles that promotes the idea of the free and open markets, eliminating or “liberalizing” economic protectionism that nation-states traditionally impose for the benefit of the nation and its citizens. Neoliberal ideology posits that by opening global markets, countries will be able to reap the benefits of a globalized marketplace, providing new opportunities and wealth for all.

During the waning years of World War II, representatives of the allied countries came together in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, to outline the monetary and economic policies that would drive the world’s economy after the war (Peet, 2003). The institutionalization of what we today term Development, also, in many ways, found its start in Bretton Woods, which produced such International Financial Institutions (IFIs) as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Munck, 2013). Initially utilized to help rebuild postwar Europe, these institutions, always following the political compass, eventually drifted towards the promotion of neoliberal restructuring and austerity practices, which have devastated the economies of the Global South (Peet, 2003).

This transition had much to do with the global economic crisis that befell the Global North in the latter half of the twentieth century. Wars, a global oil crisis, and rampant inflation sent global economies reeling citizens (Mazower, 2012). This saw many economists and politicians turn away from the Keynesian economic models that had

come out of the depression and been in place during the post-war years, which urged government spending to help lift the economy. In the post war era as well, many countries in the Global South sought to industrialize in order to compete in the international economy. This entailed seeking massive loans, which at the time, international banks, awash in petrodollars from OPEC countries, were happy to provide (Graeber, 2011). With the abovementioned shocks to the economic system, inflation, and therefore interest rates, ballooned on loans, burdening the Global South with massive debts. When economists stepped in to stem the tide of the third world debt crisis, their remedies were strict and for the most part unfeasible. What has come to be termed as the “Washington Consensus” a set of principles elucidated by the IFIs to increase privatization and de-regulate markets to encourage foreign investment, and perhaps most significantly, institute austerity measures that would cut government spending and services to citizens (Mazower, 2012).

Countries in the Global North have been able to leverage their power through their control of these International Financial Institutions to influence and implement these neoliberal policies in the countries of the Global South (Peet, 2003). IFI’s have pushed countries in the Global South to restructure their debts and many have essentially become satellite markets for the Global North. These untapped markets with cheap labor relative to the workforce in the Global North are the fuel for globalization in the neoliberal era.

In opening these markets, western companies typically invest money into the country in the form of factories and salaries for workers, which in theory boost the economies of developing countries. Because wages are low, relative to salaries in the Global North, exported products can be bought for cheaper prices and everyone benefits. On paper. In reality, the effect of these neoliberalism and policies which have resulted from it has accomplished little in terms of economic growth (Harvey, 2007).

The idea of the free market ushering in an era of limited government is a false assumption. In reality, the state simply reconfigures apparatuses in order to allow the increased generation of revenue through rents, aid, and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (Baumann, 2016). The state remains in power and can become more entrenched by aligning with private industry and elites at the expense of the majority of the citizenry (Baumann, 2016). This regulatory state must reinvent new regimes of control to stay in power, often leading to increased securitization and militarization to quell new forms of dissent (Amar, 2016). This alignment with the agents of unfettered free trade has also led to what has come to be termed as a “race to the bottom.” In attempting to attract investors, many countries compete to make their policies more attractive. This has resulted in the erosion of labor rights as government oversight is curtailed and organized labor is banned or made impotent, resulting in fewer rights for workers and more opportunity for violence and discrimination in the workplace. States with limited labor rights, such as those in the Middle East, are thus ripe for this foreign direct investment (FDI).

Jordan's Role

The states of the Global South have been a laboratory for these experiments, including Jordan and the wider Middle East. Its leaders, many of whom who attended educational institutions in the Global North, where university economics departments continue to view that unfettered free market capitalism is imperative, often are great champions of these policies. Within the Middle East, this process has resulted in very pronounced change in the interplay between rulers and citizens. For decades, Arab rulers had governed under what has become known as “Democratiyatt-al-khubz,” or “Democracy of bread.” This was a strategy by which autocratic rulers of the region sought to ensure their power and allay dissent through subsidies on such staples as food and fuel (Ciezadlo, 2011). In her book *Expulsions*, Saskia Sassen elucidates on this trend:

“with all its shortcomings, and the unequal structural power of its various branches and agencies, a working liberal state can secure a measure of socioeconomic redistribution...But when the mechanisms for accumulating profit shift from expanded mass manufacturing and public infrastructure development to financial innovations and the post-1980s corporate format, the ground for making claims of justice crumbles.” (Sassen, 2014, 218).

Jordan's place as a “modern Middle Eastern country,” is thus tinged with neoliberal discourse. Its monarchy controls much of the political process and oversees a large security and surveillance apparatus. In addition to Jordan's neoliberal economic

model, a pattern of corruption, or what is termed as “wasta” in Jordan, dominates the social, economic, and political spectrum. Wasta refers to networks of connections that aid citizens in everyday affairs. Although this use of patronage is common within the general Jordanian population, it plays itself out on a much larger scale among the political, business, tribal, and royal elite within Jordan. More broadly, researchers refer to this effect as Neo-Patrimonialism, where authoritarian rulers carve out loyal circles to entrench their hold on power (Bank & Richter, 2010). They also seek to placate the general public and Global North governments and NGO’s through incremental liberalization such as participatory elections, which are relatively non-threatening to the power structures of the state since the patronage system the state has carved out among the elites protects them from upheaval Bank & Richter, 2010).

To contextualize migrant labor in Hashemite Jordan, it is important to detail the country’s economic and political standing within the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region as well as internationally. Jordan is a paradox both politically and economically, and completely lacks the oil reserves of its neighbors. It has developed into a resource poor rentier state, based on its reliance on foreign aid and remittances from Jordanians abroad (Tsantes, 2013).

In the mid-20th century, Jordan enjoyed a degree of economic development, in large part due to the contingent of Jordanians who sought employment in the Gulf to work in the oil industry (Bureš, 2008). By the seventies, with the oil boom in full swing large

sums of wealth, were being transferred to Jordan in the form of remittances (Knowles, 2005). However, with the downswing of the oil economy and drop in oil prices around the globe many Jordanians sent back fewer remittances, or returned home, leading to increased economic woes within the country. The Gulf War, where Jordan supported Iraq, its neighbor and one of its largest trading partners, over the United States and its coalition, which included Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, also had an impact on Jordan's economy (Bureš, 2008). This led to antipathy internationally and throughout the region. These crises helped Jordanian debt to bloom and the IMF and World Bank were soon advocating changes.

Jordan completely subscribed to the economic and debt restructuring proffered by the World Bank and IMF in the wake of financial crises that had caused Jordan to default on its debt in the late 1980's, shifting the from a state driven to a market driven economy (Knowles, 2005). This however is not a total transition, as the country still operates a large state apparatus, only now directed toward the benefit of the elite holders of capital. Since 1989, Jordan has embarked on campaigns that have raised public taxes, targeted foreign direct investment by deregulating the export market, and introduced an expanded austerity package (Harrigan, El-Said, & Wang, 2006), which has not always sat well with the wider population (Cowell, 1989).

These policies have been harnessed by elites to carve out segregated spaces of power and to generate extravagant wealth, particularly through the acquisition of rents, which

deprives the general populace in the name of profit (Baumann, 2016). These dynamics have always existed, and it would be false to say that neoliberalization has ushered in all the evils that lay before us. However, as the accumulation of wealth among elites continues, tensions between much of the population and the wealthy governing elite will only become more intense. This plays itself out nowhere more clearly than in Amman, the capital of Jordan.

Josmopolitanism

With these policies, the capital city of Amman has grown so much in the last thirty years that some researchers have come to term its boundaries as the Amman Ruseifa-Zarqa Built-Up Area, and within this area the bulk of Jordan's economic activity occurs (Ababsa,2013).

Amman is relatively segregated between a middle to upper class cosmopolitan population in the developed Western part of the city, and a less affluent population in what is referred to as East Amman. The roots of this split lie in the fact that many Palestinian refugees and poorer citizens settled in the eastern part of the city, densely packed close to or within refugee camps. (Alfdeilat, 2014). Indeed, some of the more concentrated areas of East Amman have some of the world's highest population densities (Ababsa, 2013). As density increased, wealthier citizens of the city headed west (Alfdeilat, 2014). Therefore, Jordan's middle class, and the capital behind it resides firmly in an ever-expanding West Amman, separated from the economically

segregated eastern part of the city. The cosmopolitan bubble within Amman allows citizens to be shielded from the extremes of governmental repression, and also provides an avenue with which to escape the conservative restraints of much of Jordanian society (Tobin, 2012).

Again, government policies which have promoted neoliberal ideals, have allowed for the expansion of a larger middle class which has had increasingly disposable incomes. These spaces have become hotspots for the neoliberal build up. While I was in Jordan, it was commonplace to see migrant domestic workers in West Amman cater to the middle class and the elite. A short drive north or east one can find factory cities within the QIZs of the Amman-Ruseifa-Zarqa built up area, witnessing migrant garment workers producing shirts for Fortune 500 companies like Nike and Under Armour. In addition to this, as one goes about their day, they may not realize the migrant laborer construction workers who continue to build up the infrastructure of the ever-expanding city.

Qualified Industrial Zones and industrial cities, which dot the landscape around the outskirts of Amman, stem from trade agreements conducted with Israel and the United States in 1996, in the wake of the Jordan – Israel peace conducted in 1994. Initially, factories operating in QIZs received benefits if they operated with a modicum of joint Israeli-Jordanian input. The United States-Jordan free trade agreement, which was incrementally rolled out in 2000, required only Jordanian input, and expanded these

same export benefits to factories operating throughout the country (Reznick, 2018). With these trade agreements, the country attracted a variety of investors, particularly within the garment industry. Jordan has vastly increased exports out of the country to the point where its garment sector has become one of the largest in the world (Williams, 2015). These free trade agreements were meant to spur Jordanian employment, but figures tell a different story, with as many as three quarters of the workforce in the sector being migrant labor, mostly female (Reznick, 2018).

West Amman became an economic and urban development priority, and in recent years this development has ramped up. Coming back to Amman after almost a decade it was clear that the city had expanded furiously, particularly in the cosmopolitan center of West Amman, which has increasingly become a vehicle in which to promote the capitalist aesthetic and cater to cosmopolitan Jordanians, expatriates, and tourists in the form of malls, luxury hotels and nightlife. Witnessing this, it was also helpful to think of the paradoxes in this grand project. There is still no integrated public transit system in the city. In order to aid ordinary citizens, some entrepreneurial Jordanians took it upon themselves to create their own transit map including the myriad different types of fleets operating around the city (“Amman’s Public Transportation Map,” 2018).

Amman has also become an increasingly dense jungle of cars, and many people think about their day in terms of avoiding heavy traffic. Rideshare services, Uber and Kareem have also found their way into Amman but are technically illegal. Drivers of these cars seek to skirt the many traffic police that patrol the city, meaning the

passenger often must run and duck around a corner so the driver would not get his car confiscated.

Looking out a large window on the second floor of the new Abdali Mall, one can see the large azure blue domed Abdullah I mosque. To me it was difficult to determine which building overlooked the other, and what was being worshipped, God or the dollar.

Labor Hierarchy in Jordan

The Jordanian labor market is extremely hierarchical. Native Jordanians sit on top of this hierarchy and compose much of the elite and middle class. They primarily work for the state, receive a pension, and inhabit prized positions within the military and security services, followed by bureaucratic and technocratic positions. Many of these positions go to the Jordanian tribal/Bedouin community, termed “East Bankers” (El Kurd, 2014).

Jordanians of Palestinian descent are typically segregated within the labor market and have difficulty in obtaining higher positions in the public sector, especially within the army and General Intelligence Directorate (GID). They have thus carved out a more entrepreneurial role for themselves within the private sector in the fields of trade, finance, and small business.

Palestinians without Jordanian citizenship, primarily those who fled Gaza after 1967, those who fled Lebanese civil war and Israeli invasions of 1982 and 2006, as well as

those who left the West Bank after 1967, cannot work in the public sector, and have difficulty finding jobs where there are professional syndicates such as law and engineering. (Human Rights Watch, 2010, Sherab, 2015).

Non-Jordanians, as well as Jordanians of lesser means occupy the lowest tier of the labor hierarchy in Jordan. This tier is comprised mostly of migrant laborers and refugees. Refugees, primarily from Syria, often work in the informalized, unregulated sector of the Jordanian economy. Migrant laborers in Jordan come from many different countries and work in several different sectors, depending on their nationality and race. I will go deeper into their dynamics and contribution to the Jordanian economy in the following section.

One must also consider the changing workforce in Jordan. Regional and International politics have much to do with the ebb and flow of the Jordanian economy. Jordanians are becoming increasingly educated, and devoid of jobs at home, many seek employment abroad. Gender disparities are also a large issue within Jordan's labor market. Although rates of employment among Jordanian women are among the worst in the world (Sowell, 2017), Jordanian women have significantly boosted their employment numbers relative to the 1980's (Tamkeen, 2016). This is particularly true in the case in cosmopolitan West Amman, where there are many female professionals who utilize migrant domestic workers due to their busy lives. Migrant labor is also

utilized as the historical family unit has transitioned as citizens moved into the city, leading to fewer people in the home to take part in childcare (Tamkeen,2016).

Jordan and Migrant labor in the era of Neoliberal Globalization

Migrant labor has been a staple of the world economy for centuries. More recently however, within the last half century, developing states have instituted policies expressly based upon the temporary emigration of a large portion of their workforce. Currently there are approximately 200 million migrant laborers around the world and in many respects, they help to drive the world economy, as they sent home nearly a half trillion dollars in remittances in 2016 (Iyengar, 2017). Countries of origin increasingly relying on remittances as a source of revenue that in some cases eclipse that of foreign aid (Eisenstein, 2009).

The current global migrant labor framework is a mix of bureaucracy among governments and recruitment agencies, employers, and migrant laborers. Governments usually sign Memorandums of Understanding between their labor ministries, which establishes partnerships that facilitate the entry of migrant laborers. Migrants are recruited by agencies within their home countries, and then aligned with a foreign country recruitment agency, where they are then placed in homes or other employment, under the supervision of an employer (Migration Policy Institute, 2013).

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan hosts many migrant laborers from throughout the world. These migrants and their work stem from the rising tide of globalization that has

been taking place in the last thirty years in the Global South. Neoliberal Market discourse describe these workers as free and entrepreneurial, staking out a pass to middle class as a means of financing their families through remittances back home. However, the laws that govern these migrants in Jordan render many, at various times, stateless and with limited or no rights.

The total amount of migrant labor within Jordan remains uncertain, but a rough estimate place 1.4 million Jordanians within the labor market, as well as an equal number of migrant workers and refugees (Razzaz, 2017). These numbers place tremendous stress upon the Jordanian economy and unemployment among Jordanians remains high.

One of the major components of migrant labor in Jordan is that of female reproductive labor, which includes domestic work and childcare and other service related tasks that are performed for wealthier Jordanian families. Jordan's Department of Statistics states that there are around 50,000 migrant domestic workers in the country, with an additional 20,000 working informally or illegally (Karadsheh, 2018). Another large component of migrant labor are those workers in Jordan's Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs), who primarily work in the manufacture of garments. The total number of foreign migrant labor employed there comes to almost 40,000, with almost 2.5 times the amount of women than men (Tamkeen, 2016).

During my research in Jordan I came to recognize several types of migrant labor. The major sectors of migrant labor within Jordan include agricultural workers from Egypt,

primarily male, manufacturing workers from south Asia who work in the garment industry, primarily female, and female domestic workers. Within the country there is a certain hierarchy among the overall workforce as well as a hierarchy among these sectors mentioned above that manifests itself in various ways. For the sake of this article I will describe the issues related to migrant workers who work as domestic labor or within Jordan's garment sector. These consist of primarily female workers who come from varying parts of the world, primarily south Asia, including Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Bangladesh but also east Africa.

Kafala System

All of these workers are legally bound under the umbrella of a rigid contract-based employment referred to as the kafala system. The kafala system is a system of sponsorship between an employer and an employee. Although primarily used in the Gulf, Jordan also utilizes a version of this system (Tamkeen, 2016). Essentially, the system ties an employee and their work permit to an employer for the duration of their stay. Because this ties them to one employer, they cannot move to another position without the approval of their current employer. Thus, if problems arise, migrant workers often have no recourse but to work illegally. In many cases they leave their initial place of employment due to being misled about job duties or living conditions, having their pay withheld or passports confiscated, or because of abuse (Tamkeen, 2016). This especially affects many domestic workers within Jordan who are technically

there illegally because they had to flee untenable working conditions. Newly revised labor laws address many of these issues but Jordanian government agencies have little capability regarding the monitoring and enforcement of them and are thus likely to side with the employer (Tamkeen, 2016). Although it is said the kafala system has historical roots relating to the idea Arab hospitality, where an employer would house and provide for a worker during the duration of his stay, it has more recently become an abusive system with little government oversight (Khan, 2014).

Perceptions

Perceptions of migrant workers in Jordan vary, and are an interesting way to gauge the knowledge of migrant labor issues among regular Jordanians. Many do feel that migrants are exploited, however they also feel migrants exploit the system as well. These narratives are interesting in that they seem to align with prevailing neoliberal thought regarding labor as commodity or possession.

An interesting recent study undertaken by the ILO looked at employers' perceptions of Migrant Domestic Workers (MDW). Its research found that dehumanizing discourses dominate perceptions related to MDWs, with employers and recruitment agencies. (ILO,2015).

In my own research, an interesting notion among the Jordanian population that I heard repeatedly was that Jordanians didn't have the physique to carry out the labor that many (non-domestic) migrants perform. I feel that many of these perceptions stem from the

fact that this labor is looked down upon from both a cultural and monetary, as well as physical level. Another trope that I encountered by talking with Jordanians was that many migrant laborers are able to take advantage of the labor system and exploit it for their gain. In conversations with some Jordanians, they felt that migrant workers were performing elaborate schemes, making immense profits, and exploiting Jordanian hospitality. These were not explicit accusations, rather hearsay that likely arise from stereotypes. This is likely because migrants do make financial gains relative to their home economies even while they are being underpaid in Jordan. This issue has led to resentment among some Jordanians, as well as some government officials who complain that migrant domestic workers leave their rigid contract employment in order to work informally and seek larger paychecks, and not because of violent abuse (Su, 2017).

An interesting recent study undertaken by the ILO looked at employers' perceptions of Migrant Domestic Workers (MDW). Its research found that dehumanizing discourses dominate perceptions related to MDWs, with employers and recruitment agencies. Many madames see their migrant workers as "rebellious," fearing that in allowing laborers time off, they will marry Jordanian men and leave their employment (ILO,2015)

Labor Abuses

Within the garment industry, the large influx of factories and workers into QIZs and Jordan's industrial cities in the last decade or more has made it one of the more important sectors of Jordan's export economy. Lax labor standards often mean poor or dangerous working conditions ranging from unsafe workspaces and exposure to chemicals. Along with this comes poor managerial leadership, overwork and under payment, as well as unsanitary living conditions within employee dormitories (Tamkeen, 2016). Because the sector primarily employs migrant women, sexual harassment and abuse within the garment industry has been a recurring issue (Better Work Jordan, 2014).

This work is isolated due to the fact that migrants live in the private homes of their employers, also making it more difficult to monitor than factory labor. Many female migrant domestic laborers are also targets for sexual harassment and abuse and like their counterparts in the garment industry, coming forward with accusations usually comes to no avail or can lead to further abuse, as employers, due to lack or capacity of monitoring of labor rights, are often the final arbiters (Su, 2017).

Fear, Escape & Illegality

One of the largest issues that migrants face in Jordan is the aforementioned rigid kafala system which ties them to one employer, and the difficulty in nullifying a contract. Although Jordanian labor law has changed to some degree on this matter,

employers and employees are not equal parties in the reality of many labor situations. Especially in domestic work, the employee employer relationship is burdened by the fact that the employee lives in the home of their employer, creating a servant / master dynamic that pervades the work experience. Employers thus often act aggressively toward migrants when it comes to time off or activities outside the household, as they are expected to be on call throughout the day. This atmosphere of threat and fear also goes further, where many employers will confiscate passports and other legal documents and withhold pay. In these situations, many migrants will leave or even be forced to escape the abusive control of employers. This creates another problem for the migrant worker as they have now voided their contract and often, due to confiscation by their employer, have no immigration papers. These “illegal” workers number in the tens of thousands throughout Jordan, and their legal limbo leaves them open to further exploitation, driving some migrants to flee. Jordanian authorities are often not helpful and the benefit of the doubt over disputes or allegations is primarily given to the employer

Differences in the migrant labor experience in Jordan

Many migrant laborers, across all different spectrums of the Jordanian workforce face violence and abuse. The nature of de-regulation and little government oversight mean migrant laborers are easily exploited. There are however, also glaring differences

regarding working conditions and rights between garment and domestic workers, which affect their modes of protest. Regarding migrant laborers working in the Jordanian garment sector, I discovered in talking with a prominent labor leader that this sector of manufacturing within the country has a rich tradition of organizing for Jordanian workers, which many have paid for in blood or in periods of solitary confinement. This passion has also carried over to helping migrant laborers. When asked about the plight of migrants and their participation within the system, his reply, paraphrased, was that there is a certain consciousness among workers, a brotherhood that permeates nationality and background. Everyone is equal, and all face the same predicament. He also felt that large strides had been made in recent years to improve working conditions in factories. This trend in the garment sector follows a similar trend among the Jordanian labor market as a whole in the last fifteen years, especially in the wake of the Arab Spring, where labor actions, strikes, and demands among workers have dramatically increased (Adely, 2012). One of the biggest achievements that organized labor helped to win was the introduction of a Unified Contract that is the same for all workers across the sector, which explicitly describes the work to be undertaken, wages offered, and stipulates that migrants can have membership in unions and be part of the collective bargaining process.

Because of this long-standing tradition of organized labor, the manufacturing and garment sector workers have had a degree of organizational power with which to face the neoliberal policies and vie for better working conditions. This has also allowed

migrants at many times to be at the forefront of these actions (Adely, 2012). Initially managers and owners of factories were intimidated by strikes but over time organizers and managers began to work together to alleviate worker issues. Some labor organizations also continuously monitor what goes on in the garment factories between employees and managers. Thus, in addition to the regular audits made by the contracting apparel companies, there is a degree of oversight in the garment industry which is lacking or difficult to perform within the domestic labor sector.

Within the sphere of domestic work, these organizational structures do not exist. Isolation means that many migrant domestic workers have no real sense of their outside surroundings, or even their rights. As previously mentioned, although Jordanian law prohibits unfair working conditions, within the domestic sector, these laws are weakly monitored, leading to increased opportunities for abuse and exploitation.

Within the domestic work sector, I quickly discovered that among migrant domestic women there is a hierarchy or caste type system that has developed among employers, recruitment agencies, and contracting governments. Filipino maids command the most money and are the most prized. The first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Filipino migrant domestic workers between the Philippines and Jordan was signed in 1981, (ILO, 1981) and because of the long tradition of Filipino domestic workers going abroad, the stereotype that they speak better English and are more educated than migrants of other nationalities, their government commands a higher price for their

services. Contrary to what one would think, employment of migrant labor is not cheap. Employers must pay a number of legal and administrative fees to the government and recruitment agencies and prove their financial standing in order to host a worker. Yet many employers are still attracted to Filipino maids because it comes with a degree of status. However, when some of these Filipino stereotypes are not lived up to, there is potential for abuse. During my research I was told that patterns of recruitment regarding domestic workers had changed because of demand. As a result, domestic migrants are no longer always educated women from urban areas who can speak English but rather, young women from villages with little education, who receive very little training before they arrive in Jordan. This is more prominent in countries that have more recently signed MOUs with the Jordanian government such as Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. As a result, they receive lower wages relative to Filipino workers (Human Rights Watch, 2011). It must also be noted and not forgotten that race plays a role in these relationships and is thus reflected in these hierarchical modes as well.

Modes of Resistance

Jordan's reputation regarding migrant laborers has improved within the last decade, as it has improved its labor code. However, issues with monitoring adherence, and the kafala system that still ties a worker to an employer remain detriments to worker rights. To seek to counter a variety of these policies, migrant spaces of resistance operate both

inside and outside the strictures of Jordanian law, making for a kaleidoscopic array of formal and informal protest. Migrants must tread lightly to avoid the coercive policing powers of the security apparatus attached to the state.

Protests, Labor Unions and Strikes

Protests do occur routinely within the kingdom; however, they are usually quickly confined by the state policing apparatus. Large protests, other than for issues related to the Palestinian cause, are rare. Those without residential status such as refugees and migrants must keep a low profile and find other ways to resist. Jordan has, in the past, moved to quell large shows of dissent or protest, and deported migrants en masse, including an overnight police operation in late 2015, which led to the deportation on 950 Sudanese refugees fleeing Darfur, who had set up a protest camp near the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) (Williams, 2015). Among domestic workers in Jordan, no tradition of organized labor binds workers together like in the manufacturing sector. As mentioned above, migrant workers within Jordan's industrial zones have been able to organize and strike for their rights regarding their working conditions in a more traditional way. They are allowed to participate in collective bargaining, run for elections, and preside on the committees of certain unions (General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment & Clothing Industries, 2018).

Networks of Survival

Female Domestic workers in Jordan often form informal networks which they utilize to keep up to date on current events relating to work, ask questions of other domestic workers regarding their rights, and share stories of their experiences. In western Amman, the primary affluent and cosmopolitan part of the city, many residences have domestic workers, so this provides an opportunity to meet other laborers nearby. These networks are especially important among “illegal” workers as they seek to avoid Jordanian authorities and seek informal employment. NGOs and religious institutions also play a large role in creating networks of support for migrants.

NGOS

Migrant laborers utilize a patchwork of local and international NGOs to facilitate the fight for greater rights and freedoms within the kingdom. In the last fifteen years several Jordanian organizations have been established to provide pro-bono representation for migrant laborers. They seek to utilize the Jordanian legal system as a recourse to acquiring rights that have been written on paper but often are not implemented or monitored widely on the ground. Some organizations also seek to bring migrant workers together to share experiences and advocate for expanded rights (Connell, 2015). Within these institutions, Migrants play key roles in these organizations in providing witness and testimony, disseminating information among other migrants, and forming both informal and formal networks of support with the assistance of aid organizations.

NGOs also can help to influence public opinion, running awareness campaigns that seek to educate the Jordanian populace. These campaigns can help move against popular perceptions of migrant workers and bring their issues to light. These campaigns also target migrant workers, many who are not fully aware of their rights. Another role of NGOs is to conduct capacity building initiatives in partnership with the Jordanian government and managers of factories, recruitment agencies and government enforcement agencies to conduct training on best practices, incidences of sexual harassment, improvement of working conditions, and the overall rights of migrant laborers.

There are divergent opinions on how to go about tackling the issue. Some organizations play the role of watchdogs, documenting and publishing abuses. Yet some NGO leaders, while acknowledging that witness is a very important tool, feel that changing institutional thinking regarding migrant workers is the key to concrete and lasting change. They feel there is a need to focus more on assessments of the labor market, so they can advocate more clearly for desired changes that would lead to improved conditions among workers overall.

My research also found that various NGOs compete amongst themselves in order to stay relevant. Securing funding is a vital and important part of this work as it could not be done without international donors. The evidence of compassion fatigue among donors is very real and NGOs are pressured to produce reports that document violence

and their efforts to end it. Therefore, liberties with the truth can sometimes arise. I was warned a number of times by different individuals to not take information of another NGO at face value. This is not to say that there are wide spread chasms within Jordan's NGO community, but that different organizations approach the migrant worker issue in different ways.

The expansion of NGOs and their purposes within Jordan in the last fifteen years is a direct indication of neoliberal policies that have cut government services and oversight. The void in providing these services has been taken up by NGOs, their often-small staffs, and cadres of volunteers and facilitators, many of them migrant laborers.

Religious Approaches

Many migrant laborers, especially domestic workers who come to Amman are Christian. For example, a vast majority of Filipinos are Catholic, and Jordan's small Christian community provides an avenue in which to gather for church services and community events that cater to the Filipino Christian community (Abuqudairi, 2013).

In Amman, within the past few decades, a small Filipino immigrant community has emerged. Many Filipino women have married Jordanian men. Restaurants and shops have popped up around Jabal Amman. Filipinos with a more established immigration pool, have a greater opportunity to gather in a community setting than other migrants. (Abuqudairi, 2013).

Churches and church related organizations, such as Caritas International, which is a Roman Catholic non-profit and has a center in Amman, has a program in which it visits imprisoned women in Jordan's Jwaideh women's prison. Many of the prisoners are migrant workers being held for escaping their employer, which due to the Kefala system is a breach of their work contract. Caritas and other religiously affiliated organizations seeks to aid many of these women in returning home, as well as providing other resources for support ("Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem," 2018).

Other Actions

Other less established migrant labor communities are also trying to develop their informal and formal networks to connect with fellow citizens and share their stories. During my short time spent researching in Amman, there was always a whisper upon the wind of a new places and spaces that migrants were creating in Amman to create a sense of belonging and community. Some migrants have even gone back to their home countries to volunteer for organizations that train migrant workers about their rights (Connell, 2018).

5. Conclusions

This paper has traced how neoliberal globalization has shaped the migrant labor movement in Jordan, leading to the extensive commodification and exploitation of individuals and an extremely segmented and hierarchical labor market. Within this

violence and repression have sprung new modes of agency among migrant laborers, who utilize a variety of international institutions, labor organizations, and informal organized networks to advocate for their rights and increase their visibility.

Because of its precarity as a small Middle Eastern monarchy, Jordan will likely hang on to this system as long as it is dominant within the Global North. Yet this is not a Jordan centric problem. It highlights the inherent violence in the current global economic system and perpetuates the long standard narrative of cheap exploitable labor that has been the bedrock of Capitalism's success since its inception. As neoliberal models have taken hold, a "race to the bottom effect" has taken place where countries in the Global South seek to attract foreign investment by limiting tax burdens on Fortune 500 companies and rolling back labor standards. Overall, the phenomenon of migrant labor in Jordan highlights the continued extraction and transfer of wealth away from the poor and into the hands of the elite.

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