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Repatriation or Deportation? The Entanglement of Labor, Abuse and (In)Voluntary Returns of Female Filipino Domestic Workers in Kuwait Through the Lens of Janusz Korczak's Radical Humanism

“Each person carries an entire world within himself, and everything exists twice: once the way it is, the other the way he perceives it with his own eyes and feelings”.

Janusz Korczak

Introduction

According to Migrant-Rights.org, an advocacy organization that aims to advance the rights of migrant workers in the Middle East (Migrant-Rights, n.d. a), 90% of all Kuwaiti households employ a foreign domestic worker. In total, there are over 620,000 migrant domestic workers in Kuwait, who account for over 21.9% of the country's total employment (Migrant-Rights, n.d. b). They provide a wide range of essential services, from caring for children and the elderly to housekeeping which might involve such activities as cleaning,

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grocery shopping, and ironing, among others. Out of about 200,000 Filipino workers in Kuwait, about one third are engaged in various forms of domestic work (Garcia 2016b). However, Kuwait is not unique among the Gulf Cooperation Countries (which include Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman) in terms of the high rates of employment of foreign workers. It is estimated that 70% of the GCC's workforce is composed of migrant workers, which means that there are about 25 million migrants working and living in the GCC (Migrant-Rights, n.d. b). According to the Migrant Rights organization (n.d. b), expatriate workers form nearly 85% of the population in some GCC countries and, as a result, are "critical to the fabric of [their] societies and to [their] successful economic development" (n.p.). In spite of this, migrant workers are perceived as "essential yet invisible" in GCC states (Fernandez 2014). They often suffer exploitation and abuse, but governments and media tend to ignore or marginalize their daily struggles (Migrant-Rights, n.d. a). One of the most widely-reported examples of the cruel treatment that domestic workers in the GCC states experience at the hands of their employers, is a case of an Ethiopian maid who allegedly attempted to commit suicide by jumping from the seventh floor. The woman's suicide attempt was filmed by her Kuwaiti employer who, instead of helping her maid, continued filming even after the Ethiopian woman slipped and fell down to hit the awning below the window. This, however, did not stop her Kuwaiti employer from posting the incident on social media (*The Guardian* 2017).

In Kuwait, like in other GCC states, many migrant domestic workers, including Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW), face poor working and living conditions (Moreno-Fontes Chammartin 2005). For instance, even though most Filipino domestic workers speak good English and are relatively well educated, they still receive comparatively low wages and often find themselves in situations where their Kuwaiti employers ignore their labor rights (Moreno-Fontes Chammartin 2005). As a result, around five to seven housemaids run away from their employers daily (Garcia 2016b). In an attempt to regulate the work conditions of domestic workers, Kuwait, the first among the GCC states to do so, set in 2016 a minimum wage for domestic staff (*Khaleej Times* 2016). A decree issued by the local Ministry of Interior set a minimum wage at KWD60 (which amounts to about USD200) a month and granted domestic workers the right to a weekly day off, 30 days of paid annual leave,

and a 12-hour working day with rest, among others (Hasan 2016). It is worth noting, however, that the minimum wage of KWD60 a month does not go a long way in Kuwait, where a rent for a single bedroom apartment outside the city center can be in the range of KWD130 to KWD250 (Visit-Kuwait 2020), that is at least twice as much as the minimum wage. Fernandez (2014), however, points out that the meager salaries (between USD100 and USD300) earned by domestic migrant workers in the GCC are “still considerably more than [what] they would earn in their home countries” (p. 4).

Despite the legal changes listed above, some Filipino domestic workers located in Kuwait still experience such problems as non-payment of wages, long working hours with no rest days, physical and sexual abuse, etc. Consequently, many of them choose to leave their employers and find new employment somewhere else, where, due to the Kafala system under which worker's visa is tied to their sponsor (Migrant-Rights, n.d. c), they end up working without a valid visa and thus become undocumented workers (Garcia 2016a). According to the Migrant-Rights website (n.d. c), all GCC states use the Kafala (sponsorship) system to manage migrants' employment and residency. Under this system a migrant worker is sponsored either by a local citizen or a company (the kafeel), which means that a foreigner's right to work and maintain legal presence depends entirely on his or her employer. Given the strict rules that govern transfers of sponsorship from one employer to another, the Kafala system renders foreign workers particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation (Migrant-Rights, n.d. c). Furthermore, Jureidini (2010) argues that the situation of migrant domestic workers not only in GCC states but in the entire Middle East, is particularly precarious because “they are probably the most numerous of those mentioned in reports on trafficking for labor exploitation in the region” (p. 142). For instance, according to the *Trafficking in Persons Report*, some men and women that enter Kuwait as migrant workers are “subsequently subjected to trafficking in persons, specifically forced labor” (Department of State 2010, p. 203). Moreover, the report maintains that although these migrants enter Kuwait voluntarily, upon arrival some of them are “subjected to conditions of forced labor by their sponsors and labor agents”, through such practices as “non-payment of wages, threats, physical or sexual abuse, and restrictions of movement, such as the withholding of passports” (Department of State 2010, p. 203), among others. For example,

a report issued by the Department of Labor and Employment of the Republic of Philippines recalls a case of 21 female OFWs who had to be repatriated from Kuwait due to “distress” they experienced there. In this case the “distress” meant “underpayment of salary; non-payment of overtime pay, rest day, and holiday pay; no sick leave; no food or food allowance of 25 KWD per month (P3,980); and illegal salary deductions, among others” (Department of Labor 2016). Similar challenges faced by migrant domestic workers in other GCC states are also discussed by Fernandez (2014).

The lack of a valid visa and legal sponsorship (and, sometimes, passports), makes it particularly difficult, if not impossible, for “absconded” workers to return to their home countries (Migrant-Rights, n.d.). In the light of the above, Kuwait’s Ministry of Interior and Immigration Department introduced, in cooperation with the Philippine Embassy in Kuwait, the Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Program (AVRP) which allows undocumented workers to leave Kuwait without being charged for violating the country’s immigration rules (Garcia 2016a). According to Pinoy OFW, a portal dedicated to overseas Filipino workers and Filipinos living abroad, “the program is not exclusive to runaway housemaids but also accepts Article 18 visa holders whose residency visa has expired or those with absconding issues” (Pinoy OFW, n.d.).

This paper will look at the “voluntary repatriation” process as well as try to assess to what extent the “voluntary repatriation” is, indeed, voluntary. This question seems to be especially valid in the light of the findings of the *Trafficking in Persons Report*, whose authors disclose that voluntary repatriation programs in different countries are not entirely consensual. According to the report, “when government officials cannot offer meaningful, attractive, and legal alternatives to repatriation..., the ‘consent’ victims give to their repatriation is not meaningful” (Department of State 2010, p. 18), especially if “alternatives” include such “solutions” as being detained in a shelter or jailed for violations. In order to assess the level of consensuality of the Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Program in Kuwait, this paper will attempt to answer the following questions: Why do female Filipino domestic workers decide to participate in the Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Program in the first place? How do the relations of gender and power influence the repatriation process in Kuwait? And, ultimately, what is the real meaning of the words “assisted” and “repatriation” in the Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Program? The sources

gathered for the purpose of this study will be analyzed through the lens of Janusz Korczak's radical humanism as an attempt to prove that Korczak's concepts, despite him being best known for his work with children, can be applied to other populations.

I would like to underscore that the questions stated in the paragraph above seem particularly important in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, since the current public health crisis "is fueling more racist discourse towards migrant workers in the Gulf" (Migrant-Rights 2020). For instance, in Kuwait, a local actress publicly made a statement in which she urged the government to deport migrant workers in order to save hospital beds for Kuwaiti nationals who test positive for the COVID-19 virus (Migrant-Rights 2020).

Methodology

In order to answer these questions, this study will analyze press reports on the Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Program published in Kuwaiti, Filipino and international press. In addition, the author observed several Facebook groups dedicated to OFW in Kuwait to find out what are the most common issues discussed on-line by Filipino domestic workers. Facebook, as noted by McKay (2016) in her book on Filipino migrant workers in the UK, is a useful tool to "negotiate global belonging, exchanging digital images and comments" (p. 74). Moreover, Facebook seems to play a particularly important role in the lives of Filipino migrant domestic workers: according to *The Philippine Star* website, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) requires all Filipino domestic workers to have a Facebook account which is a part of the government's efforts to monitor their safety and working conditions (Jaymalin, 2015). All sources utilized in this study will be analyzed by the way of discourse analysis. According to Jaworski and Coupland (2006), discourse "is language use relative to social, political and cultural formations – it is language reflecting social order but also language shaping social order, and shaping individuals' interaction with society" (p. 3). The quote by Janusz Korczak that I chose to begin this paper with is not accidental: through discourse analysis we are able to uncover two different layers of each phenomenon – the first one being the one it appears to be on its surface. The second

layer is constituted of thoughts, feelings, and interpretations various people hold about those phenomena. Therefore, discourse analysis is a particularly useful tool for analyzing how experiences of Filipino migrant domestic workers are reported and self-reported in press and social media. I believe that by analyzing the language used in press reports and social media posts, I will be able to not only collect some facts concerned with the official requirements of the Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Program, but I will also manage to uncover some hidden narratives about experiences of Filipino migrant domestic workers living and working in Kuwait.

Theoretical framework

In this paper I will utilize the concept of radical humanism embraced and practiced by Janusz Korczak (Silverman 2017). Even though Janusz Korczak is best known for his pedagogical legacy and work with Polish and Jewish children (Odrowąż-Coates 2018), the idea of radical humanism can be applied to people of all ages and nationalities/ethnicities. Silverman (2017) notes that “[t]he core of this radical humanism and the main feature that distinguishes it from other versions of humanism is the population to whom Korczak decided to devote his humanist ethos...: the neglected and, in his understanding, the very ignored and oppressed social class of children” (p. 84). In this study, however, I argue that the principles of radical humanism can be applied to the experiences of adult Filipino domestic workers in Kuwait, who, as discussed towards the beginning of this paper, are often oppressed and exploited by their employers. In this sense, Filipino domestic workers can be construed as the ones who are “the neglected and... the very ignored and oppressed social class”. Two additional features of radical humanism, identified by Silverman (2017), further strengthen my argument for using this concept as a framework for the analysis of experiences and challenges faced by Filipino migrant domestic workers in Kuwait. First of all, Silverman (2017) points out the radical inclusiveness feature, which is “infinite in character and include[s] every suffering being” (p. 84). Second, he discusses radical consistency “between preaching and practice in [Korczak’s] effort to improve the world” (Silverman 2017, p. 84). In light of the above, I believe that radical humanism with its

compassion for “every suffering being”, radical inclusiveness, and its consistency in one’s effort to improve the world, will be helpful in assessing Filipino migrant domestic workers’ experiences with the Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Program. Therefore, this paper is divided into three sections that look at Filipino migrant domestic workers in Kuwait and their experiences with the AVR from three different angles that constitute the core of Korczak’s radical humanism: target population, that is “neglected and oppressed” social class of migrant workers, radical inclusiveness, and radical integrity. The first section will attempt to examine the main motivations of female Filipino domestic workers for migrating to Kuwait as well as the mechanism through which Filipino women are brought from their home country to Kuwait. In addition, this section will explore the reasons behind female Filipino domestic workers’ decisions to leave their legal employers in Kuwait in order to look for other, illegal forms of employment which consequently limits their options of returning to their home country without violating Kuwait’s immigration rules. This section will also attempt to find out who constitutes the majority of workers participating in the Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Program in terms of gender of its participants. The section on radical inclusiveness will address the issue of belonging and will attempt to answer the following questions: Do Filipino domestic workers belong in Kuwait? If so, in what spaces and capacities? The section on radical integrity will examine the Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Program from the perspective of radical integrity in order to see what the AVR promises to its participants and what, in fact, delivers. This section will also explore transnationality of deportation and its many forms and intersections as well as its aftermath (Boehm 2016). It will examine alienation, violence and fragmentation that seem to be inseparable from the experience of deportation. Using these concepts, this section will attempt to determine if the AVR is, in fact, deportation in disguise. Furthermore, in this section I will also look at how, by the logic of border control and rising security concerns, immigrants, such as Filipino domestic workers in Kuwait, become “natural enemies of the nation” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2007, p. 111). In addition, this section will attempt to establish to what extent the concept of immigrants as enemies is reflected in the AVR.

Limitations of the study

Although this research was carefully prepared, I am still aware of its limitations and shortcomings. First of all, I do not speak Tagalog, a language spoken as a first and second language by many Filipinos. As a result, I had to rely strictly on English-language sources. Second, I had no direct access to female Filipino domestic workers and instead my analysis was limited in its scope to a small batch of press reports that I managed to collect in the course of this study. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized for larger groups. Additionally, it has to be mentioned that for the purpose of this project I managed to collect only fourteen press reports/articles on the AVRPP and Filipino nationals in Kuwait. One of the reasons behind this scarcity of information on the matter at hand may be the fact that the AVRPP in Kuwait was introduced relatively recently, however, in the course of my research I was not able to obtain the exact date of the introduction of the program. The earliest press report on the AVRPP dates back to 2013 which suggests that the program has been in place for about six to seven years. However, during my research I noticed that the information provided in this relatively small sample of press reports/articles is quite consistent which, as a result, allowed me to believe that the sources analyzed for the purpose of this study must have been relatively accurate and trustworthy. Nevertheless, it still needs to be underscored that the data sourced from such a small batch is not representative of a wider population.

Target population of Filipino migrant domestic workers

First of all, it has to be underscored that I was not able to find/obtain any official statistics regarding the Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Program in Kuwait. Therefore, I do not have any statistics that would provide exact data on the gender makeup of Filipinos participating in the AVRPP. Fourteen press reports on the OFWs and the AVRPP that I managed to gather for the purpose of this study also fail to provide any clear information on what gender constitutes the majority of Filipino workers repatriated to their home country through the AVRPP. However, the press reports provide other cues that allow us

to guess what gender constitutes the majority of those repatriated to the Philippines. For example, a press report titled “97 Nationals Repatriated to Manila Through Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Program” published in *Kuwait Times* states that “many of those repatriated were domestic helpers” (Garcia 2016a, n.p.) – according to the International Labor Organization’s (2004) report *Gender & Migration in Arab States – The Case of Domestic Workers*, the majority of domestic workers are women. Therefore, it can be assumed that the majority of repatriated domestic helpers mentioned in the *Kuwait Times* article were women too. Another editorial published in *Kuwait Times* reports on 143 Filipino housemaids repatriated through the AVRPP (Garcia, 2016b). Another one, titled “78 Undocumented Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Kuwait Repatriated”, mentions that “of the 78, six were males while the rest were females” (Q8 India 2017, n.p.). “152 Undocumented Pinoys in Kuwait Fly Home” published by ABS-CBN News reports that “most of the undocumented OFWs worked as Household Service Workers (HSWs) who left their employers” (Santiago 2016, n.p.). Given the statistics regarding the gender makeup of domestic workers, it can be assumed, again, that the majority of the repatriates mentioned in the article above were, indeed, women. “DOLE’s Assist W.E.L.L. Comes to the Rescue of 21 OFWs Repatriated From Kuwait”, a short press report published by the Department of Labor and Employment of the Republic of Philippines, directly states that all of the OFWs repatriated in this case were women (Department of Labor 2016). “143 Distressed Filipina Maids Leave Kuwait For Home” published by Carbonated.TV (n.d.) reports on 143 Filipino women returning home after experiencing abuse at the hands of their employers. To sum up, seven out of the fourteen press articles/press reports selected for this study more or less directly indicate that the majority of those repatriated in the described cases were women (in addition, two other articles repeat the data provided in the two of the articles discussed above). Although this study is lacking more specific and official statistics, based on the analysis provided above, it can be carefully assessed that women constitute a significant number, if not a majority, of those who are repatriated to the Philippines through the AVRPP.

Given that female migrant workers often fall prey to abusive employers and, subsequently, get repatriated/deported to their home countries, it is important to ask why female Filipino domestic workers choose to migrate to Kuwait

in the first place. Furthermore, what are their reasons for ultimately leaving Kuwait? McKay (2016) places migration in the global context governed by affect. She underscores the importance of affect in understanding the global by pointing out that affect “offers us an entry point to the global where the global itself is not just an institutional superobject or an artifact of a globalized popular culture” (McKay 2016, p. 7). She furthermore maintains that affect, even though difficult to represent or quantify, “plays a significant role in the manipulations of identities, markets, and value comprising globalization” (McKay 2016, p. 7). Therefore, by neglecting affect, transnational scholars are at risk of missing those accounts and experiences of the global that are not embedded in “the ubiquity of a universal, Western-style individuated self” (McKay 2016, pp. 7–8). As such, global affect draws our attention to the meaning of personhood in a globalizing world (McKay 2016). “Affect’s intimate, cultural ties” (McKay 2016, p. 8) resonate well in several articles and reports analyzed in this study, in which female Filipino domestic workers, about to be repatriated/deported, reflect on the reasons behind leaving their home country for Kuwait, and, ultimately, returning to the Philippines. For instance, “78 Undocumented Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) In Kuwait Repatriated” published by *Q8 India* initially provides a blanket statement according to which “Household Service Workers (HSWs)... left their employers after experiencing various forms of maltreatment such as physical, verbal or sexual abuse, non-payment of salaries, lack of food and overwork” (Q8 India, 2017, n.p.). However, short conversations with the Filipino women awaiting their repatriation at the Kuwait International Airport, reveal deeply personal and emotional stories of affect. Janet, for example, is very grateful to the Philippines Embassy and the Kuwaiti government for providing her with the opportunity to go back home. “We’re very happy”, says Janet (Q8 India 2017, n.p.). Aida, another woman interviewed for the article, confesses: “I don’t have iqama [a long-term visa for a foreign national] for five years. It’s very difficult. You’re always on the lookout and it’s traumatic every time you see some police. You’re afraid that they might catch you and detain you” (Q8 India 2017, n.p.). It has to be underlined that neither Janet nor Aida spoke under their real name. Ella, a single mother of three, states: “I’m just happy to be with my kids. I still don’t know if I’ll work abroad again, my kids need me more” (Q8 India 2017, n.p.). “143 Distressed Filipina Maids Leave Kuwait For Home” points out that “nearly all the

maids being repatriated were happy to leave” (Carbonated.TV n.d., n.p.). One of the repatriated workers, Mila, describes her experience of working and then trying to leave Kuwait in the following way: “Thank God, I can go back to my family in one piece... I was verbally and physically abused by my female employer, but I had to stay at the embassy because the employer would not want to cooperate and filed a case against me” (Carbonated.TV, n.d., n.p.). Another woman, aware of the large scale of the problems faced by Filipino maids in Kuwait, expresses her hope that the Filipino government is finally going to properly address the matter at hand: “I hope the next president will pay due attention to our plight... I still have a few friends left behind who couldn’t go home because of some cases filed against them by their employers. I hope the next president will look after their needs...” (Carbonated.TV, n.d., n.p.). In “152 Undocumented Pinoys in Kuwait Fly Home” a woman named Gloria expresses her joy for being able to go home for Christmas. It turns out she has not been home since 2009 (Santiago, 2016). Lorna, who suffered from physical abuse as an OFW, also feels very happy for getting the opportunity to return home for Christmas (Santiago, 2016). In “Kuwait Interior Ministry Allows Repatriation of 250 Filipinos” the Philippines Ambassador in Kuwait expresses his understanding and sympathy for the reasons for which so many Filipino workers come to Kuwait: “We understand that our OFWs left the Philippines for Kuwait because they aspire for a better life for their families and loved ones. They therefore deserve all the assistance the Philippine Government can give them...” (Official Gazette 2015, n.p.). All those statements belong in the realm of affect – they give face and personhood to such global and seemingly faceless experiences as migration, working abroad, deportation, and, ultimately, repatriation. They are also in line with the main characteristics of the target population of Korczak’s radical humanism. Of course, Filipino migrant domestic workers are adults, but, despite the importance of their services, they are still poor, oppressed, and discriminated against. Furthermore, Kuwaiti law does not provide them with the same level of protection as other workers. Since Private Sector Kuwait Labor Law does not apply to domestic workers (referred to as “domestic servants”) (Kuwait Labor Law, n.d.), in case of conflict with an employer they are more likely to run away and, ultimately, get “voluntarily repatriated” from Kuwait, than other private sector workers who enjoy more protections under local labor law.

Radical inclusiveness

As mentioned towards the beginning of this paper, there are currently around 200,000 Filipino workers in Kuwait (Garcia 2016b). This section will attempt to find out what it means to be a Filipino in Kuwait. Kapferer argues (2005, cited in: Daswani 2013, p. 31) that scholars often “missed the fact that significant social relations were not bounded by the idea of community”. Social relations can be studied across time and space – they are not limited to a single place. A great example of such an approach in transnational studies are studies of on-line communities, which “create social and affective interaction that simultaneously connects people from different parts of the world” (Daswani 2013, p. 33). Filipino migrant domestic workers are no exception in this regard. According to the on-line and social media part of my research, Filipino workers in Kuwait form well connected on-line communities through which they search for jobs as well as recommend their relatives and friends for nanny and maid job openings posted by Kuwaiti and expat “madams” in the “Kuwait Maids and Nannies” Facebook groups. Many such job postings begin with the “Filipinas only” disclaimer which suggests that, for some reason, Filipino nannies and maids are highly regarded by local and expat “madams”. “Pinoy OFW”, a Facebook page “liked” by 541,605 users (as of December 15, 2017), offers advice to Filipinos working and living abroad. Topics covered by “Pinoy OFW” range from “The Six Most Annoying Types of Kababayans New OFWs Should Avoid” to “Rights and Obligations of Domestic Helper Employers in Saudi Arabia”. In “real life”, there exists Sandigan, a Filipino community group in Kuwait, which recently helped to rescue a female Filipino domestic worker from the hands of her abusive employer (Migrant-Rights 2017).

Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) argue that in order to understand immigrants’ ways of belonging, transnational scholars should focus on how immigrants manage the pivot between full assimilation and transnational connection as well as how “host country incorporation and homeland or other transnational ties mutually influence each other” (p. 1011). In this regard, female Filipino domestic workers’ position in Kuwait is very peculiar. On the one hand, as mentioned earlier, they are excluded from the protections offered by Private Sector Kuwait Labor Law, but, on the other, they take

care of Kuwaiti families and their children. In terms of their relations with their homeland, they send remittances to support their families in the Philippines, but at the same time the Philippines Embassy in Kuwait closely works with Kuwaiti authorities in “voluntarily repatriating” Filipino domestic workers who had decided to leave their abusive employers. From one perspective, female Filipino domestic workers’ earnings and services are highly demanded, respectively, in their home country and Kuwait, but from the other they are refused basic protections under Kuwaiti labor law. Therefore, it can be stated that they both belong and do not belong in Kuwait: their services are valued, but not enough to offer them higher wages and more rights to defend themselves against abusive employers. Female Filipino domestic workers have to deal with the vast “gulf between ‘who is in, and who is out’, a divide created by the expulsion, displacement, and attempted erasure of transnational subjects” (Boehm 2016, p. 16).

The vulnerable position of Filipino migrant domestic workers leads us to the concept of radical inclusiveness, which can be understood as “Korczak’s infinite capacity to offer respect and love to real people, irrespective of their ethnicity” (Silverman 2017, p. 88). However, in Kuwait Filipino migrant domestic workers do not receive the same level of respect and protection as other expats and Kuwaiti nationals. Silverman (2017) points out that radical inclusiveness preached and practiced by Korczak was “directly connected to his commitment to improving the world and his lifelong feelings of compassion for all sentient beings” (p. 89). It also entailed “an ethos of absolute egalitarianism” (Silverman 2017, p. 89). It bears mentioning that Korczak himself respected both physical and intellectual work (Silverman 2017). By analyzing the press reports on Filipino migrant domestic workers’ experiences with the Kuwaiti job market and the AVRPP, it becomes obvious that what is missing from those experiences are, indeed, respect, compassion and egalitarianism. In terms of compassion, Filipino domestic workers in Kuwait often experience lack of interest in their difficult working and living conditions, while in terms of egalitarianism, they do not enjoy the same level of legal protection as many other migrant workers in Kuwait.

Radical integrity

Returning to their home country through the AVRPP is emotionally charged to female Filipino domestic workers. These emotions, however, are, to say the least, ambivalent. Joy is mixed with painful memories, as in the case of Noura, a physically abused OFW repatriated through the AVRPP, who states: “I’m very thankful that finally after my harrowing experience here, I can be with my family now” (Fe Santiago 2016, n.p.). Almira, another maid quoted in the same article, suffered “three years of torture from her female employer who beat her with a steel and burned her back, legs, arms and hands with a flat iron” (Fe Santiago 2016, n.p.). She sums up those three years of mistreatment with the following statement: “I have lifted everything to God and hopefully justice will prevail. Right now, I just want to be with my family” (Fe Santiago 2016, n.p.). According to another article titled “78 Undocumented Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Kuwait Repatriated” most of the seventy eight OFWs mentioned in the title, used to work as domestic workers and left their employers as a result of “various forms of maltreatment such as physical, verbal or sexual abuse, non-payment of salaries, lack of food and overwork” (Q8 India 2017, n.p.). Even though the majority of the press reports and articles analyzed for the purpose of this study state that OFWs usually choose to leave Kuwait through the AVRPP due to the maltreatment they experienced at the hands of their employers, the articles seem to omit the question of what happens to employers who abuse their maids. A report published by Migrant-Rights.org recalls the case of a Kuwaiti physician, who, after hitting the left eye of her maid and thus causing permanent blindness, got away with ten months in jail and settlement and, after her time in jail, she returned to her old job and continued working as a doctor in a hospital. The victim, on the other hand, was “repatriated” (Migrant-Rights.org 2017). Boehm (2016) writes that “deportation focuses on individuals even as its impact reaches beyond any one person to affect families and communities” (p. 28). The AVRPP focuses on Filipino individuals, puts them in the role of pardoned offenders, and prefers to ignore the actual reasons behind the “voluntary” repatriation that so many Filipino maids decide to “choose”. By preferring “repatriation” over pressing charges against abusive employers and thus participating in “continuum of violence” (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2004; cited in Boehm 2016, p. 55), both Kuwaiti

and Philippines authorities allow the abuse female domestic workers to flourish and affect more OFWs in the future.

I keep referring to the AVRП as “deportation” because it bears all deportation characteristics as named and described by Boehm (2016): it involves alienation through dehumanization and marginalization (abused maids choose to abscond because they know nobody is going to help them), violence, fragmentation (in the case of female Filipino domestic workers removed through the AVRП it is about “gendered racial removal”), absence (in this case – the absence of help when maltreatment happens), and reinvention (deported maids are happy to be back with their families instead of enduring maltreatment in order to send remittances).

Therefore, it can be argued that, in accordance with Wimmer and Glick-Schiller’s (2007) idea of “immigrants as enemies”, the AVRП turns female Filipino domestic workers into natural enemies of the Kuwaiti nation. There are several reasons behind this statement. First of all, in the process of applying for “voluntary repatriation” absconded maids are turned from victims of abuse into offenders. Second, as offenders, they are graciously pardoned and removed from the country. Last, the real offenders and thus actual “enemies” of the nation, that is Kuwaiti employers who abuse their maids, are not punished (or their punishment is inadequate) and therefore are allowed to continue to mistreat their employees. The end product of this “continuum of violence” in a transnational setting reverses the roles of victims and offenders. Those, who should be punished, are pardoned exclusively because they are Kuwaiti citizens and thus belong in Kuwait. Those, who should be pardoned, are removed because, as foreigners, they and their problems belong somewhere else. This “continuum of violence” stands in stark contrast to Korczak’s concept of radical integrity understood as “consistency and correlation between preaching and practice in [Korczak’s] indefatigable effort to improve the world” (Silverman 2017, p. 89). The AVRП, originally designed to help runaway maids return to their home countries, turns victims into offenders and does not provide any protection to those who are most vulnerable and abused. Korczak believed that “[a]ll the dimensions of life – emotional, behavioral, intellectual, and spiritual – were interconnected, interdependent, and nourished one another, forming a single organic whole and leaving no place for inequality and hierarchy” (Silverman 2017, p. 90). The AVRП, on the other hand, creates inequality and does nothing to dismantle power hierarchies.

Conclusion

This paper shows how vulnerable is the transnational position of female Filipino domestic workers in Kuwait. They receive low wages and are not protected by Private Sector Kuwait Labor Law. Many of them suffer maltreatment and abuse at the hands of their employers. When they try to complain, they are turned away by authorities and their employment agencies. When they run away – they are marked as illegal and, ultimately, removed from the country. The voluntary repatriation program they are offered is, in fact, deportation in disguise. From the perspective of transnational studies, Filipino migrant domestic workers are a perfect example of victims of methodological nationalism which takes “national discourses, agendas, loyalties and histories for granted, without problematizing them or making them the object of an analysis in its own right” (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller 2002, p. 221) – something that Janusz Korczak fought against all his life (Odrowaz-Coates 2018). And yet, despite the rampant abuse of domestic workers in the GCC, they leave their home country and travel to Kuwait in order to support their families and provide money for their “projects” back home (McKay 2016). Given their vulnerable position within this transnational setting, I would recommend human rights groups, especially those present in the GCC, to pay closer attention to Filipino and other migrant domestic workers and their living and working conditions. This paper proves that Korczak’s radical humanism provides a universal framework for working not only with children, but also with vulnerable adults, whose rights are abused.

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