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The Kafala System and Modern Slavery in Saudi Arabia: A qualitative content analysis to the TikTok videos of domestic worker Brenda Dama

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The Kafala System and Modern Slavery in Saudi Arabia

A qualitative content analysis to the TikTok videos of domestic worker Brenda Dama

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Introduction

Slavery is a dark page in the history of mankind. But can we now claim that it was merely a part of our past? Unfortunately, we cannot. Slavery has been officially declared dead in the 1990s.[1] Even so, in the world we live in today, it has not disappeared. On the contrary, slavery is present and alive in almost every part of the world. Despite the abolition, certain forms of exploitation and deprivation of liberty are still labelled as slavery, only now it is often referred to as 'modern slavery'. This thesis discusses the kafala system and forms of modern slavery among female domestic workers in the Arabian Gulf region, with a focus on Saudi Arabia.

Migration plays an important role in the Gulf states. This is underlined by the composition of its labor force. The International Labour Organization (ILO) found "that in 2017 the Arab States hosted 23 million migrant workers, with 9 million (39 percent) women migrant workers."[2] And Amnesty International shows that the majority of these workers are based in one of the six GCC-countries: the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar or Oman.[3] To further illustrate, according to statistics of the Migrant Rights Organization (MRO), Kuwait hosts approximately 260.000 migrant domestic workers in 2015, which accounts for 21.9 percent of the state's total workforce. In addition, "90% of all Kuwaiti households employ a foreign domestic worker."[4] And in Bahrain, 10.2 percent of the total labor force is filled by domestic workers. They form up to 36.6 percent of the total female labor force.[5] These numbers indicate the significant presence of migrant workers in the region. My research is focused on women domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, most of them originating from both African and Asian countries.[6] This group is selected first because of its high representation rate in the region, as is demonstrated above. In addition, increasingly often stories emerge about women who have been physically, mentally or sexually abused, tortured, or who have died during their work.[7] Despite the alarming situation of these cases, the issue has not yet been extensively analyzed by scholars.

The high level of migration to the Gulf countries, that was in part due to the economic growth after the discovery of and increasing demand for oil, is regulated by the so-called

[1] Mende, 2018, p. 230.
[2] International Labour Organization, 2020, https://www.ilo.org/beirut/media-centre/news/WCMS_739268/lang--en/index.htm.
[3] Amnesty International, 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/04/covid19-makes-gulf-countries-abuse-of-migrant-workers-impossible-to-ignore/.
[4] Migrant Rights, 2015, https://www.migrant-rights.org/statistic/domesticworkers/.
[5] Migrant Rights, 2015, https://www.migrant-rights.org/statistic/domesticworkers/.
[6] Di Pietro, 2021, p. 90.
[7] Demissie, 2017, p. 3.

kafala system.[8] It is believed that this institution, also referred to visa sponsorship system, derives from the Bedouin 'principles of hospitality' of the 1950s,[9] which "set obligations on the treatment and protection of foreign guests."[10] However, the first signs of the concept of kafala can be traced back to Islamic law: "Kafala thus originally refers to a contract where a guarantor conjoins a guaranteed person (makfūl) and assumes liability for that person in various specified terms."[11] Today, the GCC-states use the kafala system as a labor institution that handles the flows of migration to and in their regions.[12] However, in research from various international human rights organizations like the ILO, MRO and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is claimed that "the Kafala system is basically incompatible with essential human rights and modern business systems."[13] One of the groups that is most affected by the implementation of this system is the female domestic workforce.[14] In this thesis the prevalence of modern slavery among female domestic workers in Saudi Arabia is studied.

Literature review

The phenomenon of slavery in the region and specifically in Saudi Arabia has been studied from various perspectives over the past few decades. To start with, Jennifer Weddington attempts to explain the origins of slavery in the Gulf region. She argues that "cultural and religious practices are preventing them [Islamic countries] from doing so [become more modernized]",[15] which is according to her the reason behind the violation of human rights in the region. She researches both the Christian and the Islamic perspective on slavery and aims to demonstrate that the bible is not related to slavery, while at the same time suggesting that the Islam in certain ways does justify acts of slavery.[16] However, because the publication derives from 1997, it does not offer a view on how contemporary forms of slavery are linked to migrant workers. Also, the publication seems to provide a somewhat orientalist view on the issue, by clearly distinguishing slavery within Christianity from slavery within the Islam and by stating that: "in addition, Islam has many divisions, or sects, and the dominant sect in

[8] Valenta & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 42.
[9] Di Pietro, 2021, chapter 7, p. 87.
[10] Malaeb, 2015, p. 309.
[11] Jureidini & Hassan, 2020, p. 94.
[12] Di Pietro, 2021, p. 87.
[13] Malaeb, 2015, p. 308.
[14] Di Pietro, 2021, p. 88.
[15] Weddington, 1997, p. 2.
[16] Weddington, 1997, pp. 17 & 22.

Central Arabia is de Wahhabi, which is very puritanistic by western standards."[17] Weddington seems to suggest here is that 'western standards' are the norm and that the religious Islamic movement of Wahhabi is not. It is interesting to highlight more research here that, in line with Weddington, explores the relationship between slavery and the religion of Islam and or Christianity. Jonathan Brown is one of the scholars that delves into this topic and he wrote the book *Slavery and Islam* about it. According to Brown, in order to discover the relation between the Islam and slavery, it is important first to define what Islam is as a religion. He then argues that the Islam can be perceived as an "overlapping constellation of beliefs, norms, texts and practices".[18] Next, Brown explores the relation between the Quran and slavery. He claims that the Quranic verse that is considered "the anchor for Islam's conception of slavery" is the following:

> Worship God, and ascribe not partners unto Him. And be virtuous towards parents and kinfolk, towards orphans and the indigent, towards the neighbor who is of kin, and the neighbor who is not of kin, towards the companion at your side and the traveler, and towards those whom you possess rightfully (i.e., slaves). (4:36)[19]

In addition, Brown elaborates on how slaves are supposed to be treated according to the Hadith: "The Hadith corpus nearly spills over, however, with a plethora of reports exhorting the kind treatments of slaves and describing the tremendous rewards awaiting those who free them."[20] Brown's statement somehow seems to suggest that slavery is condoned in the Hadith when the enslaved person is offered a 'kind' treatment. However, when there is no freedom of movement possible, this is still slavery. Nathaniel Mathews further emphasizes that he Quran endorses slavery in his research:

> The evident telos of the Quran is for all humankind to worship and obey Allah, not become free from human bondage first. Freedom would be achieved in the telos, through obedience as a slave to a higher master than one's own temporal material master. But the hierarchical bond between master and slave would not be severed. For

[17] Weddington, 1997, p. 5.
[18] Brown, 2019, chapter 2, p. 2.
[19] Brown, 2019, chapter 2, p. 5.
[20] Brown, 2019, chapter 2, p. 6.

> Muhammad, as for Jesus, the master-slave relationship was a metaphor of humanity's relationship with God.[21]

Mathews reiterates the relationship between the Quran and slavery when he states that the holy book does not explicitly commands the abolition of the phenomenon:

> The Islamic legal tradition has historically regarded the ownership of some people not as an intrinsic moral wrong on the level of other forbidden practices, such as the shirk, but as a non-contractual social relationship of limited property and ownership in human beings.[22]

Even though Brown and Mathews highlight aspects in the Quran and Hadith that endorse the 'kind' treatment of slaves, at the same time they both demonstrate in their research that the concept of slavery is enshrined in the Quran.

Concerning the relationship between Christianity and slavery on the other hand, Kevin Giles writes the following: "In the ages when the bible was written slavery was a universal phenomenon."[23] He claims that the bible endorses slavery and that "learned, devout evangelical Christians, with the Bible in their hands supported slavery with missionary zeal."[24] He furthermore suggests that it was the biblical curse of Noah that was seen as "the divine initiation of slavery": "After he awoke and discovered that one of his sons, Ham, had seen him naked Noah cursed him and through him his son Canaan saying: 'a slave of slaves shall you be to your brothers' (Gen 9:25)."[25] In relation, Burrell states that "The Bible itself became a tool in the defense of slavery, especially from the sixteenth century", followed by the claim that "Defenders of the institution wielded biblical accounts of slave regulations found in the Pentateuch, and even drew upon New Testament examples for the same purpose."[26] In line with Giles, Burrell reflects on the curse of Ham: "By far, however the most important biblical justification for race slavery was the protean myth of Ham's curse."[27]

[21] Mathews, 2019, pp. 240-241.
[22] Mathews, 2019, p. 227.
[23] Giles, 1994, p. 3.
[24] Giles, 1994, pp. 13-14.
[25] Giles, 1994, p. 7.
[26] Burrell, 2021, p. 10.
[27] Burrell, 2021, p. 10.

Angie Ngoc Tran uses the topic of slavery amongst domestic workers in Saudi Arabia to demonstrate that Vietnamese women in the country endure forms of exploitation.[28] In addition, she addresses the Kafala system, claiming that it dictates "the employment conditions for foreign guest-workers in the Gulf states."[29] According to Tran, it is because of this so-called sponsorship system and the emergence of Covid-19 that the exploitation of foreign workers still continues today. To support her claim, she attempts to show that recent reforms of the system did not effectively contribute to solving the issue of exploitation: "Under this half-hearted Kafala system, domestic workers are still denied all protections."[30] This view on slavery is shared by more academics, for example by Omar AlShehabi in "Policing labour in empire: The modern origins of the Kafala sponsorship system in the Gulf Arab States."[31] Or by Faisal Hamadah, who claims the following about the issue:

> Each of these reforms is often celebrated in the media as an abolition of *kafala,* often with much fanfare, yet the system continues to dominate labour relations in the states of the GCC and produce the subjectivities of migrants and citizens. [32]

Both AlShehabi as Hamadah argue that even though local governments to a certain extent attempted to reform the system, this did lead to the desired results. In addition to the publications of Tran, AlShehabi and Hamadah (2022) on the Kafala system, a variety of other academic publications regarding one of the key concepts of my research is available.[33] Both Di Pietro as Majed Alzahrani write about the topic in relation to migration in the GCC states, the latter references specifically to Saudi Arabia in his publication.[34] Additionally, in chapter six of *Migration and Islamic Ethics: Issues of Residence, Naturalization and Citizenship*, Jureidini and Hassan aim to explore the link between the concept of kafala in medieval Islamic law and the way the system is implemented in the Gulf states today.[35]

Corinne Redfern offers her perception on the concept of modern slavery. She writes about the recent Covid-pandemic and its impact on the situation of Filipino domestic workers. She aims to demonstrate that this period marks the exposure of the exploitation and abuse that

[28] Tran, 2021.
[29] Tran, 2021, par. 1.
[30] Tran, 2021, par. 7.
[31] AlShehabi, 2019.
[32] Hamadah, 2022, p. 12.
[33] Tran, 2021; AlShehabi, 2019; Hamadah, 2022.
[34] Di Pietro, 2021; Alzahrani, 2014, pp. 377-400.
[35] Jureidini & Hassan, 2020, pp. 92-109.

female employees have to endure around the world.[36] *Transnational domestication: state power and Indonesian migrant women in Saudi Arabia* is another publication that provides a perspective on the issue of modern slavery in Saudi Arabia specifically.[37] Interesting is that this reading aims to highlight specifically the contribution of the Saudi state in the migration process of the women. Silvey furthermore examines the influence of changing power structures on migration patterns of Indonesian domestic workers and the role of gender in the work place. She thus delves into the Indonesian history, this state's contribution to female migration and the issue of exploitation.[38]

The evaluated publications allow for some interesting conclusions. One aspect of the reviewed literature regarding the kafala system and the concept of modern slavery is that the majority is focused on female migrants. There are academic publications available on for example the case of the so-called 'bachelor workers', a term that relates "to migrant male workers of lower socioeconomic status who do not have their families residing with them in the Gulf"[39] and more recently on the World Cup malpractices regarding employees in Qatar.[40] However, the majority of the publications examined here is aimed at demonstrating the position of female workers in the region. This highlights the need to conduct more research to the topic: female migrants prove to be a vulnerable group for exploitation today.[41] And, as has been demonstrated, the literature often contains information about efforts to modernize the Kafala system in order to counter exploitation in the Gulf. However, one thing all academics agree about is that up until today, these attempts have not been fruitful enough. This proves that more research should be conducted to the issue.

Social relevance

It is mentioned earlier in this thesis that slavery was declared dead in the 1990s. This would mean that the phenomenon should belong to the past.[42] So, how can slavery still prevail in this so-called 'modern' and 'sophisticated' world? How is it possible that there is relatively so little information available on the topic of modern slavery and exploitation, while this is a world-wide and urgent social issue? By means of a case study, this research aims to explore in what way the kafala system contributes to the exploitation of female foreign laborers, while at

[36] Redfern, 2021.
[37] Silvey, 2004, pp. 245-264.
[38] Silvey, 2004, pp. 245-264.
[39] AlShehabi, 2019, p. 300.
[40] Millward, 2017, pp. 756-776; Graham, 2019, pp. 205-211.
[41] Blarel & Ennis, 2022, pp. 147-172.
[42] Mende, 2018, p. 230.

the same time highlighting an alarming social issue. The study of this thesis focuses on Saudi Arabia. First of all because, as in the other GCC-countries, this is a state where the kafala system is actively implemented today. Also, the country has one of the largest migrant populations worldwide.[43] In addition, there are other GCC-states, for example Qatar in the light of the World Cup, which have received and are receiving more media attention than Saudi Arabia regarding the kafala system and the treatment of migrant workers. So, the attention in the current social debate on the issue of modern slavery in the Gulf region is not necessarily focused on Saudi Arabia, which creates space to address the issue in this state.

Research question

As is emphasized earlier in the introduction, the living and working situation of female migrants in the Gulf region and its relation to exploitation and modern forms of slavery is not extensively researched by academics, despite the great social importance of the topic. This thesis therefore examines if and how the kafala system contributes to acts of modern slavery among female migrants who work in Saudi Arabia's domestic sector. This is researched first by means of defining key concepts like modern slavery. Next, the origin and functioning of the system is researched, followed by an examination of the impact of the kafala system on female migrant workers in Saudi Arabia and the other GCC-countries. Finally, a case study that involves the material of TikTok videos of a domestic worker in based in Saudi Arabia is analyzed. Ultimately, the definition of modern slavery and the examined sponsorship system are used to analyze the videos. In order to formulate an answer to the main research question, the thesis is approached by addressing four sub questions. These are respectively: what is modern slavery? If and how does the kafala sponsorship system contribute to slavery? In how far does TikTok user Brenda Dama expresses signs of slavery? In how far does the discussed kafala system influence the situation Brenda Dama finds herself in?

Methodology

In order to conduct my research, the academic publications that were highlighted in the review are further supplemented by other secondary as well as primary sources. The last category concentrates primarily on the TikTok videos.

A relatively new phenomenon in contemporary society is the ever-growing use of social media to reach the attention of a broad public. An interesting illustration is the case of a

[43] Human Rights Foundation, 2021, https://hrf.org/is-saudi-arabias-kafala-system-truly-reformed/.

young housekeeper with a Kenyan background who is employed in Saudi Arabia, known as Brenda Dama or 'Ms. Dama'. She uses the application to reveal to her followers the distressing conditions she works in. Consequently, by means of these videos she demonstrates that she never has a day off and that she does not receive any freedom or respect.[44] Brenda Dama is not the only woman sharing her experiences online, many videos have now appeared on the social media channel TikTok that are related to this topic. Indeed, the use of the internet and social media platforms to emphasize injustice and other urging social issues is becoming increasingly popular. For example, Myria Georgiou writes about the importance of social media platforms in the fight against racism.[45] This so-called 'social media activism'[46] is also highlighted in an article by José van Dijk. She claims that "social media are popular stages for self-expression, communication and self-promotion."[47] She also states that "users of online platforms (…) have adapted their strategies over the years, as they became savvier in deploying these new 'technologies of self'", meaning that through social media, users are able to adopt new ways of expressing their identity to the outside world.[48] The popularity of social media as a political platform in the Middle East is noticeable during the 2011 uprisings, when acts of digital activism (although often suppressed by censorism and internet black-outs) found its way into the Arab world.[49] In *Women's Digital Activism in a Changing Middle East*, Annabelle Sreberny elaborates on the rising participation rate of women in the region on social media platforms.[50] Subsequently, she also indicates that especially in Saudi Arabia the use of social media platform Twitter has risen because of its relatively young population. She concludes by emphasizing that new media techniques are causing women to speak out "about many issues and with many voices, with or without clerical support and male rescuers, and challenging both state power and masculinist hegemony."[51] Among the range of social media applications that is available today, think of Twitter, Facebook or Instagram, another growing and well-liked platform for communicating various expressions to a public is TikTok. Since its introduction to the world of social media, this application has expanded significantly.[52] My research however focuses on Brenda Dama's video content. The research method that is used for the analysis of the case study is further explained in chapter three of the thesis. The choice

[44] Donovan, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/25/world/middleeast/domestic-workers-tiktok-gulf.html.
[45] Georgiou, 2020, pp. 2379-2385.
[46] Carlson & Berglund, 2021, introduction, p.1.
[47] Van Dijk, 2013, p. 199.
[48] Van Dijk, 2013, p. 201.
[49] Al-Jenaibi, 2014, pp. 241-260; Bruns et al., 2013, 871-198.
[50] Sreberny, 2015, pp. 357-361.
[51] Sreberny, 2015, p. 360.
[52] Stokel-Walker, 2021, p. 11.

to conduct a qualitative research consequently means that this thesis cannot cover every aspect of information on the topic. The experiences that migrant women endure in Saudi Arabia provide just one side of the story, namely that of the employee and not that of the employer. However, these experiences do contain valuable information on the workers' in-depth emotions in and opinions on a situation.

The thesis includes three chapters. The first chapter builds a theoretical framework. It elaborates on relevant themes and concepts in relation to the topic: the relation between forms of modern slavery among female domestic workers in Saudi Arabia and the kafala system. First, it researches the concept of slavery: how is it defined? Second, it zooms in on Saudi Arabia: what is the country's connection to slavery and with what forms of exploitation is it dealing today? Lastly, the theoretical framework is aimed to explain the increasing popularity of social media application TikTok. The second chapter examines the origins of the kafala system and focuses on examining the sponsorship system in the Middle East before zooming in on the implementation of the institution in Saudi Arabia. The third and final chapter is aimed to dissect the case study – it provides a short framework for the qualitative content analysis and consequently examines the material that is used for the study, namely the TikTok videos of Brenda Dama. By means of these three chapters, the thesis aims to deliver an extensive research to modern slavery, the kafala system and forms of modern slavery among migrant women employed in the domestic sector of Saudi Arabia. It is of both academic and social importance to create awareness to this distressing issue.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework

The first chapter aims to set the parameters of the research. It respectively defines slavery, examines the prevalence of this phenomenon in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, demonstrates the fast-growing popularity of TikTok and highlights earlier research done on the social media application.

The concept of modern slavery

Slavery is one of the main concepts that is used in this research. In order to proceed, it is therefore important to dissect the term. It is already mentioned in the introduction that slavery is a concept that academics find hard to define. Michael Rota attributes the difficulty to find one clear definition of the term to the complexity of the concept: "it has proved difficult to find a definition that correctly rules in all cases that intuitively should count as cases of slavery, while at the same time correctly ruling out all cases that intuitively should not."[53] Thus, according to Rota, there is not yet a definition available that includes all aspects of slavery. Despite this, many academics attempted to draw one. Consequently, there are multiple definitions of the term available, formulated over the years by academics and by means of meetings specially organized for this purpose. The first part of the chapter aims to provide an overview of the various perspectives that exist on the meaning of slavery.

The definition of slavery that follows was established on the Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery or the Slavery Convention. It was drawn on the 25th of September 1926 in Geneva. This definition was supplemented by the second Slavery Convention in 1956. In this period, slavery was abolished in a great deal of the world. In article one and two of the 1926 Convention the concept of slavery is defined:

> For the purpose of the present Convention, the following definitions are agreed upon:
>
> (1) Slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised.
> (2) The slave trade includes all acts involved in the capture, acquisition or disposal of a person with intent to reduce him to slavery; all acts involved in the acquisition of a slave with a view to selling or exchanging him; all acts of disposal by sale or

[53] Rota, 2020, p. 2.

> exchange of a slave acquired with a view to being sold or exchanged, and, in general, every act of trade or transport in slaves.[54]

This definition focuses on slavery *de facto*. The scholar Boris Paschke reflects on the Roman period and claims that: "In the Roman Empire, slavery was thought to be in accordance with the 'law of nations' (ius gentium) and, thus, was considered legal. It existed both de jure and de facto."[55] In contemporary society however, slavery is viewed as illegal "from the perspective of international law" and consequently it does not exists *de jure* anywhere around the globe.[56] It is however, present in society *de facto*. Today there is a global issue of modern slavery at play. In 2021, approximately fifty million people world-wide lived in conditions of modern slavery and a report from 2020 reveals that especially girls and women are increasingly vulnerable of being exposed to forms of slavery.[57] Thus, even though the act of slavery is ruled out from global society *de jure*, in line with Paschke's argument, it is still a phenomenon that is visible around the world *de facto*. Consequently, my research is aimed at exploring the prevalence of slavery *de facto.*

Even though the revised version of slavery is just slightly adjusted, the additions it made to the original Convention are worth mentioning. According to the Supplementary Convention in 1956, slavery is defined as the following:

> For the purposes of the present Convention:
>
> a. "Slavery" means, as defined in the Slavery Convention of 1926, the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised, and "slave" means a person in such condition or status;
> b. "A person of servile status" means a person in the condition or status resulting from any of the institutions or practices mentioned in article 1 of this Convention;[58]

[54] First Slavery Convention, 1926, Article 1.1.2.
[55] Paschke, 2020, p. 2.
[56] Paschke, 2020, p. 2.
[57] International Labour Organization, Walk Free, IOM UN Migration, 2022.
[58] Second Slavery Convention, 1956, Section IV. Definitions, Article 7.a.b.

To its forerunner, this definition complements an explanation of what being a slave entails: "and "slave" means a person in such condition". Section b. was added and is linked to the practices and institutions highlighted in the first article of the second Convention. Thus, this definition infers that something is considered an act of slavery when a person is seen and treated by someone as property.

The scholar Jean Allain attempted to translate the legal and somewhat obsolete definition of slavery of almost a century ago into how the concept should be considered today. The issue of the legal definition of slavery from 1926 is, according to Allain, that even though "consensus has existed for more than eighty-five years among states as to the legal definition of slavery", it "failed to take hold among the general public or to "speak" to those institutions interested in the ending of slavery."[59] He dissects the fragment "powers attaching to the rights of ownership"[60] in article 1 of the first Slavery Convention and claims that in society today the act of possession should be considered as a certain form of control, "exercised in such a manner as to significantly deprive that person of their individual liberty."[61] He states that an individual is deprived of individual liberty when one cannot walk away. The concept of ownership is built out of multiple powers; the power to purchase and sell a person, the power to exploit a person, the power of profiting from the use of a person, the capacity to transfer someone to a successor, and the ability to exhaust property (an individual).[62]

The Slavery Convention and the adjusted second definition of slavery are now also supplemented by both the Trafficking Protocol and the Rome Statute.[63] The issue of human trafficking is explained in article three of the Protocol. It is defined here as a crime against humanity:

> For the purposes of this Protocol:
>
> a) "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, or the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to

[59] Allain, 2017, p. 36.
[60] First Slavery Convention, 1926, Article 1.1.
[61] Allain, 2017, p. 39.
[62] Allain, 2017, pp. 40-42.
[63] Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000; The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998.

> achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;[64]

Next to this protocol, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court also places the act of enslavement under the category of crimes against humanity. This statute is a binding international agreement and resulted in the founding of the International Criminal Court in 2002. Article 7.2.c. of the Rome Statute dives into the issue of slavery:

> "Enslavement" means the exercise of any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership over a person and includes the exercise of such power in the course of trafficking in persons, in particular women and children.[65]

In line with the Convention's definition of 1956, according to the Protocol and the Statute, slavery is present when someone sees and treats another individual as property. Both the fragment "to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person" as well as "the exercise of all powers attaching to the right of ownership over a person" confirm this.[66] The protocol connects the notion of one individual controlling another person with acts of exploitation.

The explanation of these different but at the same time corresponding definitions of slavery are necessary to eventually identify acts of slavery in the subsequent case study. However, the definitions are subjective and deciding what exactly can be classified as slavery thus depends on the explanation of the term one follows. The described definitions overlap in that they connect slavery to some clear core issues. The first is the act of possession or ownership over an individual, which flows into the deprivation of liberty. This is a form of control and applies when one cannot walk away. The second issue the definitions above refer to is that of human trafficking, which includes the process of recruitment, transportation, sell, exchange, transfer and the receipt of persons. Lastly, the Rome Statute claims that human

[64] Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000, Article 3.a.
[65] The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998, Article 7.2.c.
[66] Trafficking Protocol; Rome Statute.

trafficking exists for the purpose of exploitation, which is thus the last aspect of slavery in this thesis. Among other things, exploitation can be identified in the acts of forced labor, various forms of violence and servitude. So, in this research the concept of slavery is connected to the following themes: deprivation of liberty, human trafficking, exploitation and their associated characteristics. Based on these themes I am going to explore in chapter three whether Brenda Dama describes slavery in her TikTok videos.

Saudi Arabia

In the first part of this chapter I aimed to outline and explain various definitions of (modern) slavery. Subsequently, this part of the chapter focuses on the country that is researched in this thesis: Saudi Arabia. It aims to demonstrate the presence of acts of slavery in Saudi Arabia, examines its connection to Islamic law and researches the abolition of slavery in the country.

Slavery, although in varying forms, is a phenomenon that has been present in the region that is now known as Saudi Arabia for a long period of time. Hend Gilli-Elewy examines the development of slavery during the rise of Islam in this region.[67] The concept's early appearances are often linked to the Islamic religion, something that is elaborated on in this chapter. Gilli-Elewy highlights the presence of slaves around the 6th and 7th century in Mecca, claiming that the two main sources of slavery that were recognized by Islam were either military conflicts or enslavement by birth.[68] The slave population was diverse, including among others Arabs, Africans, Persians and Abyssinians, and consisted of men, women and children.[69] Gilli-Elewy furthermore points to various pre-Islamic acts of slavery in Arabia that included "debt slavery, sacrificial enslavement, selling oneself or one's children, kidnap, and enslavement as punishment."[70] This indicates the long-existence of slavery in the region. Next to enslavement by birth and war, another major contributor to the influx of slaves in this period was the slave trade.[71] The trade continued for centuries after, which is illustrated by the post-World War II period when the trade proved to be still actively present in the Arabian Peninsula.[72] During this period Saudi Arabia was still under the control of the British administration. By then, slavery was officially abolished in the United Kingdom and its colonies since 1833 with the implementation of the Slavery Abolition Act.[73] However,

[67] Gilli-Elewy, 2017, pp. 164-168.
[68] Gilli-Elewy, 2017, p. 166.
[69] Gilli-Elewy, 2017, p. 164.
[70] Gilli-Elewy, 2017, p. 166.
[71] Gilli-Elewy, 2017, p. 165.
[72] DiAntonis, 2021, p. 37.
[73] Chappell, 2022, p. 225.

since Saudi Arabia was not officially a British colony, this act did not apply to the country. Saudi Arabia's economy was strongly reliant on slaves working in the date and pearl industry, a dependence the British government was also aware of. Morally, the British did not agree with the trade. However, at the same time it did not wish to disturb the economic vitality in the region, since instability would jeopardize their degree of control in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf region.[74] DiAntonis offers an example of the slave trade when he highlights the case of a woman named Salayim Bint Khairullah. In 1951, she informed British officials that she had been lured into the trade under false pretenses. According to the woman, her children were sold to other slave holders and she had been beaten by her employers.[75] This case of slavery corresponds with the definition of the Rome Statute regarding human trafficking that is outlined in the first part of this chapter. Slaves were transported into the state continuously from countries as Sudan and this practice not end during the Second World War period. On the contrary, an impulse in the slave trade developed after the war, partly due to the lack of British presence in the country during the war and also because of a rising demand for oil which consequently asked for more cheap labor.[76] Not only were slaves a crucial spill in the Saudi economy, they were also kept in large amounts by the royal family.[77] The concept of slavery was thus strongly embedded in the Saudi society. The slave trade in Saudi Arabia only ended in 1962, when it was officially declared an illegal practice.[78] How is it possible that slavery was declared illegal in a society wherein slaves were of such importance for the economy? This was due to the strong international pressure Saudi Arabia was facing, but also because this gap could be filled by foreign labour brought in from especially Asian and African countries by means of the Kafala sponsorship system.[79] Freamon furthermore allocates this development to a change in labor patterns: "More significantly, the shift from slave labor to mass wage labor, as a result in labor trafficking patterns (…), probably had considerable effect on the move away from chattel slavery."[80] However, the abolition in Saudi Arabia did not mean that acts of slavery in the country came to a complete halt. As Freamon writes in his chapter: "In point of fact, he [King Faisal] did

[74] DiAntonis, 2021, p. 41.
[75] DiAntonis, 2021, p. 35.
[76] DiAntonis, 2021, p. 40.
[77] DiAntonis, 2021, pp. 2-3.
[78] Freamon, 2019, p. 458.
[79] DiAntonis, 2021, p. 34; Landolfo, 2021.
[80] Freamon, 2019, p. 459.

not abolish slavery but rather simply ordered the emancipation of anyone enslaved in the Kingdom."[81]

According to the Global Slavery Index (GSI), in 2018 approximately sixty-one thousand people were living under the conditions of modern slavery in Saudi Arabia[82] and a 2022 report of the Human Rights Watch Organization (HRW) published the following about an incident just two years ago, in 2020:

> A deportation center in Riyadh was holding hundreds of mostly Ethiopian migrant workers in conditions so degrading that they amount to ill-treatment (…). Detainees alleged to Human Rights Watch that they were held in extremely overcrowded rooms for extended period, and that guards tortured and beat them with rubber-coated metal rods, leading to at least three alleged deaths in custody between October and November 2020.[83]

What is demonstrated in this report is in line with the earlier illustrated definition of slavery, when taking into account the aspect of claiming ownership over a person and the power to exhaust these individuals. In addition, the GSI concluded that out of the other Arab states the government of Saudi Arabia, together with fellow GCC-country Kuwait, has the lowest response rate against acts of slavery.[84] This result was compiled out of research to, among other things, support for the survivors of slavery and the criminal justice system. The results implicate that there has been done little effort by the state to better the rights and conditions of its migrant laborers. Next to the exhaustion of employees, other forms of exploitation a foreign worker in Saudi Arabia possibly endures proved to exist of physical and mental abuse, unpaid wages, no freedom, torture, neglect, sexual assault, and corporal punishment.[85]

Evidently, it appears to be difficult to effectively abolish acts of slavery in Saudi Arabia. One aspect that further complicates the complete disappearance of slavery is the fact that the country's law is based on Islamic sources, which are sources that often implicitly endorse practices of slavery.[86] This is illustrated earlier by Brown when he highlighted the

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[81] Freamon, 2019, p. 458.
[82] Global Slavery Index, 2018, https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/data/country-data/saudi-arabia/.
[83] Human Rights Watch, 2022, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/saudi-arabia#49dda6.
[84] Global Slavery Index, 2018, https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/data/country-data/saudi-arabia/.
[85] Migrant Rights, 2022, https://www.migrant-rights.org/2022/08/if-my-husband-touches-you-i-will-kill-you/; Human Rights Watch, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/15/saudi-arabia-migrants-held-inhuman-degrading-conditions.
[86] Mathews, 2019, pp. 226-265; Brown, 2019, chapter 2, pp. 2-6.

Quranic verse (4:36) "be virtuous towards (…) those whom you possess rightfully" in his reading[87] and by Mathews when he described how the act of slavery is positioned in the Quran:

> The Quran uses a number of words to describe slavery. The most common phrase is *ma malakat aymankum*, meaning those possessed by your right hand. The other common usage is *abd*, as in Abdallah, slave of Allah. Most of the legal verses on slavery relate to the status of slaves as witnesses, the standard of their treatment and the virtues of the manumission. The Quran places the onus on masters to grant writs of emancipation to the enslaved.[88]

The meaning of slavery and the treatment of the enslaved is thus described in the Quran, which is in line with what was demonstrated earlier in my research. "There is no direct enjoinment towards the abolition of slavery in the Quran"[89], Mathew furthermore writes. So, even though slavery is declared illegal in the country's state law, it is still embedded in Islamic law in theory and used occasionally to justify the practice,[90] which may contribute to the perpetuation of various forms of slavery despite the official abolishment of 1962.

TikTok

Although the third chapter further examines the social media application of TikTok and its videos in relation to forms of exploitation among women domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, this part describes in advance how the social media platform grew to be enormously popular world-wide in a short period of time.

"TikTok has blown away all records in its short life", it was "the most downloaded app in 2020 and 2021", and "TikTok has had over three billion global downloads and has around one billion active users who engage with the platform to create 3-60-second-long video featuring a wide spectrum of aesthetic, thematic, and stylistic choices."[91] How did this social media platform grew to be immensely popular so fast in a relatively short period of time? The popularity can first be explained by its easiness to use. Some people use it to record songs or dances, some share their make-up tips or so called life-hacks, some use it to practice

[87] Brown, 2019, p. 5.
[88] Mathews, 2019, p. 239.
[89] Mathews, 2019, p. 227.
[90] Mathews, 2019, P. 227.
[91] Stokel-Walker, 2021, p. 11; Boffone, 2022, p. 5; Boffone, 2022, p. 2.

their imitating skills, you can name it all. After the video is uploaded on the platform, it can be streamed by the whole world.[92] All of this is recorded in short videos, often between three up to sixty seconds, although it is now possible to record up to ten minutes of content.[93] In addition, the application's target audience is the so-called generation Z, a group that mainly consists of teenagers and people early in their twenties.[94] Even though "according to *Vice*, "everyone" is now on TikTok", it is especially popular among the younger generation in today's society: "it is reported that 41 percent of TikTok's users are aged 16-24."[95] TikTok thus thrives the most among the youth and young adults. It is used for fun activities, but also for example to express emotions and to spread political ideals. To illustrate, in the United States TikTok has proved to act as a means for teenagers and young adults to express their religion, sexuality, gender, political preferences and so on.[96] In contrast to other social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook or Snapchat, it is not possible to use TikTok privately.[97] This means that a person's opinion or feeling regarding a certain situation can spread rapidly. Thus, the app is also used as a tool to reach a public for a certain cause and this is exactly why this specific application is examined in the case of the domestic worker in Saudi Arabia. It is a recent, easy-to-use, extremely popular and therefore hugely relevant social media platform to research for this thesis.

In the years since the launch of TikTok, various research based on its popularity and scope was done. One example is the *Research on the Causes of the "TikTok" app Becoming Popular and the Existing Problems.*[98] The writers attribute the application's fast-growing popularity to respectively its diverse marketing strategies, an artificial intelligence strategy that is strong and its ability to meet the needs of its users.[99] Moreover, other researchers argue that TikTok's popularity grew due to the Covid-19 crisis, which included 'stay-at-home orders' and 'social distancing guidelines' that according to them triggered the use of online media. They claim that the health crisis not only influenced the app's popularity, but that it impacted the user's perception on the crisis at the same time. According to this research, in this period young people were affected the most in their perception regarding the pandemic.[100] It is interesting to note here that research to the influence of TikTok videos often relates to

[92] Stokel-Walker, 2021, p.11.
[93] Kennedy, 2020, p. 1070; Maede & Dreyer, 2022, p. 170.
[94] Boffone, 2022, p. 2.
[95] Kennedy, 2020, p. 2.
[96] Boffone, 2022, p. 4.
[97] Boffone, 2022, p. 6.
[98] Xu et al., 2019, pp. 60-63.
[99] Xu et al., 2019, pp. 60-61.
[100] Unni & Weinstein, 2021, p. 863.

various social issues. We already know that research is conducted to the impact of the application on perceptions of the pandemic, but examination has also been done to the influence of TikTok content on for example the increasing or decreasing use of drugs, smoking and the users' perception on various health issues like diabetes and eating disorders. The article *Getting high for likes: Exploring cannabis-related content on TikTok* illustrates this trend. It shows how videos containing notions of cannabis can influence the young public's perception on this substance.[101] Furthermore, others researched the impact of TikTok content on both school performances of the youth as well as the social lives of adolescents.[102] These findings indicate that extensive research to the popularity and the social, economic and political impact of the application is done and that further research to this platform can be performed.

[101] Rutherford et al., 2022, p. 1119.
[102] Nichita et al., 2021, pp. 63-64.

Chapter Two: The Kafala System

Now that the theoretical framework has been set out, in this chapter we can explain the kafala sponsorship system. It is of importance to concentrate on the system, because of the centrality of the concept in my research to forms of modern slavery among female migrant workers in Saudi Arabia. The first part of the chapter briefly discusses various perspectives that exist on the origin of the system. The main part of the chapter then focuses on the implementation and impact of the sponsorship system in the Middle East today, with a focus on the Gulf region. Lastly, the research concentrates on the examination of the system in the country of research: Saudi Arabia.

The roots of kafala

Various perspectives have been proposed on the origins of the kafala system in the Middle East that are worth mentioning briefly in this chapter. These views relate to Bedouin culture, Islamic jurisdiction and British colonialism. "Established in the 1930s, the kafala system came from the Bedouin custom of providing foreigners protection, or in some cases, affiliation with a tribe when passing through controlled territory."[103] These words were written by Joshua Nelson. The piece relates to the first perspective on the origins of the kafala system that is highlighted here, namely the claim that its roots lay in Bedouin culture and customs. Nelson argues that there has been a complete transition within the system, from the friendly and warm cultural customs of the Bedouin people in the 1930s to the 'greedy' practice of the kafala system today, that is full of 'deceit'.[104] Khan and Harroff-Tavel claim something similar, in that originally, the system was "a noble principle, which unfortunately no longer holds the same meaning today."[105] Again, the academics point to a transformation within the practice of the system then and now. However, these findings contrast with what is claimed in *The SAGE Handbook of International Migration*. In this book it is argued that kafala is a long-existing Islamic legal practice: "Basically, this is a Muslim legal practice and a form of parental authority which a member of the family gains vis-à-vis an orphan. It ensures both moral education and economic security."[106] Jureidini and Hassan's research reinforces this idea that kafala's historical roots of the system can be found in Islamic jurisprudence. They state that:

[103] Nelson, 2017, p. 41.
[104] Nelson, 2017, p. 41.
[105] Khan & Harroff-Tavel, 2011, p. 294.
[106] Beaugé et al., 2020, p. 252.

> In Islamic family law "*kafala*" refers to a formal agreement to provide temporary support for an orphaned child until adulthood. Such support does not confer inheritance rights and is best understood as a form of legal guardianship rather than adoption.[107]

The writers claim that kafala is a legal concept and state that the principles of the system can be traced back to the law regarding guardianship. In *The Handbook* kafala is described as "a form of parental authority", which is in line with how it is defined above as "a form of legal guardianship." This means that according to this law, it is not possible for parents to legally adopt an orphaned child. Instead, the concept of kafala provides parents the right to sponsor and care for a child until it is old enough to take care of him or herself. [108]

Overall, what these historic explanations of the term kafala as a legal Islamic concept all embody is the desire to fraternize society, to create trust, to make people look out for another and care for each other. However, in reality, the institute provides security to people who otherwise would not have been able to participate in society. The system's roots in Islamic law may also be one of the reasons behind why it is still in practice today. However, in the Gulf states, Lebanon and Jordan, the system is now interpreted and used in a completely different way. This is illustrated by Jureidini and Hassan, who point to another characteristic of the contemporary kafala system in their research, namely the economic aspect: "The most highly critiqued issues of the contemporary kafala have indeed centered around the power, control and exploitation of the kafil over foreign employees as well as business establishments."[109] The same is done in *The SAGE Handbook*: "Emptied of its religious foundations, the *kafala* became a paid service, and a means of exploitation by unscrupulous 'sponsors'."[110] So, this research seems to suggest that there has occurred a change within the use of kafala. Consequently, the question rises to what extent the kafala system as it functions today can still be compared to the old Islamic tradition of taking care of children and your fellow people that is described above. At least, the roots of the institute can be traced back to Islamic jurisdiction.

[107] Jureidini & Hassan, 2020, chapter 6, p. 93.
[108] Migrant Rights, 2015, https://www.migrant-rights.org/2015/03/understanding-kafala-an-archaic-law-at-cross-purposes-with-modern-development/.
[109] Jureidini & Hassan, 2020, chapter 6, p. 95.
[110] Beaugé et al., 2020, p. 252.

> AlShehabi (2019), provides documentary evidence showing how the British colonial rulers, first in Bahrain and later other GCC states from the 1920s, introduced what was for them a system of sponsorship and surety, but which was perfectly compatible with and adaptable to the principles of kafala in Islamic law and custom.[111]

Although it is demonstrated earlier that kafala is a legal concept, AlShehabi provides here yet another view on the kafala system's development. He primarily focuses on the effect that the era of British administration in the Gulf region has had on further developments of the already existing system. He claims that its "legal and bureaucratic procedures of the sponsorship system originated during the British colonial era in the Gulf"[112] and here he specifically focuses on Bahrain. Economic development led to the increasing influx of foreigners, especially with the growth of the pearl diving industry in the late 1920s. The share of pearl divers in the institute's change towards a more labor-oriented system is also emphasized by Jureidini and Hassan:

> The earliest account of kafala in relation to labour in the Arabian Gulf seems to have been loose arrangements from the turn of the twentieth century to the 1940s. Pearl divers, for example, were bound to a kafīl who owned the dhow boats that were used.[113]

The region's economic prosperity caused an administrative challenge for the British authorities. The rulers introduced a system that "had all the hallmarks that were to become emblematic legal requirements of the modern Kafala system"[114], including the obligated use of sponsors and exit visas. The British influence and economic aspect of the system also highlight the transition of the *kafeel* from a guarantor to a sponsor, the latter concept is explained in the next paragraph. This system was thus implemented to control the flow of any laborer that entered the Gulf and its use increased intensively after the discovery of oil and the influx of the 'bachelor workers'.[115] The institution of sponsorship was then actively implemented in the other Gulf countries that were under British jurisdiction.[116]

[111] Jureidini & Hassan, 2020, chapter 6, p. 92.
[112] AlShehabi, 2019, p. 293.
[113] Jureidini & Hassan, 2020, chapter 6, p. 94.
[114] AlShehabi, 2019, p. 297.
[115] AlShehabi, 2019, p. 300.
[116] AlShehabi, 2019, p. 303.

In addition, it is important to shortly highlight the difference between British jurisdiction and that of an independent Kuwait here, since it resulted in a change within the practice of the sponsorship system. Whereas the British authorities allowed non-citizens to sponsor individuals to work and live in a country, the Kuwaiti government instead limited this right to the state citizens only.[117]

> The results [of this change] are the unique features that define the Kafala system in the GCC states today: unrestricted labour migration versus restricted citizenship, with the migration flow governed by requiring that citizens personally sponsor migrants.[118]

This development started in Kuwait and consequently spread to the other Gulf States after they became independent, including Saudi Arabia. The sponsorship system we are familiar with today thus emerged after the period of independence: "In its contemporary form, however, the kafala system emerged only in the post-independence context."[119] The following paragraph explores the contemporary kafala system in the region in more detail.

The system today

> According to the United Nations database of 2015, the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Emirates, have one of the largest migrant stocks worldwide with around 25 million migrant workers who constitute about 60% of the region's total population.[120]

The share of foreigners in the labor force is extremely high in all GCC countries, especially in Qatar and Dubai, where "the share is as high as 96% of the total workforce."[121] In order to regulate the enormous flows of migration to the region, the states use the kafala sponsorship system. Other countries in the Middle East that are known for applying the system are Lebanon and Jordan.[122] However, the concept of kafala is also known in various other Middle

[117] AlShehabi, 2019, p. 309.
[118] AlShehabi, 2019, p. 309.
[119] Damir-Geilsdorf & Pelican, 2018, p. 157.
[120] Damir-Geilsdorf & Pelican, 2018, p. 155.
[121] Damir-Geilsdorf & Pelican, 2018, p. 156.
[122] Pande, 2013, p. 414; Caillol, 2017, p. 445.

Eastern countries as Morocco, where the term still primarily relates to family law and foster-care measures highlighted in the previous paragraph.[123] Most of the migrant workers in the region derive from countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia and Africa.[124]

This paragraph shows the key actors behind the process of the kafala system. In other words, how does the system operate today? Before answering this question, it is of importance to shortly elaborate on the concept 'sponsor' and on what is meant with 'sponsorship' in the context of my research. "Under the kafala system, domestic workers are without labour market or employment flexibility as they are technically bound in a relationship of servitude to their kafeel or sponsor."[125] The term *kafeel* translates into 'responsible' and as is explained above, by means of the kafala system the migrant is bound to a sponsor who is responsible for the worker: "the sponsorship system requires the sponsor to assume full economic and legal responsibility for the employee during the contract period."[126] Through the system the *kafeel*, which either can be the government, a company, a private citizen or an expatriate, is able to exert control over the employee in many ways.[127] Because the sponsor is obligated to take care of the migrant when it comes to salary, transportation, bureaucratic costs, but also in terms of contract termination or renewals and the worker's mobility to change jobs, the migrant's life is strongly dependent on the employer.[128] As is highlighted before in this research, various reforms have been implemented in the countries that utilize kafala in an effort to improve the system. Despite this, the sponsors are still able to control their workers to a great extent. For example, although the confiscation of passports by the *kafeel* in Qatar has been declared illegal in 2015, research from 2020 showed that in reality, identification papers are occasionally taken from especially the domestic migrant workers in the country.[129] By means of the kafala system, sponsors thus possess an almost exclusive kind of power over the migrant laborers. So, in this research the term sponsorship refers to an employer (or sponsor) that controls an employee (migrant worker) by providing, among other things, a salary, housing and insurance.

Sponsors are able to approach and hire domestic foreign workers individually, but usually the process starts with the help of a recruitment agency.[130] These agencies are

[123] U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Morocco, 2021, https://ma.usembassy.gov/visas/immigrant-visas/adopting-in-morocco/.
[124] Parreñas & Silvey, 2021, p. 2.
[125] Parreñas & Silvey, 2021, p. 2.
[126] Malaeb, 2015, p. 310.
[127] Damir-Geilsdorf & Pelican, 2018, p. 158.
[128] Garrett, 2020, p. 202.
[129] Amnesty International, 2022, https://www.amnesty.nl/wat-we-doen/landen/qatar/kafala.
[130] Robinson, 2021, par. 'What is the kafala system?'.

established either in the so-called 'sending' countries: the countries of the migrants' origin, or in the 'receiving' countries, which are the countries that take the migrants in and provide the work. [131] The agencies try to convince workers to take the step to leave their families and travel to the Gulf by promising them money and a better life. They especially apply this tactic to those living in poor areas.[132] Consequently, many workers leave their homeland with false expectations. On top of that, the agencies often put the migrants in a vulnerable financial position by asking them for these so-called unauthorized placement fees: a sum of money a worker pays to secure job placement.[133] "Despite the government's strict regulations on unauthorized placement fees, private recruitment agencies have continued to use their control over domestic workers, offering direct threats to their status (i.e. deportation, salary deductions) or their families."[134] The recruitment agencies that are located in both the sending and the receiving states thus play a crucial role in the process of the kafala system. From the moment the domestic workers are persuaded by the agencies to take the step of moving to another country, they are trapped in the system. At their arrival, often the workers' passports are taken and after a few hours or days of waiting they are assigned to their sponsor.[135] This is the starting point for the migrants' struggle with the unpromised work they have to fulfil, as well as an abnormal salary, a limited moving space and often horrible living situations. Consequently, these are all aspects that the sponsorship system is blamed for: "Although individual employers determine the severity of restrictions on MDW's [Migrant Domestic Workers] mobility, the kafala system provides the basis for such violations."[136]

Forms of exploitation

Now that the process of recruitment and the subsequent steps of the kafala system in the receiving countries is demonstrated, this section focuses on highlighting the forms of exploitation that this system enables to occur. As is mentioned earlier, the system has grown to be a controversial practice[137] and is often compared to acts of slavery: "Current practice of the *kafala* system has been critiqued for its exploitation of migrant workers, to the extent of describing it as a slave system."[138] This statement is substantiated extensively by the availability of various accounts of abuse. In the paragraph above I mentioned the practice of

[131] Malit Jr. & Naufal, 2016, p.78.
[132] Rak, 2020.
[133] Malit Jr. & Naufal, 2016, pp. 78 & 82.
[134] Malit Jr. & Naufal, 2016, p. 82.
[135] Pande, 2013, p. 424.
[136] Pande, 2013, p. 428.
[137] Robinson, 2021, introduction.
[138] Jureidini & Hassan, 2019, p. 96.

taking away the migrants' passports when they enter the country. The report named *Why do you want to rest?* that is published by Amnesty International illustrates this. It shows that between May 2019 and September 2020 approximately 83 percent of the 105 domestic workers surveyed in Qatar had been confiscated of their passports against their will, meaning they are not able to leave the country.[139] Pande interviewed an Ethiopian women who described her experience of arriving at the airport as the following:

> "I didn't see anything like this in my country… very dirty place. People from different parts of the world sitting there, with no water, no facilities and no information. We feel very cold and some there are sleeping like, like… there is a war. But they will not let us out, no, they tell us, "no, not without your sponsor""[140]

According to the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR), abuse is also present in the form of "debt bondage", "forced labor", "visa trading" and " irregular residency status".[141] Jureidini and Hassan contribute to the study of the CFR by highlighting the aspect of the kafala system that allows labor exploitation: "Workers may be forced to pay recruitment charges to the recruitment agency, thus burdening the workers with more expenses, feeding a system of bribery and corruption, and binding them into a form of labour indebtedness and forced labour."[142] The kafala system is also known for its implementation of the so-called No Objection Certificates (NOC), which means that in order for workers to switch employers, they need permission from their sponsor first.[143] According to the scholar, this is a "structural aspect of kafala which provides the opportunity for unscrupulous sponsors to wield NOC as a weapon of modern slavery."[144] Because sponsors can decide not to grant the NOC, via this medium, workers are restricted in their freedom. Subsequently, there is a significant amount of reports available on cases of verbal, physical and abuse of domestic workers. For example, the Amnesty International report reveals that the organization spoke to 40 women who, out of the 105 in total, experienced these forms of abuse. There are accounts of women who have been beaten by their bosses and even by the kids of their bosses.[145] Amnesty International published the following about the experiences of a 26-year old woman from the Philippines:

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[139] Amnesty International, 2020, p. 16, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/3175/2020/en/.
[140] Pande, 2013, p. 424.
[141] Robinson, 2021, par. 'What are its origins?'.
[142] Jureidini & Hassan, 2019, p. 96.
[143] El-Mumin, 2020, p. 257.
[144] El-Mumin, 2020, p. 257.
[145] Amnesty International, 2020, p. 49, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/3175/2020/en/.

"Her employers immediately confiscated her passport and phone, forced her to work 17-hour days, barely fed her, made her sleep on the floor, sexually harassed her and towards the end of her time there, did not pay her[146]" Another aspect these reports present is the presence of gender-based discrimination; women face the most abuse. They are being imprisoned by the governments of Qatar and Kuwait, accused of having sex outside of their marriage while they often actually were the victims of rape.[147] However, the victimized women are frequently afraid to speak out. The kafala system is again blamed here, this time for creating a system that discourages victims from reporting: "Even in the rare cases when domestic workers do report such abuses and press charges, they risk being accused of "illicit relations" and face an arsenal of retaliatory measures arising from the kafala system."[148] The exploitation of migrant workers, specifically that of women, thus manifests itself in various ways. This includes labor exploitation and the restriction of free movement, next to verbal, physical and sexual abuse.

The accounts of abuse and exploitation have not gone unnoticed by the international community and consequently the concerned states have faced much criticism, the most visible example of this criticism today is aimed at Qatar as the host of the World Cup 2022. In recent years, the countries have consequently worked on attempts to modernize the system. To illustrate, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW), Qatar introduced certain labor reform measures in 2020. These reforms relate to aspects of the kafala system, considering they will "allow migrant workers to change jobs without employer permission and set a higher minimum wage for all workers, regardless of nationality".[149] The reforms were seen as extremely significant to better the work situation of the World Cup 2022 migrants. However, recent reports show that in 2022 these measures are still not fully integrated. In July 2022, a migrant worker told HRW that he had returned home without payment and eventually waited for six months until he received his money.[150] Also, HRW writes, the kafala system still entails multiple other aspects that can exploit workers.[151] Bahrain has claimed in 2019 it would abolish the kafala system, which is a promise made by more states. However, "most have really tinkered with reforms, and none have abolished it in full."[152]

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[146] Amnesty International, 2020, p. 49, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/3175/2020/en/.
[147] Robinson, 2021, par. 'How do race and gender play into this?'.
[148] Amnesty International, 2020, p. 50, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/3175/2020/en/.
[149] Human Rights Watch, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/24/qatar-significant-labor-and-kafala-reforms.
[150] Begum, 2022.
[151] HRW, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/14/qatar-reform-efforts-fail-remedy-rights-abuses.
[152] HRW, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/30/what-will-it-take-saudi-arabia-abolish-abusive-sponsorship-system.

Although it is true that positive efforts have been made to improve the migrants' situation, the attempts have often shown to be unfruitful. As is stressed by a campaign by Migrant Rights: "Some countries claimed to abolish or reform the Kafala, but the system's most critical vulnerabilities still remain."[153]

Kafala and exploitation in Saudi Arabia

In the previous paragraph the kafala system and its ability to contribute to forms of exploitation was examined. In this last part of the chapter, the link between the presence of the institution in Saudi Arabia and forms of exploitation among the largest group of foreign laborers in the world is analyzed.

With approximately ten million workers, a large group of migrants is located in Saudi Arabia. However, the country has so far delayed research into creating a better treatment for this large group.[154] The alarming issue of exploitation and abuse in the country that is fueled by the kafala system is extensively highlighted by various labor and human rights organizations. As early as in 2008, HRW published the report *As if I am not human: abuses against Asian domestic workers in Saudi Arabia*.[155] In this report, the organization addresses various forms of abuse migrant workers in the country endure, including cases of physical, mental and sexual violence, as well as the issues of overwork and low or no wages.[156] However, an important aspect of the research emphasized in the report is that the exact amount of abuse cases in Saudi Arabia is impossible to document. This is due to the denial of the Saudi Ministry of Social Affairs to acknowledge the urging issue, the general fear of reporting among the migrants, the workers' isolation and the power of the employer to withhold their employee from reporting a case. Consequently, the real number of abuse cases is probably higher than indicated.[157] Next to forced labor and human trafficking, the organization connects the experiences of domestic workers, conducted by interviews, to slavery. By using the definition of slavery drawn by the Slavery Convention and the Elements of Crimes (which derives from the Rome Statute) as explained in chapter one, HRW claims the following:

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[153] Migrant Rights, 2019, https://www.migrant-rights.org/campaign/end-the-kafala-system/.
[154] Human Rights Foundation, 2021, https://hrf.org/is-saudi-arabias-kafala-system-truly-reformed/.
[155] Human Rights Watch, 2008, https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/07/07/if-i-am-not-human/abuses-against-asian-domestic-workers-saudi-arabia
[156] Human Rights Watch, 2008, pp. 7-8, https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/07/07/if-i-am-not-human/abuses-against-asian-domestic-workers-saudi-arabia.
[157] Human Rights Watch, 2008, p. 22, https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/07/07/if-i-am-not-human/abuses-against-asian-domestic-workers-saudi-arabia.

> Haima G.'s [a 17 years old Filipina domestic worker] situation amounts to trafficking and conditions of slavery, as relatives deceived Haima G. about her promised job abroad, her agent sexually harassed her, and her employer threatened to return her to her abusive agent if she complained. Her employer sexually assaulted her, retained her passport, and locked her in the workplace so that she could not escape[158]

This report was published more than a decade ago. Unfortunately, years later not much has changed. To illustrate, in 2021 Amnesty International published the article *Saudi Arabia: Dozens of Sri Lankan women wrongfully detained for months due to abusive kafala system.*[159] As the title suggests, the report brings to light another aspect of abuse linked to kafala. Sri Lankan domestic workers, some of them having children with them, were held in detention for months while awaiting repatriation. According to the organization it involves at least 41 women. Amnesty International claims this is "a stark illustration of how domestic workers remain caught up in the inherently abusive *kafala* (sponsorship) system."[160] Most recently, in august 2022, the MRO published *"If my husband touches you I will kill you": Rape, abuse, neglect, and death threats: the lives of Kenyan women returning from Saudi*.[161] In this report research was conducted to the experiences that female domestic migrants, employed under the kafala system, suffered and to the consequent trauma they took back home. It contains many cases of sexual and physical violence against the women. The following fragment is part of the personal story of a woman from Kenya named Celeste. She worked in the east of Saudi Arabia and was sexually assaulted by her boss:

> The man [her employer] started coming to my room with a gun. On 3 February (2020), the lady was not home. He came and raped me. And he continues raping me over the coming months until November, In the fifth month, he raped and hit me with the gun on the head and I fainted.[162]

[158] Human Rights Watch, 2008, pp. 43-44, https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/07/07/if-i-am-not-human/abuses-against-asian-domestic-workers-saudi-arabia.
[159] Amnesty International, 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/04/saudi-arabia-dozens-of-sri-lankan-women-wrongfully-detained-for-months-due-to-abusive-kafala-system/.
[160] Amnesty International, 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/04/saudi-arabia-dozens-of-sri-lankan-women-wrongfully-detained-for-months-due-to-abusive-kafala-system/.
[161] Migrant Rights, 2022, https://www.migrant-rights.org/2022/08/if-my-husband-touches-you-i-will-kill-you/.
[162] Migrant Rights, p. 6, https://www.migrant-rights.org/2022/08/if-my-husband-touches-you-i-will-kill-you/.

This citation indicates that the woman experienced sexual and physical violence at her employer's home. She also suffered from mental abuse in the form of threats: "She could not tell the wife, who had told Celeste at the very beginning that if baba touched her, she (the wife) would hurt her."[163] Celeste's story is just one of the many alarming stories shared in this very recent report on the treatment of migrant workers Saudi Arabia. Another concerning experience is told by a Kenyan woman called Feith, who was ill and eventually ran away, but was sent back to her employer:

> "Baba [the employer] demanded my phones and beat me up so severely. He said, 'no police, no office, no hospital, the doctor said you are ok.' They forced me to go cook." While she was cooking, the employer started ranting at her again, looming over her from behind – 'You are here to work not to be sick. In Saudi, there is no sickness. I buy you, you are my property.' As Feith turned to speak to him, he picked up the kettle of hot water and poured it on her.[164]

These examples painfully indicate the gravity of the situation foreign women working in the domestic sector find themselves in. How is the Saudi government trying to prevent or counter exploitation and abuse that is fueled by its labor system?

In line with the other states that use the sponsorship system, Saudi Arabia announced a range of innovative reforms. In March 2021 the state attempted, but failed, to change the system. It removed the permission migrants need from their employers to leave the country and allowed migrant workers to switch employers 'under certain conditions'.[165] However, women researcher Rothna Begum claims that these reforms "exclude migrant domestic workers who make up 30% of the country's 10 million migrant workers."[166] Also, the government failed to discuss the new measures with the migrant workers' groups. Even though these recent implemented measures are positive attempts to reform kafala, many elements of the system remained intact.[167] It is thus save to claim that until today, the reform efforts have failed to benefit the almost ten million migrant workers in Saudi Arabia.

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[163] Migrant Rights, p. 6, https://www.migrant-rights.org/2022/08/if-my-husband-touches-you-i-will-kill-you/.
[164] Migrant Rights, pp. 11-12, https://www.migrant-rights.org/2022/08/if-my-husband-touches-you-i-will-kill-you/.
[165] Human Rights Watch, 2021, par. 'Work Sponsorship Reforms' https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/25/saudi-arabia-proposed-reforms-neglect-basic-rights.
[166] Human Rights Watch, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/30/what-will-it-take-saudi-arabia-abolish-abusive-sponsorship-system.
[167] Human Rights Watch, 2021, par. 'Work Sponsorship Reforms' https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/25/saudi-arabia-proposed-reforms-neglect-basic-rights.

Chapter Three: A Case Study of Ms. Dama's TikTok Videos

The previous chapter aimed to explain the origin, meaning, functioning and results of the kafala system in Saudi Arabia and the other Middle Eastern states that use the system. The last chapter of the thesis entails a qualitative content analysis to the TikTok videos belonging to the domestic migrant worker named Brenda Dama, who publishes her content under the account name of *@damabrenda28.* This particular account was chosen both because of its popularity (at this moment Ms. Dama has around 30.4 thousand followers and a total of 364.6 thousand likes) and its reference in publications by The Fuller Project, The New York Times (NYT) and several other online news platforms.[168] This indicates the relative prominence of the account. First, I wish to shortly elaborate on who Brenda Dama is. Because of the collaboration between The Fuller Project and the NYT, that aimed to highlight the alarming situation domestic women find themselves in, we know a few things about Brenda Dama. She moved from her home country Kenya to Saudi Arabia in 2019 when she was twenty-six years old. Since then she has worked as a domestic worker for a Saudi family. In an interview with the newspaper Brenda revealed that posting the videos and receiving positive reactions decreases her feeling of loneliness.[169]

A qualitative content analysis

In this paragraph, a short theoretical framework is offered that explains how the social media platform TikTok is examined as a source in this thesis. It includes an explanation of the research method that is applied to analyze the content of the videos. Also, it is important to note here that the analysis is qualitative because it is based on interpretation, not on numbers. This research uses this method of qualitative content analysis, due to its ability to identify certain patterns in a communication tool. The analysis is partly based on chapter twelve of the *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, named *Qualitative Content Analysis*, written by scholar Margrit Schreier. Schreier provides a clear overview of what qualitative content analysis entails and how to apply it in your own research. She reflects on a rather old but still often cited definition of the method that was drawn by Berenson in 1952: "Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication".[170] According to this definition, within a qualitative content

[168] Archyde, 2021; Hanad, 2021.
[169] Donovan, 2021, https://fullerproject.org/story/domestic-workers-in-gulf-countries-vent-woes-on-tiktok/.
[170] Schreier, 2014, chapter 12 in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, p. 172.

analysis research is conducted to a certain means of communication, which can for example be newspaper articles, an interview or blog, a television fragment or social media content.[171] Furthermore, Schreier attributes three beneficial characteristics to performing this kind of research: it reduces the amount of material; it well organizes the material; it is flexible.[172] More importantly, she explains what steps have to be taken in order to conduct the analysis. According to her, one should respectively 1) select the research material, 2) build a coding frame, which she explains as "structuring and generating categories; defining categories; revising and expanding the frame"[173], 3) apply the established coding frame and 4) present the findings.[174] These steps are followed in this study of the TikTok videos to ultimately reach a conclusion. However, there are a couple of aspects to consider before the start of the analysis. First, the analysis in this research is based on relatively short videos of up to thirty seconds and a few text elements, instead of the longer text fragments Schreier highlights in her research: "the idea of the coding unit works best when applied to textual material."[175] In addition, conducting research to TikTok content is a relatively new phenomenon, since the application only exists since 2016.[176] These factors result in that Schreier's study is implemented slightly different here: my research uses the provided steps as a guide line rather than that it strictly adheres to them. Because a coding unit as presented by Schreier is more applicable to a large amount of text, in this analysis various established themes are used to identify signs of slavery in the videos. In addition to Schreier's article, the examination is also based on prior content analysis to the platform[177] and other research concerning social media content.[178]

The purpose of this analysis can be divided into two parts. The first goal is to map how Brenda Dama uses the TikTok videos to describe her life and work situation in Saudi Arabia. Next, I wish to examine if these identified descriptions show the elements of slavery that were established the first chapter of this thesis. The outcome then demonstrates if and how Brenda Dama addresses the concept of slavery in her videos.

[171] Demuth & Mey, 2015, p. 672.
[172] Schreier, 2014, chapter 12 in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, p. 171.
[173] Schreier, 2014, chapter 12 in *the SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, p. 176.
[174] Schreier, 2014, chapter 12 in *the SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, pp. 176-187.
[175] Schreier, 2014, chapter 12 in *the SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, p. 188.
[176] Kennedy, 2020, p. 1070.
[177] Zhu et al., 2019; Serrano et al., 2020 ; Li et al., 2021.
[178] Van der Pijl et al., 2020; Chan & Nybeck, 2015.

The material

In line with Schreier's article, in this section respectively the material of the analysis is proposed, coding units are identified and applied to the content. Instead of analyzing various accounts or hashtags, as is done in other case studies[179], this study focuses on one account only. In total, Brenda Dama's account consists of thirty videos. The first video was published in May 2020 and the last in May 2021. Within this group, a selection was made based on the nature of the videos' description – the use of textual words and audio that is related to either the Gulf region; Kafala; slavery; or work, or specific signs of emotion that are expressed by Brenda Dama. The latter are coded based on personal interpretation. The criteria used to select the videos are shown in the following figure:

Written words	**Signs of emotion**
• Domestic • Work • Boss • Madam • Baba • Maid • Slave • Saudi-Arabia • UAE • Gulf • Contract • Survive	• Exhaustion • Fear, distress or submission • Frustration or anger

Figure 1: Selection criteria of the TikTok videos.

Thirteen videos are selected based on these criteria. Seventeen out of thirty videos on Brenda's account are thus not included in the analysis. As is indicated, this is decided based on the text and emotions they display to the viewers. This does not mean that these publications do not contain interesting information on Brenda's life. On the contrary, in one video named "my culture my pride" for example, she shares with her followers information

[179] Zhu et al., 2019, p. 3.

about her culture by dancing to a song. Another video that is titled by Brenda as "my favourites", shows her wearing a garbage bag as a dress, apparently one of the TikTok trends at the time. Even though these videos show other aspects of Brenda's life, they do not meet one of the established criteria demonstrated above.[180] In this analysis I chose to focus on identifying and analyzing videos that contain signs of slavery only. Each of thirteen selected videos is carefully examined for the prevalence of specific content features, in which the focus lays on pinpointing certain established themes. These themes were identified in the first chapter and are based on the examination to the definition of modern slavery. Consequently, deprivation of freedom, human trafficking and exploitation serve as the subcategories used for the analysis. These subcategories, that belong to the overarching theme of modern slavery, can be further divided into various subcategories that are defined and explained in the following paragraph. The latter are at the same time used as the coding scheme for the analysis.

Before elaborating on the categories and coding scheme, in order to research how Brenda Dama shows her life and work situation and to what extent she expresses signs of slavery in her videos, it is first important to offer information on the lay-out and content of the videos. The figure below provides the link that belongs to each of the videos. It is followed by figure 3, that respectively informs on the videos' date of publication, time of filming, amount of likes and comments. Lastly, any written text and audio is displayed in figure 4. Next to explaining what text is used, this figure also details what is demonstrated exactly by Brenda in each of the videos.

Video (V)	**Link**
Video 1 (V.1)	https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6825014198775434501
Video 2 (V.2)	https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6849724479162076422
Video 3 (V.3)	https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6851203933377924358
Video 4 (V.4)	https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6854627603093933317
Video 5 (V.5)	https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6855240931608677637
Video 6 (V.6)	https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6864115996597161221
Video 7 (V.7)	https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6866119584987073794
Video 8 (V.8)	https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6871899255464938753
Video 9 (V.9)	https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6874526102014938370

[180] TikTok video, "My favourites", https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6859098695758089478.

Video 10 (V.10)	https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6874876221071559937
Video 11 (V.11)	https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6904939221685980417
Video 12 (V.12)	https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6933893818462850309
Video 13 (V.13)	https://www.tiktok.com/@damabrenda28/video/6967659541781679362

Figure 2: TikTok videos and web address

Video	**Date**	**Time**	**Likes**	**Comments**
V.1	May 10, 2020	0:11	2349	79
V.2	July 15, 2020	00:24	1918	143
V.3	July 19, 2020	00:10	1406	82
V.4	July 28, 2020	00:08	336	19
V.5	July 30, 2020	00:14	2595	64
V.6	August 23, 2020	00:09	2513	185
V.7	August 28, 2020	00:17	143700	4509
V.8	September 13, 2020	00:11	1027	83
V.9	September 20, 2020	00:29	379	19
V.10	September 21, 2020	00:26	39100	1760
V.11	December 11, 2020	00:14	250	21
V.12	February 27, 2021	00:12	1367	81
V.13	May 29, 2021	00:11	182	24

Figure 3: Information on the selected videos, including their date, timeslot, amount of likes and comments

Video	**Text and content**
V.1	Title: - In-text: - What is displayed: Brenda is in the kitchen, wearing her work uniform. She expresses that she has to work hard by wiping the floor and that she is exhausted by rubbing her hand along her head.
V.2	Title: - In-text: "To my fellow househelps in the UAE or any other place going thro' tough times", "That they feel they wanna give up, know that it's not a forever mission, you feel that and it's right bc you are not perfect…", "But know that you are strong and can make it"

	What is displayed: Brenda is wearing her work uniform and playbacks the song "Like You" written by Tatiana Manaois.
V.3	Title: "If you agree don't forget to like and share" In-text: "Tips to survive as a domestic worker in the Gulf Countries all thro' your contract period" - "Keep God first, be very prayerful", "Learn to manage stress", "Respect your employer no matter what", "Never take your employer's arguments n temper personal, it's their nature", "Make sure to feed well to get the working strength" and "Above all, be hardworking always" What is displayed: Brenda is wearing her work uniform and is dancing to a song while pointing to the text that appears on the screen.
V.4	Title: "@Jesindonga0 u almost got me but thanjs God" In-text: "Kadamas motto: be prepared" What is displayed: The video shows Brenda on one side of the video, seemingly making pictures of herself. When someone who is dressed like the madam walks into the room, Brenda quickly stops taking pictures and puts on her uniform.
V.5	Title: "Reply to @cleocaseyug, did you think someone does it" In-text: "Reply to @cleocaseyug's comment: wow who records your videos?" "What TikTok sees", "What madam saw when she caught me red-handed" What is displayed: In the first shot, Brenda is dancing right in front of the camera. In the second shot you see her dancing in the laundry room recording herself with her phone supported by a plastic bottle.
V.6	Title: "Am 3 sometimes am forced to be 4… which are you" In-text: "Types of kadamas during madam's lecture" – "The emotional cry baby", "The one that is quick at apologising", "The u bothered one who has seen it all" and "The rude one that responds to everything n submits to no bullshit" What is displayed: Brenda is in the kitchen and displays to her followers the ways in which she can respond when her madam is screaming at her, by showing various emotions (like crying) next to the text fragments.
V.7	Title: "Don't got it" In-text: "Working as a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia" – "Freedom", "A single day off", "Acceptance by all family members", "A peaceful life without querels n insults", "homesickness, loneliness", "Gods protection, good health n every month end salary", "Being respected as stated in the letter"

	What is displayed: Brenda is wearing her uniform. While the song "Don't got it" is played she points to the things she does and does not have as a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia.
V.8	Title: "Reply to @girlhunt #twinchallenge… Thanks for the 19k guys, I missed u so much" In-text: "Reply to @girlhunt's comment: you are not a maid… you are a slave" "You may be right but no situation is permanent in this life" What is displayed: This videos shows Brenda's reaction to the comment that she is a slave. She is dancing and laughing.
V.9	Title: "Saudi life: I guess it's due to the very hot sun during the day here so many activities are undertaken during the night" In-text: "I have something disturbing on my mind", "Has the world ruptured somewhere", "God planned the night is sleep time", "Why have humans changed God's plans", "The night has no changed to afternoon", "N the afternoon is now like the night" What is displayed: Brenda is sitting behind what seems like a desk and playbacks a song. She makes sleep gestures.
V.10	Title: "Tit for that has always been a fair game" In-text: - What is displayed: Brenda is ironing clothes and talks to someone behind the camera.
V.11	Title: "Why are they like this tho" In-text: "When you folded n arranged the clothes neatly only to find this mess the next day" What is displayed: In this video Brenda records herself standing next to a closet where the clothes have fallen out. She shows frustration and puts them back.
V.12	Title: "It's been a minute" In-text: "When your boss' son keeps flirting but you have to play naïve to avoid trouble" What is displayed: Brenda is hanging laundry when a male voice behind the camera asks her "am I handsome?". This question she then continues to dodge. She acts as if she does not understand what is being asked.
V.13	Title: "Okaaay, lemme leave your career alone"

	In-text: "Scrub nurse", "Gulf domestic help" What is displayed: Brenda is standing between the words "scrub nurse" on the one side and "Gulf domestic help" on the other side. She is happily dancing towards the words "scrub nurse" when a male voice behind the camera speaks to her in Arabic and she moves herself to the "domestic help" side, while expressing a sad emotion.

Figure 4: Information on the selected videos[181]

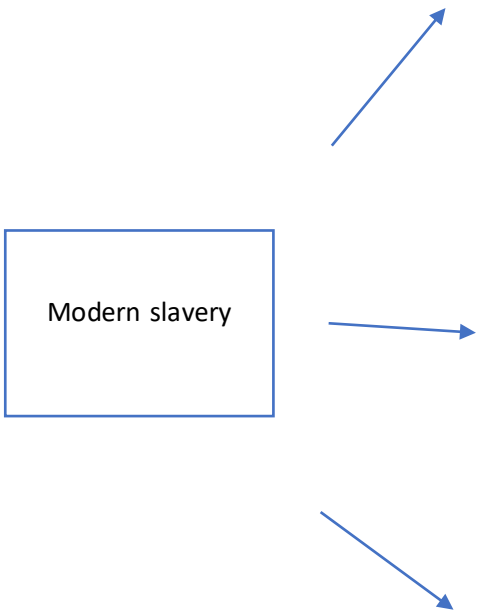
The information on each video that is offered above contributes to mapping how Brenda Dama expresses her life and work situation on the platform. Brenda's videos are relatively short, never longer than thirty seconds, and she often uses short displays of text to tell the story. She shows various emotions by the use of facial expressions as laughing, crying or looking frustrated. In addition, she applies humor and sarcasm, next to dancing in her videos. She additionally implements songs in her videos that correspond the story she wants to convey. The content that appears to be the most popular is video 7 (V.7), named "Don't got it". It was liked 143700 times and 4509 comments were made under the video. Even though she shares that she is paid every month by her employer, the aim of this publication is to emphasize to her followers the things Brenda does not enjoy as a domestic worker, which are freedom, a day off, the acceptance of her employers, a work experience without mental assaults and arguments and treatment according to her contract letter. She also suffers from home sickness. In addition, worth mentioning are a few of the comments made to this video. For example, *@breynboy* writes that Brenda needs to be rescued, to which she responds with "I pray for strength to endure till I go back home, just to avoid trouble…". *@Sophiasmithgaler*, now a reporter at VICE News, writes "Hi – I'm a journalist with the BBC. I'm here if you want to talk", to which Brenda replies "I wouldn't want to get into trouble of any kind know", followed by a sad emoji.[182] Brenda's reaction to the comments emphasize the seriousness of the situation she finds herself in. In addition, by encouraging her followers to like and share her videos, which is displayed in the title of V.3 "If you agree don't forget to like and share", she shows how she aims to reach a larger audience. Brenda thus uses musique, songs, dance, facial emotions text and audio to express her life and work situation in Saudi Arabia.

[181] All the information can be reviewed when using the web addresses provided in figure 2.
[182] Forbes, 2022, https://www.forbes.com/profile/sophia-smith-galer/?sh=7a30d2863ec7.

Categorization and coding

Whereas in the previous paragraph the material that is used for the analysis and the motivation behind the selection of the videos is explained, in this section the framework for the analysis is built. As is explained in the first chapter, deprivation of ones liberty consists of the act of ownership or possession over a person. It entails one individual controlling another individual and the issue that one is not able to walk away from the situation. Human trafficking then, as is demonstrated, entails an individuals' recruitment process, transportation, sell, exchange, transfer and receipt. Lastly, the act of exploitation consists of multiple facets. It contains of sexual, physical and mental assault or abuse, but can also occur in the form of exhaustion, forced labor and servitude. The main category of modern slavery, the subcategories and their characteristics (or codes) are used to analyze the videos' content. Some of the codes are in need of some further explanation, hence the additions in figure 5. Sexual exploitation for example, can be further subcategorized into prostitution, sexual harassment and sexual violence. On the one hand, forced labor or services may concern withholding identity cards, instituting penalties or involuntary work, on the other hand it can relate to extensively long working days with no free time.[183] The figure on the next page serves as a clarification. It covers all the subcategories and codes that fall under the overarching category of modern slavery that are used to conduct the analysis.

[183] International Labour Organization, *What is forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking*, https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/definition/lang--en/index.htm.



Subcategories	Codes
Deprivation of liberty	1. Act of possession: Exercising control over someone's mobility No possibility/ inability to leave 2. Act of ownership: Buy or sell a person Use a person Profit from a person Exhaust a person
Human trafficking	3. Recruitment 4. Transport 5. Sell 6. Exchange 7. Transfer 8. Receipt
Exploitation	9. Sexual: Prostitution Sexual harassment Sexual violence 10. Physical 11. Mental/psychological 12. Forced labor or services: Retention of identity papers Extensive working hours No free time/days off Exhaustion 13. Servitude 14. Removal of organs

Figure 5: The framework of the main category, subcategories and codes.

The coding system that is applied in this analysis is thus based on the in the first chapter identified and established definition of modern slavery. The videos are examined through the lens of these numbered codes (e.g. code 1 = the act of possession). Important to note is that the examination explores the existence of the concepts in the videos, not the frequency. To clarify, while the analysis is conducted, the spoken and or written text fragments, as well as any signs of emotion in the videos are included in the study. In addition, the title of the publication and any accompanying description is also examined. The results of the analysis are presented in the next section.

The results

Each of the videos is analyzed individually in order to formulate an answer to the question if these videos about Brenda Dama's life and work situation demonstrate elements of slavery. As is highlighted above, the videos are labeled respectively 'V.1' up to 'V.13'. The codes are referred to as 'C.1' up to 'C.14'. The following figure demonstrates the findings of the analysis:

	Deprivation of liberty		Human trafficking						Exploitation					
	C.1	**C.2**	**C.3**	**C.4**	**C.5**	**C.6**	**C.7**	**C.8**	**C.9**	**C.10**	**C.11**	**C.12**	**C.13**	**C.14**
V.1		x										x		
V.2											x	x		
V.3	x									x			x	
V.4														
V.5														
V.6											x			
V.7	x										x	x		
V.8	x													
V.9												x		

V.10													
V.11											x		
V.12									x				
V.13	x												

Figure 6: Analysis

Video (V)	**Category and code (C)**
V.1	Deprivation of liberty (C.2) Exploitation (C.12)
V.2	Exploitation (C.11, C.12)
V.3	Exploitation (C.1, C.10, C.13)
V.4	-
V.5	-
V.6	Exploitation (C11)
V.7	Deprivation of liberty (C.1) Exploitation (C11, C12)
V.8	Deprivation of liberty (C.1)
V.9	Exploitation (C.12)
V.10	-
V.11	Exploitation (C.12)
V.12	Exploitation (C.9)
V.13	Deprivation of liberty (C.1)

Figure 7: Follow-up analysis.

Interpretation

By using the method of qualitative content analysis, this case study leads to various results. To start with, within the thirteen videos that are analyzed, ten consist of either signs of exploitation or the deprivation of freedom. This is concluded based on the various aspects of the videos that are described in figure 4 and by analyzing the emotions that are expressed by Brenda in the videos. To provide an illustration: TikTok video 12 (V.12) includes the text "when your boss's son keeps flirting but you have to play naïve to avoid trouble". This is

followed by a spoken question "am I handsome?". The question is repeatedly asked by what is supposed to portray the voice of the bosses' son behind the camera. This person is not visible. As is explained in figure 4, Brenda plays naïve by repeating the question and by acting she does not understand what is being asked. In the analysis, this is identified as a sign of sexual harassment, which falls under the category of exploitation (C.9). Another example is video 6 (V.6). In this video Brenda demonstrates to her followers four possible responses to a madam's 'lecture'. This indicates that Brenda experiences this on a regular bases. According to my analysis this video therefore includes mental exploitation. Figure 4 provides an description of each of the videos' content.

In addition, the analysis demonstrated that three of thirteen examined the videos do not contain enough indications to establish the presence of codes. They were selected for this study initially because the content of these specific videos matched one of the criteria I set up in figure 1. For example, in video 4 (V.4), Ms. Dama shows signs of distress when her madam enters the room, which was in figure 1 established as a sign of emotion. Video 5 (V.5) contains the term 'madam' and in video 10 (V.10) the Arabic word "شغل" is used, which means 'job' or 'work'.[184] However, after the analysis was conducted, it can be concluded that these videos do not match with one of the categories.

As can also be inferred from the analysis, the videos' content only consists of signs of deprivation of freedom and exploitation, not of human trafficking. On the one hand, this may be due to the difficulty to virtually express this theme in a video. On the other hand, it is possible that Brenda did not personally experience this issue. Also, these videos have been published after she arrived at her employer, while the act of human trafficking takes place beforehand, which may also have influenced the content of her publications.

The analysis consists of a few downfalls that are important to take into account. As highlighted before in the thesis, this type of qualitative content analysis is based on interpretation and is therefore subjective. And, as is highlighted earlier in the chapter, seventeen videos have not been included in the analysis due to their content, which may have led to the exclusion of other aspects of Brenda Dama's life from the research. However, in this research I chose to focus on identifying signs of slavery in the videos. Next to that, Brenda herself stated in an interview with a French television show that her employers have also joined the social media platform, which may lead to her being unable and afraid to

[184] Reverso dictionary, 2022, https://dictionary.reverso.net/arabic-english/%D8%B4%D8%BA%D9%84.

publish on certain issues.[185] Also, that this study only sheds light on the personal experience of one domestic worker in Saudi Arabia. This means that the experiences of other workers in different countries is excluded. However, the relatively large amount of followers and the amount of likes this particular account receives proves its relevance. Brenda Dama's TikTok videos and the analysis that is conducted here may increase awareness concerning a new tool of communication that enables one to express identity and urge issues as exploitation in the Middle East. This is further elaborated on in the last part of this thesis, the conclusion.

The qualitative analysis reveals that the content of at least ten of the in total thirty videos published on the account, and of the thirteen that are closely analyzed, are in line with the in the first chapter established definition of modern slavery. This relates to both the notion of deprivation of freedom and exploitation. Based on this analysis can be concluded that Brenda Dama does address the issue of slavery on social media platform TikTok.

[185] The observers, France 24, 2021, https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=interview+brenda+dama+tiktok+saudi+arabia&&view=detail&mid=EBD4B829C098AEEDD5D1EBD4B829C098AEEDD5D1&&FORM=VRDGAR&ru=%2Fvideos%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dinterview%2Bbrenda%2Bdama%2Btiktok%2Bsaudi%2Barabia%26FORM%3DHDRSC4

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to examine how the kafala system contributes to acts of modern slavery among female migrants working in Saudi Arabia's domestic sector. A qualitative content analysis was conducted for this purpose, in the form of a case study concerning TikTok videos of a domestic worker. The thesis was further approached by considering a number of questions during the course of the research. These were formulated in the first part of the thesis as: what is modern slavery? How does the kafala system contribute to slavery? In how far does Brenda Dama expresses signs of slavery in her videos? To what extent does the kafala system influence the situation Brenda Dama finds herself in?

In the first chapter of this thesis, the theoretical framework, I mapped the definition of modern slavery. First, the subjectivity of the term slavery was emphasized, before providing various international established definitions of the term. By means of these descriptions, I then connected the concept of slavery to the following aspects: the act of possession over an individual, human trafficking and exploitation. This formulated an answer to the question of how to define slavery in contemporary society. Then, the phenomenom of slavery in Saudi Arabia was examined and in the last part of the chapter the rapidly growing popularity of social media platform TikTok since its launch in 2016 was explained.

In the second chapter I aimed to research to what extent the kafala system contributes to slavery as defined in the first chapter. After various views on the origin of the system were shortly demonstrated, the contemporary kafala system was examined. It started with a research to the meaning of terms as 'sponsor', 'sponsorship' and 'recruitment agencies', and explained in which context these concepts are applied in the thesis. It was also emphasized here that the system enables the sponsor to exercise a high degree of power over the sponsored foreign laborer. Consequently, the chapter includes an examination to forms of exploitation that are brought forward by the system. It highlights various accounts of abuse that workers who are bound to the institution may endure. It showed that the system's policy can result in the limitation of an individual's mobility and freedom in the form of, among other things, passport confiscation or the need of a NOC. Other personal experiences of migrant workers' that were highlighted include signs of mental, physical and sexual abuse or exhaustion. These accounts have been brought to light by the reports of international human rights and labor organizations that extensively criticized the system. In the last part of the chapter, these reports were limited to highlighting the experiences that female domestic workers endure in Saudi Arabia specifically. The findings of this chapter show that the kafala

system allows for various forms of exploitation and limitation of freedom to happen among migrant workers.

The qualitative content analysis is conducted in the final chapter of the thesis. In this part, I analyze first how Brenda Dama uses the TikTok videos to describe her life and work situation in Saudi Arabia. When this was established, the results were used to conclude whether or not these descriptions show and match the categorized and coded elements of modern slavery. The outcome of the content analysis demonstrated the most important finding of the thesis, namely that the migrant domestic worker Ms. Dama addresses the issue of slavery in her videos published on social media platform TikTok.

Finally, when taking all the elements of the thesis into account, the results lead to the conclusion that the kafala system contributes to acts of modern slavery among female migrants working in Saudi Arabia's domestic sector. This is in line with the specific case of Brenda Dama, who was working as a domestic help through the system. The institution may not directly cause forms of modern slavery among female domestic workers, but this thesis did find that the system affects the prevalence of the phenomenon in Saudi Arabia.

The goal of this thesis was to identify the link between slavery, the kafala system and female migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, and we know now that Brenda Dama demonstrates aspects of modern slavery in her video content. The final part of this thesis is devoted to highlight how Brenda positions herself in the bigger debate that exists on the exploitation of female domestic laborers in the Middle East, because this proves the growing position of social media activism in contemporary society. For years, international organizations have been reporting on and campaigning against the exploitative and abusive situation domestic workers often find themselves in.[186] However, recently the debate has moved beyond these organizations to social media platforms where the domestic workers themselves can speak up about their experiences. The Covid-19 pandemic has played a part in this: "With their already minimal freedoms further diminished by the pandemic and their isolation growing, the domestic workers are unflinchingly using TikTok to tell the world how they are being treated."[187] Next to Brenda, there are many other domestic workers who use TikTok as the platform to reach an audience and share experiences. One example is the Filipino worker

[186] Amnesty International, 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/10/qatar-domestic-worker-abuse-and-exploitation-report/; Donovan & Hubbard, 2020, https://fullerproject.org/story/domestic-workers-saudi-arabia-lebanon-abuse-covid/; Human Rights Watch, 2014, https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/22/united-arab-emirates-trapped-exploited-abused.
[187] Donovan, 2021, par. 10, https://fullerproject.org/story/domestic-workers-in-gulf-countries-vent-woes-on-tiktok/

Nieza Tunacao. She was employed in Kuwait and now has 1.9 million followers. In line with Brenda, she uses her videos to alarm the outside world about the exploitative situation she was living and working in.[188] The use of social media to express identity is not limited to the Middle East, it is also a popular activity in for example Hong Kong, where Filipino domestic workers "produce videos of dance routines, lip synch memes or humoristic depictions of household work. In these TikTok videos and captions, these Filipino workers often move across their different languages as they communicate with both local and global audience."[189]

The increasing use of social media contributes to the debate on abuse and exploitation among migrant workers, in that in for example the case of Brenda, her videos have proved to trigger both supporters and opponents of her views to respond. Although the comments can be negative and sometimes abusive, the interest in the videos and the situation of the workers increases.[190] It raises the question if the internet is now the platform to express activism and reach an, instead of via mainstream journalism. Whereas in the latter the average domestic worker would not easily have the opportunity to speak about the situation she finds herself in, social media applications like TikTok, but also Facebook or Instagram, provide a platform where they are able to reach a large public. It offers women an easily accessible way to join an activist movement and raise their voice. These findings demonstrate that by addressing the issue of slavery online, Brenda Dama joins a trend of using social media to express issues. Social media activism is not limited to domestic workers, it is part of a greater phenomenom that is happening among women in the Middle East and the rest of the world.[191] So, in order to address the issue of exploitation and abuse among female migrant workers, it is important to recognize the growing share of social media activism among women in the Middle East.

[188] Donovan, 2021, https://fullerproject.org/story/domestic-workers-in-gulf-countries-vent-woes-on-tiktok/.
[189] Darvin, 2021, p. 1.
[190] Donovan, 2021, last paragraph, https://fullerproject.org/story/domestic-workers-in-gulf-countries-vent-woes-on-tiktok/.
[191] Sreberny, 2015, pp. 357-361; Nas, 2022, pp. 1163-1178; Mehrabov, 2016, pp. 1-17.

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