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Filipino Guest Workers, Gender Segregation, and the Changing Social/Labour-Scape in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Filipinos are a major part of the workforce in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with a population of almost one million. This article investigates the effects of gender segregation on Filipino workers and how they navigate their lives through systems imposed on them. In particular, it examines the Kafala system (administrative sponsoring system) used for recruiting migrant workers for GCC countries. This article suggests that contrary beliefs about gender segregation and dress codes, Filipinas found it empowering. However, this article also concludes that gender segregation and dress codes also lead to isolation and loneliness. In addition, it is concluded that the fate and contentment of the overseas Filipino workers are directly dependent on who sponsors them.

Keywords: Gender segregation, Saudi Arabia, Filipino Overseas' Workers, Dress codes, Homesickness, Kafala system.

Introduction

This article focuses on two very different aspects affecting the immigrant life in KSA. Firstly, it examines what may be considered the most visible salient aspect of Saudi public life, gender segregation (Al Lily 2016), and secondly, it explores the employment policy known as the Kafala system².

Filipinos migrate because of labour surpluses, depressed wages at home, as well as, badly needed foreign currency desired by the Philippine government (Parreñas 2005). Interviews suggest Filipino Overseas Workers (OFWs) move to Saudi Arabia because it is an easy destination to begin their careers and because of labour shortages in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Saudi Arabia has become a site where two very different cultures encounter one another³. This Saudi/Filipino cultural 'odd couple' has been mutually beneficial for several generations but at least for Filipinos, as may be with many who experience transnational migration to a foreign land, the experience is not without misunderstanding, nostalgia, pain, loneliness, and/or sacrifice⁴.

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² The Kafala system is a mechanism used to control flows of labor into Saudi Arabia but also in all the other Gulf states (Doip 2015).

³ There are many nationalities living and working in KSA. Thirty percent of the work force are foreigners in almost all levels of society. So there are many cultures effecting contemporary Saudi society. But this paper focuses on the Saudi/Filipino interrelationships. More specifically this study is from the Filipino workers perspective.

⁴ KSA is an exception in that the migrant work force is diverse. It is only a slightly feminised workforce. Only 54% of the Filipino workforce in KSA is female (Johnson 2010). Access for interview of domestic workers, which is actually only 17% of the overall Filipino workforce in Saudi, was very limited. Domestic workers work seven days a week and only leave their employers homes when they accompany them on outings such as shopping. As a result, this paper focuses on the experience of non-domestic workers. In addition,



With the decrees by King Salman on September 26th 2017 and pronouncements by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, structural changes in the law concerning gender were actively put in motion. Women's driving, Women working and serving in the military, and the building of cinemas and music concerts halls (France 24, 14/2/2018) are just to name a few of the plans in making KSA a modern⁵ Islamic country. Much of the youth are excited about the changes and there seems to be great optimism about the reforms (Ghafour 2018). Whether or not, such changes will have an impact on Filipino Overseas Workers is discussed in this article.

International media portrays KSA as an enigma. It is in the international media daily as they open their society to the world and because of rapid social change initiated by their young Crown Prince. However, as it becomes less mysterious, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is still an exceptional place in many ways. KSA is one of the richest countries in the world and the primary producer of the world's oil. As a result, it is a very important geopolitical power. However, it is also often portrayed in the international media as either, place of religious extremism, or as a place of gender oppression, a place where women are not allowed to drive and, a place of public executions (McKernan 2017). Though these subjects are not the focus of this article, it is not suggesting KSA is a utopia. However, these characterizations are over-simplified images of KSA (cf. Said 1979). Little is known to the outside but KSA is a globalized place and in many respects an ultra-modern state. Despite such media coverage⁶, KSA is one of the major transnational employer nations, only second to the United States. It is a very desirable destination for both Muslim and non-Muslim alike. For Muslim guest workers, it is a very special place (Silvey 2004, Toureek 2017). Many Muslim workers have stated that the prestige and honour of being able to work in the holy land and have easy access to Mecca and Medina, the holiest sites in Islam. It is one of the greatest honours a Muslim can have (Taureek 2017). They feel privileged to be able to travel to Mecca at the drop of a hat (Silva 2006). For non-Muslims it does not have the allure or religious privilege, nor does it hold the prestige it envisioned for Muslims, but KSA is a place where guest workers receive relatively higher salaries in comparison to 'home'. Moreover, for OFWs, KSA is seen as an important stepping-stone to career advancement either for those planning to return to a more prestigious position at home, or a stepping stone to work elsewhere in the world such as Europe, Canada, Australia, or the United States.

This article will illustrate that Saudi is not a monolithic place with a rapidly changing social landscape. Where it will lead is also unknown territory. This article gives voices to some of the Filipinos who are one of the groups that make up just one of the nine million strong workforce in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The site

The sites of the study were in Dammam, Al Khobar and Dhahran in Saudi Arabia and in Manila and in Cebu in the Philippines. The fieldwork for this research is based on participant observation, grounded theory, and interviews, which were conducted in Saudi Arabia and in the Philippines.

KSA is an exception in that the migrant work force is very diverse. The Filipino workforce is only a slightly feminised. Only 54% of the Filipino workforce in KSA is female (Johnson 2010).

⁵ Not to be confused with westernization meaning modernization, the term 'modern' is used by the Saudi government with respect to the social changes that are happening presently.

⁶ This paper was written prior to the events which affected international non-Saudi public opinion with regards to Saudi Arabia in the latter half of 2018. However, the excitement about the Vision 2030 and the planned social changes are still seen with enthusiasm inside KSA.



Foreign Workers in Saudi

Foreign workers in Saudi are not migrants in the technical sense. There is little to no likelihood for them to permanently settle in KSA. At present, only VIP guests, employees or pilgrims can visit the kingdom. People visiting Saudi are either visiting KSA for pilgrimage (Umrah or Haj), wealthy investors, or as labourers. All guest workers need permission to come to work in KSA. Guest workers must be sponsored by a kafil (sponsor/employer). The system of sponsorship is known as the kafala system. The kafala system has been criticized by institutions both inside the GCC as well as outside the GCC (Diop 2015). But the practices are embedded into the GCC culture and change has been hard to enforce (Diop 2015). Thus, foreign workers legally reside in the country as long as their Kafil allows them to do so⁷. In addition, the quality of life, plight, or prosperity of the guest worker depends on the ambivalence of their employer, their kafil. The Filipinos in this study, thus, had very mixed experiences. Several of them were very satisfied with their employer and with their lives in KSA, while others found their sojourn very difficult.

Gender segregation

Everyday life in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is organized according to their understanding of the Islamic scriptures, the Quran and Hadith. The Saudi Arabian state has attempted to put these organizing factors based in Islam into practice and to promote a conservative interpretation of Islamic values on a statewide level. As a result, gender regulation is one of the most salient considerations governing behaviour of everyday life in Saudi Arabia (Al Lily 2015). Therefore, where one can shop, eat, or bank, or sit in public places, like malls or parks, is segregated by gender. Even where someone pays for purchases and/or to whom one has a conversation, is gender-segregated. The public spaces in Saudi Arabia are divided into two categories. Singles, *shabab*, and families, *aleayila*. "*Shabab*" literally means, "young unmarried men", but in the context of public social spaces, it is the spaces men can occupy. The *shabab* spaces are male spaces (regardless of marital status or age) when men do not accompany women or children. Unaccompanied women are designated to *aleayila* spaces. Surprisingly, both public and private life are supposed to be gender-segregated. In other words, unrelated unmarried individuals of the opposite sex are not supposed to mingle either in private or in public spaces. As a result, Filipinos, as with any transnationals, whose spouses do not accompany them to KSA have little opportunity to associate with people of the opposite sex (Margold 1995)⁸. Not surprisingly, loneliness, nostalgia and related homesickness are major issue for OFWs who either leave their families behind or come to work as single individuals.

This study expected to find OFWs from both genders disparaged by the gender segregation rules, isolating them from members of the opposite sex, and by extension, social networks of friends and extended families. However, the OFWs in this study experiences and attitudes about gender segregation varied as their experiences varied.

⁷ The Kafil usually confiscates the workers passport on the employee's arrival and controls when and where their employee can leave the country. The Kafil is, in theory, responsible to care for the needs of the employee. He should give the employee the means to get food, shelter and tickets home every twenty-four months for an extended holiday. Abuses happen, when employees are not paid, given adequate housing conditions, or are not given timely holidays. In extreme situations the employee options are but to runaway (Silva 2004, Johnson 2010). The reasons such situations happen because it is very difficult to regulate or control individual kafils (cf. Silva 2004, Diop 2015).

⁸ Margold discusses the effects of colonialism and the treatment of Filipino workers in present (1995) Saudi Arabia. She suggests that there is crisis of masculinity as Filipino men affirm their non-existence



Optical Segregation⁹

Most Filipinos working in KSA do not have a high level, higher-paying positions. The men and women who participated in this study were primarily support staff of lower/middle level management or labourers with the exception of one woman who worked as a dentist in Riyadh.

However, the experience of gender segregation in everyday life is independent of one's station. Interestingly, there was both positive and negative experience for both genders. Gender segregation is also accentuated by formal public dress codes. While men's formal dress codes are not very different from home in the Philippines, women are required to wear the *hijab* and *abaya*, the headscarf and black robe. Women were obligated to wear their *hijab* and *abaya* in public¹⁰. The *hijab* and *abaya* primary function is modesty. The dress code is codified into law according to the Saudi government's understanding of the Hadith and Quran.¹¹ However, this code creates a visual separation also between men and women, isolating them from each other even more. One of the dress code's intentions maybe just that because unrelated people of the opposite are not supposed to mingle. However, for those OFWs who do not have the support of family and intimate friendships like what they might find at home in the Philippines, it is very alienating. The dress code accentuates the spatial and visual separation so that the gaze upon the opposite sex becomes almost impossible and intensifies their feelings of loneliness and alienation¹². John stated how alone he felt when he saw all his women *kabayans* (compatriots) all dressed in their *abayas*; He said they (the women) were like shadows or ghosts of people. One woman participant referred in jest to her *abaya* as her ninja uniform.

In contrast, several women in the study stated that once they got used to dressing in their *abayas*, they enjoyed the freedoms it gave them. Several women in the study stated that they liked it when they do not have to dress up or prepare for excursions and could wear whatever they wanted under their *abayas*. In other words, the *abaya* gave them freedom from objectification¹³. Several women in the study also felt safer. If they were dressed "properly", in other words, by wearing the *hijab* and *abaya*, they would not be approached by male strangers. This freedom to move around without being 'noticed' was something all the women participants mentioned.

There were several points the female participant did not like about gender segregation. Most of the participants, whether married women in KSA without their families, single women, or women accompanied by their spouses, did not like the fact that there was a sense of risk in meeting friends for celebrations or have opportunities to interact with platonic male friends¹⁴. One interlocutor stated that those (few) who lived on company compounds were very lucky because they had the freedom to congregate, or talk to whomever they wanted, whenever they wanted. Alan a 29-year-old support staff at an auto dealership stated that he was apprehensive about visiting people on holidays such as

⁹ "Optical Segregation" is a term coined for this paper. Where segregation usually is used to define space. Optical segregation is a visual, sensual segregation where the gaze is segregated.

¹⁰ It is considered obscene for men to wear sleeveless jerseys or shorts above the knee. Women are supposed to wear the *abaya* at all times in public but in places like Al Khobar and Dammam where there are many ex-pats. Women do not need to wear the *hijab*. However, in more conservative places this is not the case.

¹¹ Critical reforms are continuous. As recently as August 2019, after the first draft of this paper was submitted for publication, a royal decree was made that the *abaya* was no longer mandatory though it is still the overwhelmingly most common practiced public dress-code for women (Irish Times 9/2/2019).

¹² The crisis of masculinity Margold suggests, in part may be accentuated by visual segregation. Dunkas discusses how nostalgia may cause a clinical malaise when people cannot adjust to new host country.

¹³ Rhys and Vashi (2007) suggest that Muslim women living in America had similar feeling of freedom because the *hijab* allowed them to not be objectified as sexual objects

¹⁴ Saudis generally believe men and women cannot have a platonic relationship



Christmas or Easter for parties because they were afraid someone would talk to the police and cause them serious problems

Loneliness and crying was often a theme when discussing segregation. It often leads to discussions of situations in the Philippines, home, and meeting and eating with friends and family. However, it was not so bleak for several of the participants. June, an early forties wife of an office assistant told me that she thoroughly enjoyed her time in KSA. The gender restrictions, she felt, were not a problem. June accompanied her husband and their baby son to KSA. She found dress codes and segregation liberating. It liberated her for several reasons. Her family status gave her the freedom to socializing with other couples or other women for small gatherings which were not as drastically different compared to that of the life of singles of either gender.

In contrast, regulations about men's dress are not as strict as it is for women¹⁵. Men also have complete freedom of movement. Even so, Filipino *shabab* in this study found it especially difficult at times. One interlocutor said he learned to related better to men but desired female company feeling he could not express himself with men as he could with women. Jay, an inventory manager, in his late forties could not bring his family to KSA for over a year because of a bureaucratic mix-up. He said the loneliness was killing him and he would cry himself to sleep every night till they arrived. He said he would not have come to KSA if he had known about his trails and had no one he could confide in. Several men in this study had wives or girlfriends at home in the Philippines and found the separation extremely hard. To add to the situation the ability to mingle and discuss their problems with women was complicated. Several male participants felt 'shy' as they put, it to discuss their loneliness with other men. Thus, gender segregation is hard on both genders when they live in KSA without their partners. There are restrictions on their congregating or travelling together or any other such mingling. When a man or a woman is accompanied by his or her partner then gender segregation alters daily life greatly¹⁶. Moreover, women enjoy their freedom from objectification. Men were not so positive about their experience. The most positive comments about gender segregation were with respect to male comradery. Some of the men of this study expressed their appreciation for their male comrades but for the men in this study, there are more negatives feelings towards gender segregation than positives ones. Most statements concerning gender segregation were in the context of alienation and loneliness¹⁷.

OFWs, Employees, Compounds and Accommodations

There are differing opinions about gender segregation for OFWs. These opinions are probably associated with employee/employer relations and the freedoms it affords the OFW. A women dental assistant at one of the major petroleum associated industries, named Marilyn¹⁸, told me that they had busses into town several times a day and to different places. Marilyn is from Luzon Island. She

¹⁵ Men's shorts should be below the knee and they should not have their shoulders exposed.

¹⁶ Public life for couple and families does not appear to be restrictive since they sit in family sections and can go to family catered shops, café restaurants in malls etc. Some malls only cater to families. However, families and single women cannot go to shops that only cater to men. These shops are usually locally run businesses.

¹⁷ Though the subject of Saudization is beyond the scope of this paper, it is one of the few policies which are effecting OFWs. Saudization is the process of to promote Saudis into the work force. At present, 30% of the entire workforce are non-nationals. Progressively fees to maintain ex-pats and their families have increased drastically. Fees to re-new exit visas, residence permits, remittance fees and value added taxes are pressuring expats to either resign or leave, or to send their families home. In theory, the Saudi workforce will take up the slack. In fact, Saudis nationals which were not very visible in public jobs are now being seen. Women have also taken up jobs. Many service based job replacements are also putting pressure on the foreign labor force to leave. The policies are in their infancy but visible changes are happening. Since Filipinos are primarily in the service sector and are in the mid to lower ranges of pay, they are particularly feeling the pinch. Many have left in 2017 while others are planning to send their families home.

¹⁸ The all the names used in this paper have been changed for ethical considerations.



is single in her 40's. She has been working in KSA for 18 years. When she came to KSA people had to get government permission leave the city they were assigned to and women were only hired if they were single and remained so¹⁹. Marilyn feels fortunate as her employer has technical staff living on her compound. Her compound has modern convinces. Women can dress as they like and the genders are not strictly segregated on compounds. Marilyn has the freedom to dress as she liked and associate with anyone she wants. In contrast, when she is outside the compound, she enjoys the fact that she can go to the women's queue in shops or banks and is not required to wait as do the men. She can associate with *kabayan* in the compound freely. They celebrate together and have social groups such as choral singers. She also sings in a band²⁰. The main issues for her are being far from her family, time with very little to do and loneliness. She does not have a partner to share her life with. The gender segregation outside the compound makes it difficult for her to find someone since the opportunities to meet single men are very limited. She would cry²¹ on the weekend because she had no one (a partner) to go out with and no place to go. However, she does have some small regrets about it but finds solace with close friendships in the compound and knowing she has benefited her family in the Philippines²².

The situation is different from people living outside residential compounds. Dondon is an administrative assistant in a large company. He is in his late thirties and has been living in KSA for twelve years. He likes his job and his employer and is given many freedoms like exit visas to visit Bahrain whenever he might want to go. He does not go out except with a workmate on occasion. As a result, he lives a mostly solitary life missing companionship. He is not married. When he returns to the Philippines, he spends time with his sisters and their families and he misses his family very much but feels his labour and sacrifice is bettering their lives.

Loneliness

Loneliness is a reoccurring point of discussion for the OFWs who took part in this study. The reason for this loneliness is first experienced when the OFWs leave home. When the OFWs arrive in Saudi, they are taken to their accommodations and are provided with a room or a bed and in some cases a little food until they are settled in.

Filipinos in this study leave a social environment where they are 'complete' social beings. Most of the participants come from large extended family environments. They know their social status, position in their household, in their family and in their villages or their neighbourhood. People from the neighbourhood come and go offering an opportunity for conversation. There are social happenings all around, as families eat together, children play in the streets, or come and go to school. Women and men chatting either together or chatting in organically segregated groups. There is always sounds of sociality, noises of children, conversation, working, and in the distance karaoke from either a nearby house or a local k-bar.

When the OFWs arrive in KSA they know little their social position, and in the beginning, they usually do not know anyone, do not know the language, and vaguely familiar with the practices associated with daily life²³. The loneliness is only intensified when people are discouraged from

¹⁹ Currently in the kingdom, married women are hired in the health professions. In the past it was forbidden.

²⁰ Before the reforms happening at present, public displays of music were frowned upon in KSA but people are seen in parks playing music. It is still under debate.

²¹ Using the expression of 'crying' was a common way in which the participant would express their loneliness.

²² Marilyn educated several nieces and nephews and supported her family for more than fifteen years. She is not apprehensive because she believes her family will take care of her in her old age.

²³ The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) gives seminars to people planning to work in the Middle East but several of the participants said their information was outdated or inaccurate.



congregating. Several participants arrived either for the first time to KSA either in the dead of night or during times such as Ramadan²⁴ where most sociality happens after sunset. The realization of what they are doing, and why they have travelled all to KSA is blurred, as OFWs are "metaphorical fish out of water, with no psychological support and an environment completely foreign, different to anything they were told or even imagine.

The sensual stimuli are completely alien to what they came from²⁵. The sounds and smells they were accustomed to are so different, smells of food, the sound of the Azan (the call to prayer) echoes everywhere even in the dead of night²⁶

Even after they become accustom to life in Saudi there are still issues of loneliness. There is little to do after the working day is done other than going shopping or eating. This gives OFW much idle time. However, for several participants, free time was not a blessing. Most realized the purpose of their sojourn is to make money so the participants lived very frugal lives²⁷. The participants in the study were always considering the cost of almost everything they purchased. As a result, free time was actually an alienating act. Mak, a retired seventy-year-old retired accountant living in Manila, stated that he would lighten the burden of boredom and loneliness spending as much time at work even though his boss gave him little overtime pay. Mak thought the long nights were the most difficult. He was not given leave to go home as was promised by his contract which compounded his loneliness. And even though he was given the opportunity to go to Bahrain or Abu Dhabi he chose not to go because he did not want to make any "mistakes" or spend unnecessarily²⁸. At times he said he was so lonely so work was the only outlet to keep his mind busy²⁹.

In KSA, the opportunity to socialize and to get to know people has limitations for OFWs. Even in residential compounds where people are free, to congregate loneliness and a longing for home is something transnationals have to confront³⁰. The transnational's fortune depends on who employs them. The kafil can make a difference.

Kafala System

Historically, the Kafala system was a system of protection allowing people to travel from one place to another in the Arabian Peninsula under the protection of their kafil, or sponsor. Today, the kafala system is a regulatory apparatus used for development in countries of the Arabian Gulf. The kafala system has been criticized by both local and international organizations for abuses. Despite mounting pressures, the system has not been affected greatly and the reforms have been weakly implemented (Diop 2015).

Since thirty per cent of the Saudi workforce is transnational, the system is an integral part of the Saudi economy³¹. The system is a decentralized system where any Saudi can become a kafil. A national hires transnationals and sponsors them to work for the said sponsor on a fixed contract.

²⁴ In Saudi Arabia during Ramadan almost all the shops are closed and the streets are almost all empty.

²⁵ Serematakis (2005) discusses the social/cognitive elements of the senses.

²⁶ The State has attempted to have a place to pray every 100m. As a result, the call to pray is heard almost everywhere one goes.

²⁷ Salaries in Saudi are determined by a person's origins. As a result, frugality is essential to life as an OFW. They are in KSA to support their families. They have many obligations from home and can only be successful by watching every penny. Their obligations always seem to be greater than the salaries they receive.

²⁸ Money is always a concern. All the participants said they were in Saudi to make money and to support their families. The Filipinos in this study lived very modestly to support their families. Even those who had prestigious positions still lived comparatively modest way of life. When Mak refers to mistakes he infers either spending all his money meant for home or to infidelities.

²⁹ Lonely does not equate being alone. Mak said he made very good and long lasting friendships who are both Filipinos Pakistanis and Indians. He still is in touch with some of them.

³⁰ Dunkas (2007) discusses the effects of nostalgia

³¹ Other GCC countries also use the Kafala system. However Only 30% of their workforce are immigrants. In other GCC countries the number reaches 80% (Johnson 2010)



The sponsor/employer pays for the employee work and gives him or her lodging and a wage (it may include things like transportation to the work-site, food, and the payment of utilities). There are many concerns about the system and because each employer has different understandings of their responsibilities. Worker experience varied from employer to employer (Diop 2015).

Jon now lives in Manila but spent 12 years living and working and a site engineer in the Middle East. He lived 2 years in Qatar and ten years in KSA. His first position was in Qatar, then he moved to KSA where he lived and worked in Riyadh. His last job in KSA was not very pleasant. The sponsor had him live on-site with the workers. They lived in shipping containers and had portapotties and outdoor showers. He complained that the accommodations were not fit for an engineer but was told this is the facilities we have for their workers. So he was stuck with it for the two-year contract and returned home to the Philippines as soon as his contract was completed.

There has been much written about the problems with the Kafala system but little has been done to change attitudes about that go with the changes. Laws such as holding the employees' passport have been outlawed for many years but it is still common practice (Johnson 2010, Diop 2015). One of the reasons the Kafala system persists because of the decentralized structure of the system. Anyone can be a kafil and though the law protects workers, they are completely dependent on their kafil. Needless to say, most of the participants were happy with their employers³².

The system of employment and sponsor grants the sponsor a tremendous amount of power. The kafil can determine when and how their employees are paid, when their employees can leave, have days off or when they can go home for holiday. Mak, the retired secretary worked for a transport/taxi service from 15 years. His main complaint about the business was that they never gave him the contractual repatriation ticket every two years as promised in the contract because they said they could not replace him while he was away on holiday. As a result he got holidays only once every three or four years. The reality was that he had no options. He did change jobs several times, eventually he stayed in KSA for 26 years. The main point of this description is that the employee, once hired, has little choice to what his or her working/living conditions are. An OFW's future is a direct consequence of who their Kafil is. The kafil has the power to determine how an OFW's stay in KSA is content, fair, and successful, or harsh and unsuccessful. Evie is a dental assistant at a dental health facility in Khobar area of KSA. She mentioned several times that she was happy with her arrangement with the clinic. Her accommodation was near a large mall, she was paid on time and worked a regular working schedule. Evie was planning to stay in KSA temporarily, using her experience there to go to Europe or Canada but she has decided to stay because she likes her boss and her job is 'good.'

Conclusion

Gender issues such as movie theatre construction, or women's driving are important issues for the people of KSA. However, as seen from this paper they are not the most pressing issues for Filipino's living and working in Saudi Arabia. Filipino worker quality of life is a very small part of the Vision 2030 plans and what that is in not clear. As a result, OFW's every day lives may not greatly be affected by these changes. Gender segregation is not presently on the table for Vision 2030. Meanwhile, OFW's still suffer greatly from culture shock. Their everyday lives are largely determined by the benevolence of their kafil and they will still find it difficult meeting and congregating with their company of friends. They will feel nostalgia for home, miss their families

³² Hire domestics are exempt from labor laws and because the majority of Filipinas domestics are hired by individuals, if there are abuses the domestic workers have very limited options to choose from if something unfortunate were to happen (cf Johnson 2010).



and have to contend with the situation they have been dealt so they can send greatly needed economic support to their families.

What appears to be the main issue for OFWs in Saudi Arabia is their need for sociality. Several participants enjoyed their experience in Saudi, but they seemed to have a more complete social experience. Workers who had compassionate kafils appeared happier in Saudi Arabia. Married individuals also had less of a struggle in their daily lives because they had support from their spouses. It is easier for them to go as a couple to public places and socialize with their friends but both married individuals and those with benevolent kafils about their social lives because they felt apprehensive to congregate in private setting during Christian holidays openly³³.

In addition, gender segregation hinders sociality. Not being able to communicate with the opposite sex appears to be a minor concern but it affects every part of public life. Moreover, dress code practices create distance between gendered individuals. Interestingly many women view the dress code positively. It enables women a kind of freedom of being under the objective eye of others all the time. Filipinas in this study like the advantages segregation and the dress code offered them. To conclude, Filipinos are an important asset to Saudi Arabians. Both Saudis and Filipinos have benefitted from their cooperation. As a result, Filipinos will be coming to Saudi Arabia for as long as they are welcome. They will have a lasting effect on Saudi society.

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³³ This is also changing: Prince Salman has given permission for Churches to be built in KSA.



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