AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HIGH YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND INCREASED MIGRATION TO THE GULF REGION: THE EXPERIENCES OF KENYAN WORKERS.

By

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that all information, data, and arguments presented in this paper are mine and have not been taken from any other sources. I also acknowledge that all references used in this thesis have been properly cited according to the provisions of APA 7th edition and that any ideas or words borrowed from other sources are clearly indicated as such. Furthermore, I declare that this paper has not been published or submitted to any other institution for assessment.

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Student

ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate the connection between youth unemployment in Kenya and increased migration to the Gulf region. Specifically, it examined the motivations for migration, the role of economic independence and socio-economic aspirations in migration decisions, how migrants seek information to help them decide whether to travel, and the lived experiences of Kenyan migrant workers in the Gulf and how they respond to them. The study used the qualitative research approach and semi-structured interviews to explore, frame, and analyse the subject. Data were collected from 12 respondents using face-to-face and online interviews and focus group discussions. The respondents were chosen through snowball sampling after meeting the criteria for participation. The data was analysed using thematic analysis, where multiple themes and subthemes emerged, including single motherhood stress, racism and discrimination, shattered dreams, and media bias in framing migrant experiences in the Gulf. Furthermore, the study established, against popular anti-Gulf narratives in the media, that the experiences of migrant workers in the region were no different from those in other regions. Most importantly, it determined that the motivation of Kenyan youth to migrate to the Gulf region is driven by a complex set of factors, including poverty, social exclusion, the search for better opportunities, and the desire to escape gender-based discrimination and domestic abuse. While negative experiences such as racism, religious intolerance, overworking, sexual abuse, and verbal abuse were reported, it was determined that they were no worse than in Kenya and other regions. This finding is critical to dispelling harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about migration to the Gulf. It revealed that the media often portrays a biased, inaccurate, and incomplete picture of the migrant experience in the Gulf, which perpetuates harmful stereotypes and misconceptions. The study recommends creating community programs, online support groups, therapy, and counselling to help returnees, mostly single mothers, cope. Secondly, it proposes active initiatives by the Kenyan government to make migration safer to ensure that migrants are protected from abuse and exploitation. Thirdly, it advocates for policies to make Kenya safer for women to live and raise their children. Lastly, it calls out the media to adopt a more nuanced approach to reporting migrant experiences in the Gulf. The study overcame limitations such as financial constraints, limited time, gatekeepers who were unwilling to assist, and the stigmatisation of rape and other sexual offences that made some participants reluctant to share their experiences, to deliver a document that could impact policy and save lives.

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DEDICATIONS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIDS - Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

EAC - East African Community

CBD – Central Business District

FIFA – Fédération Internationale de Football

GCC - Gulf Cooperation Council

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GOK - Government of Kenya

HELB – Higher Education Loans Board

HDI - Human Development Index

HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus

ICT – Information & Communication Technology

ILO - International Labour Organization

KTN - Kenya Television Network

KDF – Kenya Defence Forces

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

NARC - National Rainbow Coalition

NARCOSTI - National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation

NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data

RTM - Ravenstein's Theory of Migration

NTV – National Television Network

TA - Teaching Assistant

TRA - Theory of Reasoned Action

UAE - United Arab Emirates

UDHR - Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN - United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WHO - World Health Organization

WID - Women in Development

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. 1. Background

> Levina Mapenzi was only 20 years old when she went to Saudi Arabia as a domestic worker. Apart from her many dehumanising and humiliating experiences, she was raped repeatedly by her boss. However, when she reported the ordeal to her handlers, they said there was no evidence; therefore, they could not help her. Two months later, she discovered she was pregnant and reported it to them. She was swiftly removed from the house and taken to jail, where she was to serve a three-year sentence for adultery. Her son was born in prison, and they were separated immediately. He never experienced her warmth or love. There was no trial or inquiry, and her boss got away with raping her (KTN, 2018).

Levina's case is not an isolated one. Stories of workers being mistreated and abused in the Gulf region are plentiful on social media, TV interviews like Levina's, radio, WhatsApp chats and messages, and family narratives. They paint a picture of workers who are often subjected to abuse and discrimination by their employers, government officials, and other Gulf citizens. While some of these stories go unnoticed, others have caused massive uproars. For instance, in 2014, a video of a Kenyan woman being branded with a hot iron rod in Saudi Arabia sparked wide outrage among netizens. Human Rights Organisations, NGOs, human rights activists, and several government officials joined the outcry, calling for an immediate ban on the "recruitment and export of domestic workers to Saudi Arabia" (Toumi, 2014). The protests were so loud and widespread that politicians and government officials were drawn into the discussion. A swift response from the government saw a temporary ban on migration to the Gulf region instituted less than four months later. Despite the ban, complaints from Kenyans stuck in the Gulf kept coming, with many unexplained deaths reported monthly (Keenan & Rugen, 2019; Ruiz, 2019).

Kenya's ban on migration to the gulf came at the trickiest time. The country was experiencing its most challenging economic times in decades, Europe had instituted its most authoritarian border control measures and made legal entries from Africa almost impossible, the Gulf's economic growth was at an all-time high, and Qatar had just been awarded the World Cup hosting rights by FIFA (Malit & Youha, 2020). An overwhelming number of Kenyans moved swiftly to take advantage of the job openings in the Gulf. While the estimates remain widely varied, it is claimed that the number increased from 35,000 in 2011 to 100,000 in 2016 (Malit & Youha, 2020). Unfortunately, the increased number of workers also led to a sharp increase

in claims of torture, unexplained deaths, rape, physical harm, emotional abuse, and other forms of violence (Amnesty International, 2021).

Alarmed by the events in the Gulf, the Kenyan government launched a new campaign against migrating to the region. Knowing that a ban had failed, it had to organise sensitisation campaigns to make the people know what could happen to them if they moved there (Keenan & Rugen, 2019). Ironically, the number of people applying for jobs in the Gulf only kept growing. The ban and restrictions did not change young people's minds. Today, it is estimated that over 400,000 Kenyans are in the Gulf for different types of work (Malit & Youha, 2021). By ignoring government directives, it was assumed that they exposed themselves to unimaginable dangers while at the same time making it harder for the Kenyan government to protect or save them.

In the first nine months of 2021 alone, over 89 Kenyan workers were declared dead under "suspicious" circumstances in Saudi Arabia (Middle East Monitor, 2021). I intended to find out why young Kenyans were ignoring their government's anti-Gulf campaigns and bans, other workers' harrowing experiences, and other protection initiatives and still migrating to the Gulf. This is critical because it was claimed that Kenya was losing so many citizens in the region, violating their fundamental human rights. It was also claimed that many citizens were being maimed, disabled, and emotionally wounded, affecting their quality of life forever (Blaydes, 2023; Begum, 2014; United Nations, 2019). Most victims of these crimes were young women in the domestic work segment. While abuse against women is a global challenge, the presentation of the issue in the Gulf, in both print and social media, made it more concerning. Whereas a few factors could drive the problem, the role of unemployment and poverty was evident. As such, the study's main objective was to determine the connection between high youth unemployment in Kenya and their increased migration to the Gulf region.

1. 2. Problem Statement

The problem that this study intends to explore has a global outlook. It has happened and is happening to Hispanics (Ullah et al., 2020), South Asians (Chowdhury & Rajan, 2018), Americans (Aguiar et al., 2019), and Africans (AlTaher, 2019), among other peoples. If the abuse and discrimination of foreign workers in the Gulf region is real and remains unsolved, it is possible that lives could be lost, families broken, and people maimed, tortured, raped, disabled, emotionally wounded, and dehumanised, all in the name of seeking work. These

losses and negative experiences will affect the people involved, their families, and governments.

Until the start of this study, the Kenyan government, like many other governments, had tried resolving the issue through bans, persuading citizens not to go to the region, and liaising with partners to create jobs for the youth, in vain. These approaches failed because they did not address people's needs or the root causes of the problem. The focus should have been on creating local jobs and making small businesses more appealing to the youth.

The thought of young productive lives being wasted for precarious labour in the Gulf is unacceptable. Global development studies focus on uplifting societies together and improving their livelihoods. This case is a typical example of the challenges for which students, experts, and scholars should investigate and find working solutions. Moreover, this is a current global crisis affecting our generation, requiring our input to find viable and lasting solutions.

A few studies have been carried out on the subject, but gaps still exist. For instance, none of them tried to address the root causes of the problem. The study by Mburu (2019) was limited to the rights and privileges of migrant workers and how they are abused in the Gulf region. On the other hand, Gikuru (2013) focused on the lived experiences of the migrants and how they affected their well-being. Of greater importance is to determine the underlying causes of migration to the Gulf region against all odds. It was my hope that this study might save lives and restore dignity to would-be victims and returnees, if completed successfully.

Moreover, it was interesting to determine why young Kenyans are ignoring their own government's warnings and bans, paying no attention to the heart-breaking experiences of their compatriots, and neglecting good advice from the government on migrating to the Gulf. This was made possible by exploring the idea through the lenses of Ravenstein's Theory of Migration (RTM) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA).

1. 3. Research Questions

The study was guided by the general question:

- What is the connection between youth unemployment in Kenya and increased migration to the gulf region?

I explored the following specific questions to frame the general question:

i. What are the motivations for the Kenyan youth to migrate?
ii. What is the role of economic independence and socio-economic aspirations in migration decisions?
iii. How do potential migrants seek information to help them decide whether to go to the Gulf?
iv. What are the lived experiences of Kenyan migrant workers in the Gulf, and how do they respond to them?

1. 4. Justification of the Study

The claims of maltreatment of Kenyans employed in the Gulf has attracted widespread public condemnation, prompting the government to impose travel restrictions to the region. Despite reports of rampant abuse, there has, unfortunately, not been much academic research done to describe the experiences of migrant workers or, more crucially, what the supplying and receiving governments are doing to address this problem. Moreover, the prohibition only lasted for a brief period, making the issue disappear from public discourse. The result has been a perception among potential migrants that the threats, if any, have diminished.

The significance of this study lies in reviving the conversation about this issue to bring out a balanced perspective. An open discussion of this matter could help raise public awareness, subsequently empowering potential migrants with the capacity to assess the possible risks and rewards ahead and, ideally, make a more reasoned decision before moving to the Gulf. Additionally, this study sought to generate discourse and encourage returnees to share their stories so that Kenya may develop appropriate support systems and programs for them.

The study will accomplish its objective in the context of an understanding that the culture of silence around abuse conceals the harm done to workers and minimises the severity of the violence migrants may face. In the absence of an inquiry into the plight of these workers, they return to their prior lives and essentially vanish from the government's view of those in need of assistance. Without help, they are forced to secure whatever employment they can find to support their families due to the absence of Kenyan government programs that can help rehabilitate and facilitate job placement and societal reintegration. The return of migrant workers in Kenya creates the need for attention to all pertinent issues. Ignoring these challenges can put the Kenyan government in positions that limit its ability to address the issue of migrants while neglecting to confront the challenges returnees face. Even in cases where governments

have negotiated bilateral agreements or regulations in the receiving country, rehabilitation and reintegration are still imperative. It is essential to note that some employers may ignore the law, despite the necessity for reintegration upon contract termination.

This research query is critical from a humanity and developmental point of view. Structuring the question as in the project was pertinent to analysing the relationship between rising migration to the Gulf region and high youth unemployment rates. They provide the opportunity to document the experiences of migrants while looking into any possible psychological repercussions from their time working in the Gulf. They also facilitated grasping the migrants' explanations regarding factors justifying their movement, including the possibility of becoming abuse victims. The specific questions also helped me to examine the travel bans, their impacts, and how migrants to the Gulf view them. Adopting an open-ended question allowed me to explore the government's initiatives and strategies from all perspectives. In addition to examining the gap between official rhetoric and reality, these questions provided the returnees with a forum to speak about their personal experiences and inform proposals that could help establish better support for migrant workers as opposed to the existing systems.

1. 5. Scope of the Study

This study was limited to examining the experiences of Kenyan migrant workers in the Gulf region. It examined the stories of returnees, the testimonies of families that had lost their kin, and the reports of those still in the region. Although such an approach is perfectly reasonable, it could have included information regarding events that occurred several years before the study. As such, I was keen to produce up-to-date research that could provide accurate information to inform potential migrant and government decisions. Notably, since the early 2000s, when the first reported cases of abuse occurred, some changes had been made in the Gulf region. For example, the kafala system was amended and updated, but the effects and implementation of these amendments were unknown. In addition, Kenyan migration laws had been altered to better protect citizens who work abroad, specifically those who go to the Gulf region. Again, the extent to which these new laws had been successful was unclear. Moreover, international migration laws had been introduced and modified to help safeguard the rights of foreign workers. Therefore, it was important to ask if the situation had improved for migrant workers travelling to the Gulf region. Have their experiences improved? To gain insight into this, I focused on the events and experiences that had taken place since 2012, when Kenya implemented the first set of laws to protect migrants travelling to the Middle East.

1. 6. Geographic Study Area

The study was conducted in Kenya, an East African country bordering the Indian ocean. The country is 582,646 km² with a population of 53.77 million (2020). The data collection was carried out in Nairobi, the capital city. More specifically, estates in Eastlands such as Donholm, Umoja, Buruburu, and Tena, where most returnees reside. The area is approximately 5.1 km from Nairobi CBD. It is estimated that 5.119 million people live within Nairobi and its environs (Macrotrends, 2022). Despite being the smallest region, Eastlands account for almost half of the city's population, with 988,808, 626,482, and 268,276 people living in Embakasi, Njiru, and Kamukunji, respectively. The region is dominated by lower-middle and low-income earners, mostly involved in informal labour.

Eastlands is Kenya's most diverse region. People from all tribes, races, and religions inhabit it. The housing projects in estates like Buruburu and Nyayo house the upper middle class, though they are a very small percentage of the population. The other estates, such as Donholm, Fedha, and Komarok, house the middle class, who are mainly employed in various companies around the city. The remaining estates are for the lower class, who comprise most of the region's population. As established by Thieme (2021, p. 35), their lives are characterised by mean temporary arrangements and high mobility: "As everyday lives are mired in constant uncertainty, youth occupy a 'precarious present', caught in a state of suspension but also well versed in adapting to adversity and shaping local politics of provisioning in the absence of formal structures of support." The mobility of this category of residents is not only local but also international. They are more willing than the rest of the population to seek greener pastures in the Gulf.

***Figure 1**: Map of the World showing the location of Africa*

Source: Geology (2022)

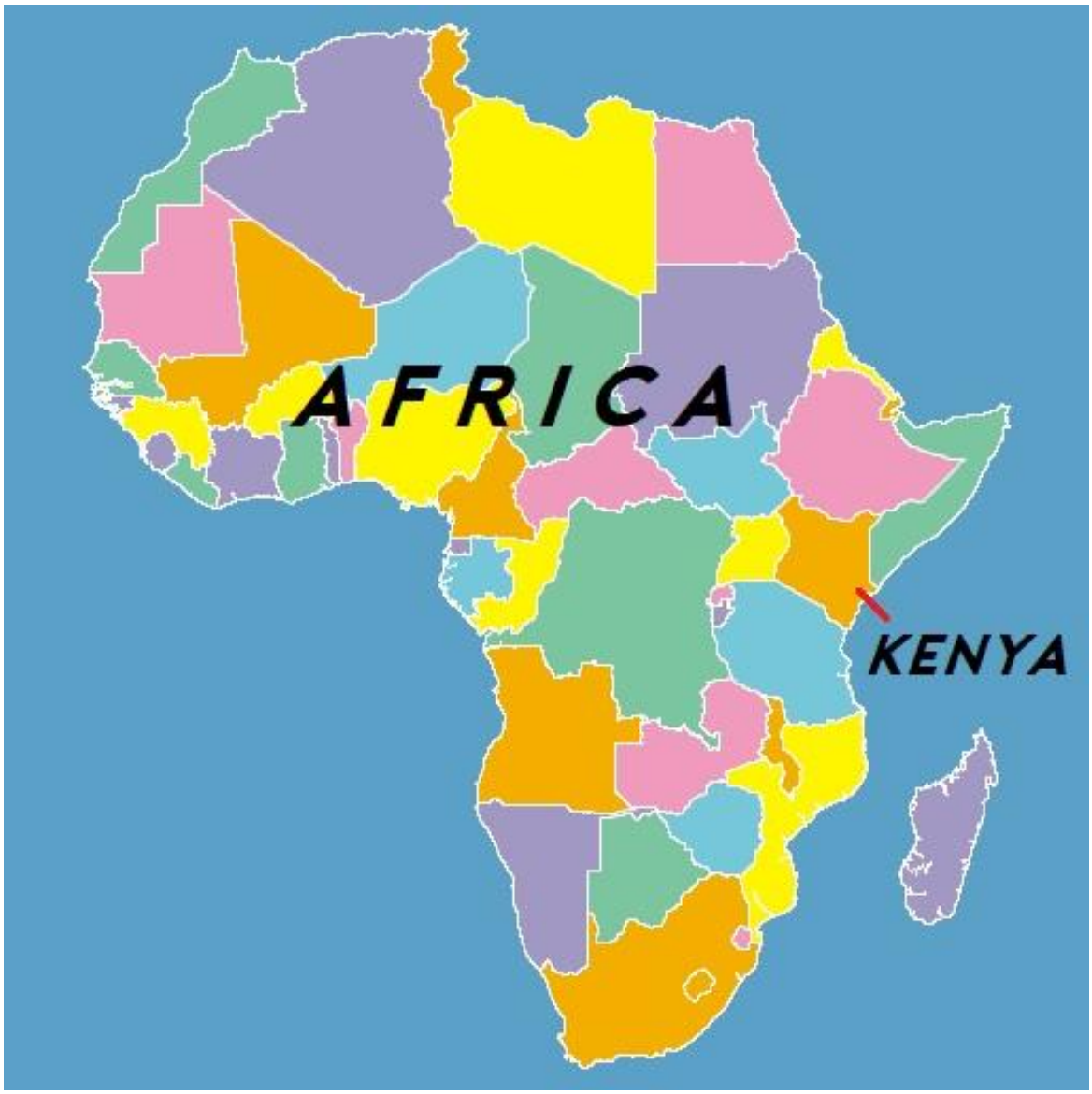

Figure 2*: Map of Kenya in Africa*

Source: ("Map of Kenya," 2022)

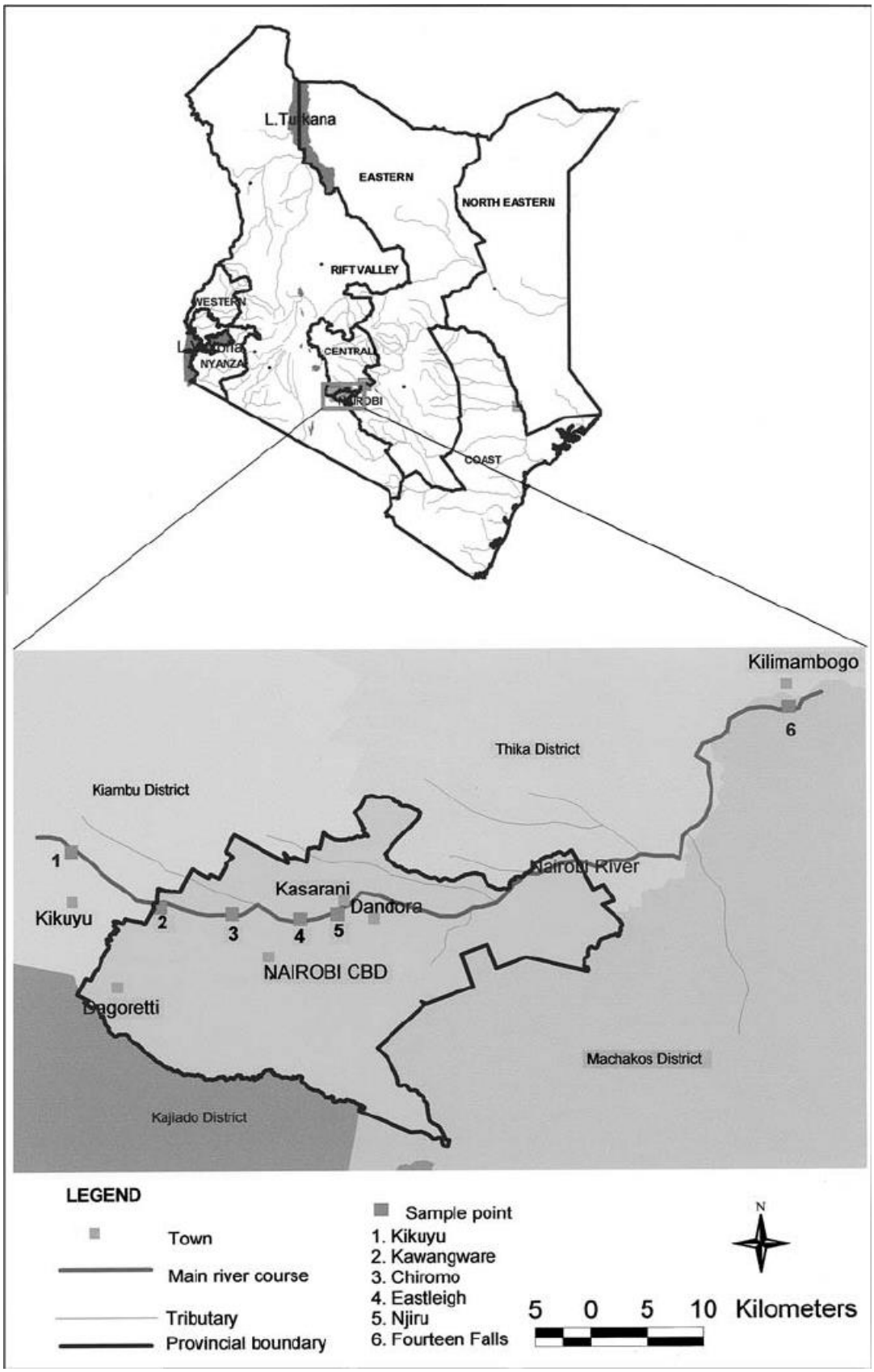

Figure 3: *Map of Nairobi in Kenya*

Source: Budambula (2006)

1. 7. Methodology in Brief

The study adopted a qualitative approach, which has been widely acknowledged as a suitable approach for exploring issues that require digging into more profound human behaviours, i.e., emotions, feelings, and attitudes. The claims of mistreatment of Kenyan workers in the Gulf remains an emotive issue that requires a careful and well-planned investigation. It is critical that any approach chosen to unearth the issue is thorough and brings me closer to the survivors as possible. By selecting the qualitative approach, I allowed myself to see and understand what the victims had gone through first-hand. I conducted face-to-face interviews, online interviews, and focus group discussions. Online interviews involved workers who are still in the Gulf, face-to-face interviews involved returnees. An interview with a ministry of labour official was also carried out to provide detailed government interventions and measures. Another interview involved a travel agency representative connecting Kenyan youth with work in the Gulf region. My work specifically dwelt around Umoja, Tena, and Donholm, Eastland's most populated estates. The areas are populated by many returnees and people saving money to travel to the Gulf. Snowball sampling was considered more appropriate for selecting participants, as it ensured that only suitable candidates for the study were involved. A thematic analysis was then performed to analyse the data collected from interviews and focus group discussions.

1. 8. Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into five chapters, each addressing specific issues. The chapters include:

1. **Introduction:** Provides the background and overview of the study and shows readers what to expect. It also defines the purpose of the study, the research questions that are being addressed, and the methodology and sources of data to be used.
2. **Literature review**: Explores studies on the subject and other theories that underpin the study. It provides context and relevance.
3. **Methodology:** Outlines what has been done to achieve the study's objectives.
4. **Empirical Findings:** Shows the results of the data analysis carried out in the field.
5. **Analysis/Discussion:** Discusses the results obtained from the field, weaving them together with the known results from other studies to make informed and unbiased conclusions.
6. **Conclusion:** Summarizes the study outlining its main findings.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1. Introduction

This section presents what other researchers have written about the topic and how their work influences my research. It is a critical, in-depth examination and evaluation of all relevant published sources on migrant experiences, their work, and motivations. The sources include journal articles, previous research papers, textbooks, conference proceedings, books, and book chapters. It is divided into two sections, empirical and theoretical review, with five major sections, including the kafala employment system in the Gulf, youth, unemployment, and culture in Kenya, colonial legacies, Ravenstein's Theory of Migration (RTM), and Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA).

2. 2. Empirical Literature Review

2.2. 1. Youth, unemployment, and culture in Kenya

Unemployment is a global problem that affects people in every corner of the world. It affects the economy, society, and individuals alike. Unemployment refers to people in the workforce who are currently jobless but are willing and able to take a job (Gallant et al., 2020). On the other hand, the unemployment rate is the percentage of the civilian labour force that is without work but available for and seeking employment (Gallant et al., 2020). If a person is not actively looking for work but is willing to work if a job is offered, he or she is still considered unemployed. In this way, people who have been unsuccessful in finding work are still a part of the unemployment rate. Unemployment affects nearly everyone in the world in one way or another, but it is something people in the Global North tend to think of as an issue on the other side of the globe (Matilla-Santander et al., 2020). The truth, however, is that there are people worldwide who are currently suffering from unemployment problems and looking for ways to get back on their feet.

The global unemployment rate has remained high over the last two decades. The lowest global unemployment rate recorded within the last 22 years was 5.39%, which was the pre-Covid 19 era (Figure 4). Despite its sharp fluctuations across all regions, unemployment remains a more significant challenge in the Global South than in the Global North (Yeung & Yang, 2020). For instance, in Africa, the unemployment rate has remained staggeringly high, grossly undermining the utilisation of human labour (Filmer & Fox, 2014). Africa's unemployment rates have hit a year-on-year average of 7.7% over the last decade, undermining its population's ability to grow and make a decent living (Macrotrends, 2022).

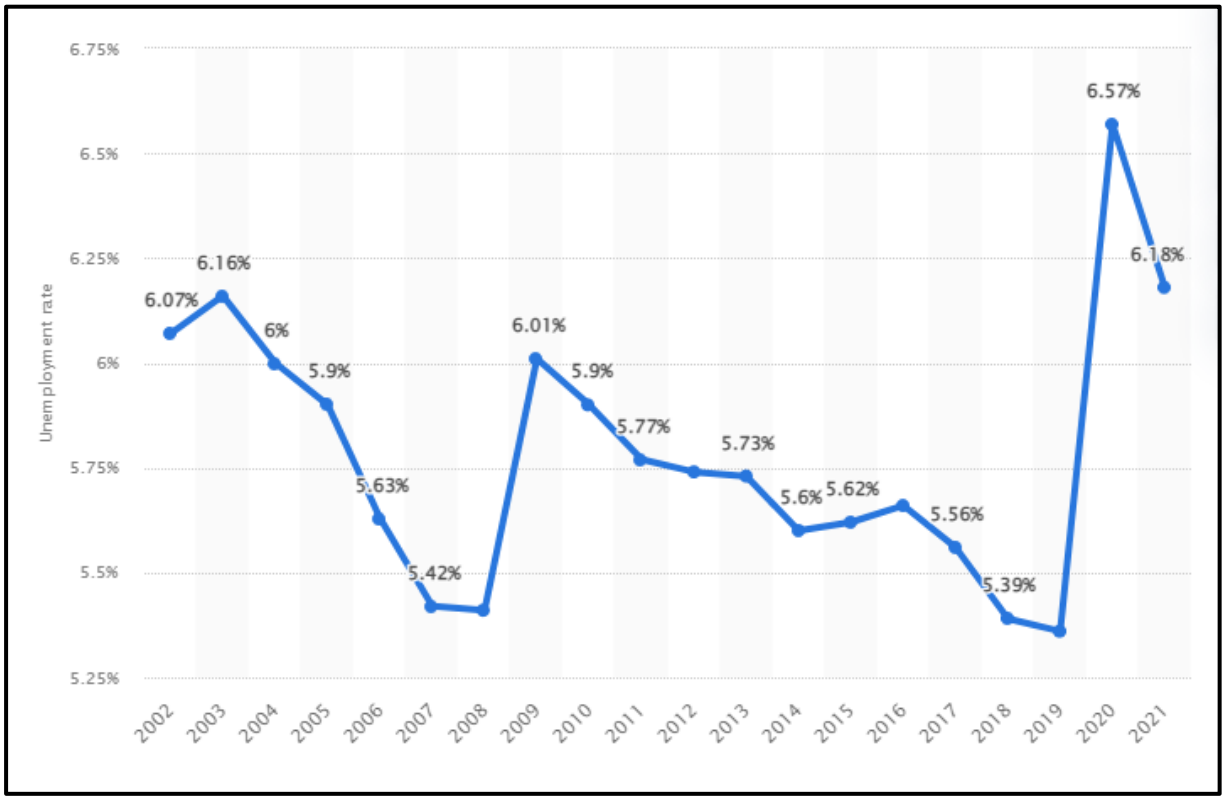

Figure 4: Global unemployment rate 2002-2021

Source: Statista (2022).

While the high rates of unemployment in Africa are worrying, of greater concern is that it is gendered, with the "female unemployment rate standing at roughly 9.0% in 2022, compared to 7.4% among men" ("Unemployment rate in Africa as of 2022, by country," 2022). Furthermore, men are more likely to be in the workforce, and women are less so. Gender stereotypes predispose people to think that men should be providers and women should stay home with the kids - but this affects what sort of jobs both men and women can land, too (Ellemers, 2018). Women frequently have difficulty finding employment because gender roles limit them.

The Kenyan situation is not any different, if not more worrying. Over the last two decades, the Kenyan unemployment rate has revolved around 3.2%. However, the rate jumped to 5.7% in the last four years, impacted partly by the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 4). It is also worth noting that most jobs in Kenya are in the informal sector, where labour is precarious, and people work for basic survival. According to Kamer (2022), "The informal sector in Kenya employed roughly 15.26 million individuals in 2021. This corresponded to over 80 per cent of the total

number of people employed in the country." Therefore, even though the official unemployment rate may seem low, most struggle to make ends meet. While this is a big problem for all categories of citizens, the youth are the most affected.

***Table 1**: Kenya Unemployment Rate - Historical Data -2001-2021*

Year	Unemployment Rate (%)	Annual Change
2021	5.74%	0.01%
2020	5.73%	0.72%
2019	5.01%	0.76%
2018	4.25%	0.74%
2017	3.51%	0.75%
2016	2.76%	-0.02%
2015	2.78%	-0.02%
2014	2.80%	-0.01%
2013	2.81%	-0.02%
2012	2.83%	-0.01%
2011	2.84%	0.00%
2010	2.84%	-0.04%
2009	2.88%	-0.03%
2008	2.92%	0.02%
2007	2.89%	-0.02%
2006	2.91%	-0.02%
2005	2.92%	-0.02%
2004	2.94%	-0.03%
2003	2.97%	-0.03%
2002	3.00%	0.01%
2001	2.99%	-0.03%

Source: Macrotrends (2022)

Kenyan youth aged 18-24 recorded a 25% unemployment rate in 2021 (Guguyu, 2022). Interestingly, unemployment affects male and female youth similarly. It is reported that joblessness affects 13.6% and 12.6% of males and females, respectively. While men who should provide remain jobless, and the women who should support them cannot find local opportunities, they are pushed into more desperate endeavours. Today, it is not surprising to see women venturing into jobs that have been a preserve for men in Nairobi city. Karani (1987, p. 422) stated, "Traditionally, Kenyan women, like women in other African countries, performed roles of wife, mother, child-bearer, caretaker and food provider. They were prepared for these roles through traditional education." A short walk through the streets of Nairobi shows how things have changed. Young women are now "makangas" – the public vehicle touts who hang on the doors and call out passengers- shoe-shiners, "jua kali" artisans – the ones who make simple items like pans – mechanics, etc. But this shift is not welcome by all. Many people still

frown at and disapprove of women in “traditionally male roles” (Flöttmann, 2021). This could, in my opinion, explain why some women, especially those from deeply traditional backgrounds, are okay with working in foreign countries rather than being ridiculed. It is a tough choice between fighting for a few opportunities available in the country and facing ridicule or going to the Gulf, where several claims of abuse have been made.

Location seems to play a significant role in explaining unemployment patterns. The Kenyan rural and urban areas have varying unemployment rates, with 11.2 and 19.9%, respectively (Business Daily, 2022). Some studies have established that Kenya has some of the highest rural-urban migration rates in Africa (Macharia, 2014). The one-way movement has depleted rural labour, diminishing rural growth and development. Small-scale agricultural activities dominate Kenyan rural areas. While they can often feed the people, they can hardly support significant growth. Consequently, industries and manufacturing plants have remained in cities and towns. Ironically, even factories processing local produce such as fish, sugarcane, cotton, tea, coffee, and pyrethrum are located in towns and cities, providing meaningful employment opportunities (Bowden, 2007). However, young people in rural areas have to contend with limited farm-based job opportunities that often pay meagre wages (Macharia, 2014). To make matters worse, most youths in rural areas treat their jobs as stop-gap measures (Mullei et al., 2010). They hope to go to the city and make a better life. As such, they do little with their meagre earnings out of poor planning or saving for the journey to the city.

Transitioning from rural to urban life is often difficult for most Kenyan youth. They move to the cities with high hopes but often end up with disappointments (Thieme, 2021). They soon realise that jobs in the city pay more, but the expenses are much higher, reducing their earnings to nothing. New demands in rent, water, electricity bill, and food, among other expenditures, reduce their lives into survival mode. City life to the youth trapped in the low economic levels is just another prison they must escape from as they did the rural one. While unemployment is dangerous, precarious employment is even more undesirable. Unemployed youth may get away with some financial responsibilities, but those in precarious labour are overburdened with them, often leading to indebtedness and the creation of a vicious circle of poverty. For example, new online loan apps have popped up in the country, extending small loans to people with credentials (Chorah, 2022). With over 50 such companies, someone can get multiple loans they cannot repay, leading to a lifetime of debt. Needless to say, such online apps are not well-regulated, forcing low-income earners to pay exorbitant repayment rates, some as much as 60% per month.

Nevertheless, what options do the youth have? Where to move? To many in this desperate situation, migrating to other regions presents a new hope (Thieme, 2021). Nothing can be more uncertain for young men and women who have confronted the unknowns of city life.

There is also a growing concern over inactive youths. According to Munga and Onsomu (2016), approximately 10.2% of unemployed Kenyan youth are inactive. They are homemakers with limited time to find gainful employment, yet earn nothing from their service. Most of these young women and men are in rural areas where they support family members and businesses while not accumulating any financial gains for themselves. Most African cultures have no wills: "Coupled with the communitarian nature of African societies are issues such as lack of awareness of advance directives, fear of death and grief…" (Ekore & Lanre-Abass, 2016, p. 369). The advance directives, in this case, refers to wills for sharing properties and future medical care in case of incapacitation. To many African communities, writing a will is like calling for death (Ekore & Lanre-Abass, 2016, p. 369). In my culture, properties remain in the hands of parents until they die, and their distribution after death does not always favour the children who provided the most service but the eldest. This creates a situation where inactive youths risk being plunged deeper into poverty upon their parents' deaths. Inactivity is not limited to rural areas. Towns and cities across the country are full of young men and women providing free services to their relatives (Mireri, 2012). In most cases, they are not attending college or vocational training, diminishing their employability. Such people 'wake up' when it is already too late. Unable to secure good jobs with their poor education, foreign jobs become more feasible.

Another major concern, especially in the last two decades, is the emergence and rise of a culture of "soft life" among the youth. Most Kenyan communities cherish hard work and discipline. In fact, baby boomers, generation X, and millennials built their wealth through sheer hard work. This has been widely acknowledged locally and internationally (Otieno et al., 2021). The culture of hard work is not only evident at home, but also in other regions and countries where Kenyans have migrated. For example, "Kenyan immigrants working in the United States have been ranked the third most industrious foreigners" (The East African, 2018). According to the Bloomberg report, Kenyans scored 73.4%, while Ghanaians and Bulgarians scored 75.2% and 74.2%, respectively. This trend is not being witnessed among Generation Z. The generation exhibits a strong desire for an easy life #softlife. As described in urban lingo, it is "a life of ease without requiring hard work, sacrifice, and unpleasantness" (Danielle, 2022). This concept has

been popularised on social media over the last few years by young people who are beneficiaries of easy money. Most of them travel in Yachts, private jets, and expensive limousines, and visit expensive hotels and destinations, all paid for through 'favours' (Williams, 2022). The youth do not want to do menial jobs and are choosy. According to the report by Protection International (2020), most victims of extra-judicial killings are youths aged 18-25 years. The youth, the report claims, are often involved in cybercrimes and "wash-wash" businesses, which is a form of currency counterfeiting. They want quick riches but are unwilling to work hard for it. The situation is exacerbated by social media lifestyles that promote show-off and glamour. Going by this trend, it becomes evident why some youth migrate to the Gulf. They are under pressure to succeed, but the opportunities for success out of crime are limited.

Education is also a key factor in youth unemployment in Kenya. The free primary and secondary school education introduced by the NARC (National Rainbow Coalition - was a coalition of opposition parties that dethroned the ruling party in a general election) government in 2002 has significantly improved enrolment and transition from primary to secondary schools. Literacy levels have improved from 72.16% to 81.64% between 2002 and 2018, respectively (**Table 2**). Ironically, most Kenyan youths are still stuck with low-level education, with over 62% failing to attain secondary school certificates (Munga & Onsomu, 2016). Only 34% have completed secondary education, and 1% have degrees. A thorough scrutiny of the unemployment data shows that the more a person is educated, the less likely they are to be unemployed. Youths aged 18-24 who were unemployed or inactive were mainly uneducated or with basic education (Guguyu, 2022). Another 75% of the unemployed who were actively looking for jobs had not gone beyond secondary education.

Table 2: *Kenya Literacy Rate 2000-2022*

Year	**Literacy Rate**	**Annual Change**
2018	81.54%	2.80%
2014	78.73%	6.58%
2007	72.16%	-10.07%
2000	82.23%	-10.07%

Source: Macrotrends (2022b)

In 2002, the NARK government invested in university education to solve the country's skilled labour shortage. Vast sums of money were invested in expanding existing universities and

establishing new ones (Gudo, 2013). In less than five years, enrolment in public and private universities had more than doubled. This was attributed to the restructuring of HELB (Higher Education Loans Board), allowing it to give more loans to many more students from low-income families and introducing free primary and secondary education. By 2021, the government had increased its monetary allocation for education to 25% of the national budget from a mere 11% in 2002 (International Trade Administration, 2022). For the first time, local universities were sending an adequate number of students into the labour market. However, it became apparent that they were not well-prepared for it. Many employers claimed that graduates were half-basked and unready. The Minister for ICT, Dr Bitange Ndemo, reiterated, "It is not surprising that potential employers in Kenya and elsewhere say that our institutions are not graduating people with the skills they need" (Business Daily, 2022). While opportunities for graduates are still limited, some became hard to fill because of knowledge, experience, and skills gap.

Kenya's economic growth has also been underwhelming. The country started on the same footage as Asian giants such as Singapore in the 1960s but was soon overtaken. According to Mutai (2015), "In 1963, when Kenya got independence, and Singapore merged with Malaysia, Kenya's GDP was $926.6 million while Singapore's was $917.2 million." However, while Singapore put structures in place and fought corruption and public wastage, Kenyan leaders embezzled state coffers, leading to poverty and stagnation. Today, while Singapore is celebrated as one of the most developed countries in the world, Kenya is yet to cross from a developing to a developed country. The country's growth is debt-financed, squeezing invaluable capital that could have been used to pay labour out. Additionally, its development projects are not labour-intensive, reducing job opportunities further (Mutai, 2015). A weak economy cannot create enough jobs nor sustain good quality ones. However, it should be noted that Kenya's slow economic growth or stagnation is not exclusively an issue of bad leadership and corruption. The country, like many others in the Global South, is a victim of Global Production Networks (GPNs) and Global Value Chains (GVCs) that favour the Global North at the expense of the South (Neilson et al., 2017; Ponte, 2019; Barrientos, 2019; Dieter & Plummer, 2018). Moreover, the shadows of colonial legacy have made the journey more complex and difficult, as I have discussed in a different section below.

A lack of proper education and quality job opportunities will likely drive the unemployment problem in Kenya even further. The problem could be compounded by local culture. Local

attitudes and beliefs about employment are partly responsible for youth migration to the Gulf. As opportunities dry in rural areas, most Kenyans choose to move to urban centres for menial jobs. They would rather work in the city where no one knows them, even if they live in deplorable conditions, than stay in the village and bare the shame of joblessness (Omondi, 2023). Many communities tie success with moving to the city where anyone can become anything they dream of (Fengler, 2011). These beliefs push untrained, unprepared, and unskilled youths to the city, where they are subjected to unimaginable suffering. It is unsurprising that 30% of the Kenyan population lives in cities (Fengler, 2011). Moreover, "While the total population will double by 2045, the urban population will more than quadruple" (Fengler, 2011). Going back to the rural areas is already incomprehensible to most youths in the city, so what next? If they cannot go back home and their lives in the city are deplorable, going to the Gulf becomes a viable, if not an appealing option.

Another important aspect of Kenyan culture is its view of migration. Many communities in Kenya view migration to any destination positively (Kleinman, 2019, p. 174). Their view aligns with the claim, "When an African migrates, the community views this as a chance for promotion, growth, and improvement of their lives" (Kabuiku, 2017, p. 96). Once you leave your native country, you are seen to have attained something notable or established yourself for great prospects. Interestingly, this perception applies to both the learned and the unlearned. The public's mindset is crafted by the communalist society in Kenya and Africa as a whole, giving individual accomplishments a collective meaning and imposing intense pressure on the youth (Sue & Sue, 2012). Thus, Kenyan adolescents that venture into unknown territories to elevate their standard of life are inspired and forced to take up the responsibility of proving themselves worthy. As Nwoye (2009) articulates, those who come back with no accomplishment to their name become a source of laughter in the villages. As a result, their lives deteriorate, and they enter into disorientation, refutation, intellectual inconsistency, and gradual deterioration (Nwoye, 2009). More often than not, returning to the village after a thwarted attempt at foreign countries means their lives will end abruptly. Even though it is conceivable to attempt to begin anew and revive your circumstances, confronting one's society as a letdown is a situation the young population struggles to cope with.

2.2. 2. The Kafala Sponsorship System in The Gulf

The Gulf highly depends on foreign labour governed by the *Kafala* employment system (Shipra, 2012, p. 13). The system has been referred to as “modern-day slavery” because of its unfairness to migrant workers (Sonmez et al., 2011, p. 19). While in theory, this system should facilitate the hiring of domestic workers and those in the private sector (Pande, 2013), in practice, it tethers them to their employers, rendering them unable to pursue new opportunities, seek alternate employment, or leave the country on their own accord. Their passports are confiscated, thereby entrapping them in servitude from which they are powerless to escape. All too often, workers lack the ability to obtain redress for mistreatment, exploitation, and abuse. Furthermore, even in cases where abuse or discrimination are particularly egregious, the employer or sponsor may never be removed from the list of those allowed to hire workers, allowing them to bring in new workers who will be exposed to the same unjust treatment. As Pande (2013) states, there is almost no prospect of punishing the employer regardless of the nature of the crime.

The sponsors, known commonly as *kafeel*, have been vested with extraordinary powers concerning the presence of foreign workers in the Gulf region (Chowdhury & Rajan, 2018). Instead of scrutinising and certifying domestic and corporate employees, the authorities transferred this responsibility to the sponsors, who have become the leading offenders of their entitlement and influence (Chowdhury & Rajan, 2018). Instead of expediting the procedure, they use it to make profits, asking for payments from both the migrant personnel and their employers - at the cost of dignified job environments and standards (Sherry & Human Rights Watch, 2004, p. 18). Allowing these individuals such liberties in the place of the rights that should have been extended to the immigration officers appears untimely and ill-conceived. However, the rationale behind this policy becomes more discernible on closer inspection.

The *kafala* sponsorship system also allows agents to swindle migrants via fake contracts. When immigrants leave their native countries, they are often duped into signing "non-existent" contracts. Nevertheless, sponsors take hold of and annihilate the agreements once they arrive in the Gulf region, furnishing them with new contracts in Arabic (Sherry & Human Rights Watch, 2004; Manseau, 2006; United Nations, 2019; Holmes, 2021). Unfortunately, these contracts often lack specificity, lacking the elements of protection, rights, obligations, salaries, hours of work, employer relationships, or duties (Sherry & Human Rights Watch, 2004). Bizarrely, these new contracts are accepted before local labour tribunals. In a nutshell, any

worker who agrees to the contract agrees to any work for any period with no particular salary, privileges, dignity, the potential for development or advancement, or schedule.

The *Kafala* system drastically endangers migrant workers with manipulative labour and living conditions, the inability to unionise or strike, delayed or non-existent salary payments, and even sexual violence and death (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Unsurprisingly, migrant workers are routinely forced to sacrifice their hard-earned wages, respect, well-being, and sometimes even their lives (Mohammad, 2010, p. 87). This egregious exploitation of migrant labourers is in direct opposition to both international conventions and the Islamic faith, which are the foundational beliefs of Gulf countries.

2.2. 3. The Impact of Colonial Legacies on Development and Migration Patterns

Kenya has a long and complicated history of colonialism. Starting with British colonisation in the late 19th century, the country experienced various levels of political, social and economic oppression during the period (Durrani, 2018). Even after Kenya's independence in 1963, the legacy of the colonial rule continues to shape life in modern-day Kenya, impacting development and migration patterns significantly.

In terms of economic development, colonial rule caused widespread inequality and poverty among many Kenyans (Levy, 2011). During this time, most economic opportunities were controlled by European settlers or foreigners, meaning that native Kenyan populations were often left out or marginalised from prosperity. Settlers controlled all means of production, including land, capital, and labour. Fertile lands in the highlands and tropical areas were forcefully confiscated, and locals moved to reserves that were dry and unproductive (Broch-Due & Schroeder, 2000; Levy, 2011). One example is Isiolo where "Some pastoral groups were removed altogether—the Laikipiak Maasai and the Isiolo Turkana. Others, like the Samburu, were pushed to the outskirts" (Broch-Due & Schroeder, 2000, p. 54). The people did not only lose their livelihood but their movements were also restricted, denying them the opportunity to establish businesses in areas with potential. In the end, they were impoverished and left to survive on scrams.

This inequality persists to this day, creating an environment where the wealthy benefit from colonial policies while the impoverished struggle for essential resources (Robinson, 2019). For instance, the ruling class has continued to accumulate wealth at the expense of the people. They

drive luxurious cars and live in exclusive estates where the poor are prohibited from visiting (Robinson, 2019). In Kenya, the disparity is not just between politicians and other citizens; it has taken the form of tribal and regional discrimination. Some tribes (large ethnic groups) who took power after independence, like the Agikuyu and Kalenjins, have economic, social, and political advantages that other communities do not enjoy (Shilaho, 2017). Robinson (2019, p. 1) argues, "differential colonial investments across communities and regions generated significant inequality, with continued political implications in the 21st century." Regions with more investments, like Central, have continued to lead the country, with those far away in western Kenya lagging.

The colonisers' attitude towards women created gender inequality which has persisted to this day. While most Kenyan communities are chauvinistic (Tamarkin, 1973, p. 257), the structures and foundations laid by settlers made it easier for women to be segregated from the workplace, denied opportunities for growth, and assigned to unpaid labour in the home. Until the 1980s, most Kenyan women remained grounded at home, providing family care and assistance (Sobania, 2003). As of 2016, only “880,000 women compared to 1.68 million men had formal sector employment” (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The workplace design and culture introduced by colonisers favoured men and gave no room for women. Contemporary Kenyan women find it hard to fight the structural inequalities, perhaps explaining their departure to other destinations (Sobania, 2003). On the other hand, their increasing empowerment may drive them to take greater risks, including migrating to other countries.

The structure of government created by colonial powers has left lasting effects on Kenya's democracy. The centralisation of power within a single ruling class mirrored Britain’s own system, often leaving Kenyans with limited control over their own destinies (Ogot & Ochieng', 1995). In 2010, the country adopted a new constitution introducing regional governance, i.e., majimbo. Today, the country has 47 counties, each serving Kenyans in their regions. Despite the progress towards decentralisation, issues like tribalism remain entrenched within Kenyan politics, partly due to the divide-and-conquer strategies employed by colonisers during their rule (Broch-Due & Schroeder, 2000). The heavy emphasis placed on ethnic divisions has made coalition-building between tribes difficult for politicians and contributes to issues like regional inequalities and insecurity throughout the country today (Khadiagala, 2010). Migration patterns already show that the youth from disadvantaged communities are the most desperate for opportunities outside the country. They are disproportionately affected by the events in the Gulf

but have no alternatives (Verweijen & Van Bockhaven, 2020). The profile of those affected may influence the political elites' indecisiveness on the matter.

The legacy of colonialism can also be seen in the demographics of modern-day Kenya, specifically in terms of migratory patterns and urbanisation. Colonial rule led to numerous changes in both internal and international migration patterns, as railways were constructed throughout the country, enabling transportation over long distances that were previously difficult or impossible (Levy, 2011). This motivated people from rural areas to migrate toward cities where they could find employment opportunities or a higher quality of life; this influx led to a rapid expansion of urban centres like Nairobi and Mombasa during this period. The earlier rural-to-urban migration cultivated a culture of seeking new prospects away from home in case of scarcity. The difference today is that Kenyans are crossing borders while searching for new opportunities. People who have relocated to cities in search of jobs and have not been successful are more than willing to explore opportunities in other countries, including the Gulf region.

Colonial rule in Kenya had an overwhelmingly negative effect on the economy and society. In particular, colonial authorities created a system of economic dependency wherein production shifted towards supplying European demands (Zartman, 1976). Local agriculture was hijacked, and cash crops were grown instead of local indigenous products (Levy, 2011). Consequently, industries catering to local needs and development suffered greatly, lacking support from colonial powers (Durrani, 2018). Furthermore, they ensured that local labour and produce were obtained at little cost through slave labour or bargain-basement pricing while making foreign products expensive (Levy, 2011). For example, my late grandmother used to tell me that a simple mirror could cost as much as a herd of thirty cows. This disbalance ensured that locals worked harder and longer to survive. Today, agricultural produce from rural areas, despite being produced organically, still fetches the lowest market prices. This cycle has kept communities from less developed areas in a vicious circle of poverty, sometimes depending on foreign aid and government assistance for survival.

The colonial rule also left its mark on the structure of the Kenyan government and society by introducing authoritarian governance and creating deep-seated social hierarchies based on race and ethnicity (Austin, 2010). Even today, many officials lack respect for human rights and operate within corrupt systems due to years of oppression under colonialism (Van Rij, 2021). The Kenyan political climate is also rife with ethnic tensions between majority tribes such as

the Kikuyu and Kalenjin people; this enmity can largely be attributed to colonial policies which divided communities for administrative convenience without considering their cultural differences or pre-existing antagonisms. Today, every government appointment is scrutinised through the lens of tribalism and cronyism (Guyo, 2023). The greatest losers are people from minority tribes and impoverished families. The worst part is that poverty is more prevalent among minority groups than in major ones, compounding their problems even further. To put this into perspective, over 60% of the top jobs in the country are occupied by two tribes in a nation with over 42 tribes. Some minorities may be leaving the country for other destinations to escape the demeaning and dehumanising social hierarchies.

Some areas were intensively developed during colonial rule due to their resources or climate, while others were largely disregarded and neglected (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012). This disproportionate emphasis has created tremendous discrepancies in regional wealth, which have been maintained and led to the migration of individuals from rural to more densely populated areas such as Nairobi, Thika, and Mombasa (Durrani, 2018). The unrelenting pattern of urbanisation not only suggests poverty but is also connected to a longing for ideal job opportunities and access to more services and facilities. Unchecked urbanisation has increased stress on resources and caused hardship due to meagre salaries and competition for work; both are still challenges in larger cities, which have been subjected to flows of immigration since colonial control ended in the 1960s (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012). Additionally, the customisation of low-paying employment in the farms during colonial times further aggravates the issue.

Overall, it is clear that colonial legacies continue to impact development and migration patterns in Kenya even today. Despite independence nearly 60 years ago, native Kenyan populations still deal with inequalities set up by Europeans during colonisation and enduring effects on infrastructure development that hinder national growth and opportunity. These factors play an important role when considering modern-day migrations from rural areas into cities seeking a better quality of life and those seeking greener pastures in the Gulf region.

2.3 Literature Review of Migration Studies

Migration is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that has been studied by scholars across various disciplines. The literature on migration studies is vast and diverse, covering a wide range of topics. In recent years, it has attracted even more scholars, reflecting the

increasing importance of migration as a global issue. A review of some of the most influential and innovative works in the field shows multiple themes, ideas, and debates.

One of the most important themes in migration studies is the question of why people move. The ground-breaking work by Massey et al. (1994) explored this issue in detail while unifying various migration theories. While there is no single answer to why people move, scholars have identified a range of factors that can drive migration, including economic, political, social, and environmental factors (Faist, 2021; Bastia, 2011; Maletzky, 2017). Some studies have focused specifically on the role of economic factors such as job opportunities and income differentials in driving migration (Westmore, 2014; Kuhn, 2015; Chaudhuri, 2002), while others have emphasized the importance of political factors such as conflict, persecution, and human rights abuses (Hoxha, 2022; Parkins, 2010; Soysa, 2020). Social factors such as family reunification and cultural ties have also been identified as key drivers of migration (Jong & Gardner, 2013; Green, 1975; Alscher, 2010; Mustadi et al., 2021). Finally, environmental factors such as natural disasters and climate change are increasingly recognized as important drivers of migration in the contemporary world (McAuliffe, 2017; Moore & Wesselbaum, 2022; Castelli, 2018; Boso et al., 2016).

Another important theme in migration studies is the concept of transnationalism, which refers to the ways in which migrants maintain connections with their home countries while also forging new connections in their destination countries (Lee, 2011; Munro, 2016; Dahinden, 2005; Vertovec, 2003). This can take many different forms, from remittances sent back home to participation in cultural or political activities that transcend national borders. Transnationalism challenges traditional notions of nation-states as fixed and bounded entities and highlights the ways in which migrants are active agents who shape their own experiences of migration (Munro, 2016). For developing countries like Kenya, remittances from migrants are crucial for national development and the improvement of citizens' livelihood.

A third theme I identified in a few studies is the intersectionality of identities and experiences. Migrants not only face challenges related to their legal status and socio-economic position but also face discrimination and marginalization based on factors such as race, gender, sexuality, religion, and language proficiency (Grosfoguel et al., 2018; Bastia, 2014; Anthias, 2012; Alberti et al., 2013). A migrant may be female, queer, Muslim, Black, disabled, and so much more. All of these identities come together and affect their experience of migration in various ways. For

instance, a migrant woman may face gender-based violence and discrimination in addition to the struggles of migration. Intersectionality recognizes that these different aspects of identity are interconnected and can create unique experiences of migration for different groups of migrants (Grosfoguel et al., 2018, p. 365; Brekke & Mastekaasa, 2008). As held by Bastia (2014), it is a critical concept to keep in mind when discussing migrant experiences and addressing their needs. These studies reminded me that there is no single experience of migration, and we must strive to understand and address the diverse and unique challenges migrants face.

Furthermore, there is a growing body of research on the impact of migration on both origin and destination countries. While some studies have highlighted the potential benefits of migration, such as remittances and brain gain (Tedeschi, 2020; Kleist, 2015; Asiedu, 2005; Burks et al., 2002; Chiswick & Miller, 2007; Kanas & Steinmetz, 2020), others have emphasized the negative consequences, such as brain drain and social dislocation (Tunali, 2000; Kogan, 2010; Schnepf, 2006; Grand & Szulkin, 2002; Reyneri & Fullin, 2010).

Another important theme in migration studies is the experiences of migrants themselves. Scholars have explored a range of issues related to migrant experiences, including the challenges and opportunities they face in their new communities, the ways in which they negotiate their identities in new contexts, and the impact of migration on their mental health and well-being (Kogan, 2010; Brekke & Mastekaasa, 2008; Moussaoui, 2021). Some studies have also examined the experiences of specific groups of migrants such as refugees, undocumented migrants, and temporary workers (Lecic-Tosevski & Pejuskovic, 2021; Behtoui, 2008; Poduval et al., 2015). Still, I found a considerable number of studies focussing on the direct negative impacts on migrants and their families, exploring issues such as exclusion, loneliness, and failed integration (Kjærre, 2011; Bloch, 2013; Magalhaes et al., 2009; Teunissen et al., 2014; Munro et al., 2012). Operating within spaces that are not recognised by the law, undocumented or irregular migrants experience difficulties finding jobs, housing, healthcare, or education, often leading to frustrations and even death (Bloch, 2013; Waite & Lewis, 2017; Gollerkeri & Chhabra, 2016).

The literature on migration studies also encompasses policy and practice. Scholars have analysed a range of policies and practices related to migration, including immigration laws, border controls, refugee resettlement programs, and labour migration schemes (Cox, 2004;

Joppke, 2017; Kofman, 2017; Hagelund, 2020; Thomsen, 2012). These studies have examined the impact of these policies on various stakeholders such as migrants themselves, sending and receiving countries, and employers (Khosravi, 2010; Niemann & Zaun, 2017; De Genova, 2020; Stokes-Dupass, 2017; Olwig, 2011). There is also a growing body of literature that critiques the ways in which migration policies and practices can reinforce inequalities and perpetuate social exclusion (Midtbøen, 2015; Flores & Schachter, 2018; Grande et al., 2018).

The migration studies that I have explored in this section are informed by a variety of theoretical frameworks that seek to understand the motivations, challenges, and impacts of migration. For instance, the study by Nannestad et al. (2008) relied on the social capital theory, suggesting that the social networks, norms, and values of migrants and their communities affect their decision to migrate, their ability to navigate the new environment, and their integration into the host society. Williams et al. (2020) framed their work using the network theory, which views migration as a process of information-sharing and resource mobilization, emphasizing the importance of social ties and communication channels. Other studies used dual labour market theory to explain how labour market segmentation, discrimination, and exploitation shape migrant workers' experiences and opportunities (Müller, 2003; Lusis & Bauder, 2009; O'Reilly, 2012; Groth et al., 2020). There are a few studies that explore institutional theory, highlighting the role of laws, policies, and cultural practices in shaping migration patterns and experiences (Kubal, 2013). Peters (2017) explored the issue through the lens of world systems theory, examining the global economic and political forces that drive migration flows and inequality.

There is also a growing interest in neoclassical micro-migration theory. For instance, Dolzhenko and Lobova (2021) have used it to focus on the role of individual-level factors such as wage differentials, job opportunities, and education in migration. Closely related to network theory are behavioural models which analyse how individual and group attitudes and preferences influence migration decisions (Haug, 2008). Lastly, the theory of social systems, which is closely related to the new economics of labour migration theory, has also been used to emphasize the interdependence and complexity of migration, and how households and communities make migration decisions based on economic and social considerations. So many studies have also explored migration from a gender-based perspective (Nawyn, 2010; Tidswell, 2002; Sharpe, 2002; Rahman, 2011). While most of these theories and perspectives are old, a few are new and yet to be exhausted. For instance, the Ravenstein's Theory of Migration (RTM)

is old, but more robust than many new ones, making it a vital tool for analysing migration issues more broadly.

My main takeaway from most of the studies is that migration is primarily by a combination of factors that push people out of their home countries and pull them towards destination countries. Push factors can include economic hardship, political instability, natural disasters, and conflict, while pull factors can include better job opportunities, higher wages, political stability, and access to education and health care. The studies have used the framework to explain a wide range of migration patterns, from rural-to-urban migration within developing countries to international migration from one continent to another.

2. 4. Theoretical Framework

2.4. 1. Ravenstein's Theory of Migration (RTM)

Developed by the esteemed British geographer Ernst Ravenstein in the late 19th century, Ravenstein's Theory of Migration (RTM) is a ground-breaking concept in migration studies that provides an insightful analysis into why people move and how they do so (Seiger et al., 2020). RTM is based on a combination of both 'push' and 'pull' factors, acknowledging that different motivations propel various types of migratory patterns. A few studies have used the theory to frame their works in migration, including Gurieva and Dzhioev (2015), Andris (2011), and Rees and Lomax (2020).

The core idea behind RTM is that people move from one place to another because of social, economic, and environmental factors (Parkins, 2010). The push factors may include poverty, unemployment, overcrowding, political instability, and natural disasters (Paul, 2017). In addition to these push factors, there are also pull factors, such as better jobs, healthcare, or educational opportunities in other places. This study focuses on the impact of high unemployment on migration patterns to the Gulf, which means that the theory's push factors can help to frame it. The theory also considers that migrants often move in stages; for example, they may first move from rural to urban areas before moving abroad. This concept is known as "step migration," and it suggests that migrants are motivated by a desire to improve their living conditions or to access better opportunities. This is interesting, considering that most Kenyans migrate to the Gulf from the capital city, Nairobi. This might seem an example of "step migration", as described by Ravenstein.

According to RTM, there are five main types of migration: Voluntary, forced, chain, step, and circular migration. While many of these patterns may not explain the trends in Kenya-Gulf migrations, voluntary and step migration are more relevant. According to the theory, voluntary migration occurs when people move because they want to. While they may be pushed or pulled by different factors, their decision to migrate is often a rational one and involves no forceful eviction. This is a perfect explanation for Kenya – Gulf migration, as no Kenyan is forced to move due to violence or conflicts. Step migration is also reverent because the migrants often take multiple steps before reaching their destination – From rural areas to minor cities, then the capital, from where they fly to the Gulf region.

RTM also suggests that different types of migrations impact the places people migrate from and migrate to (Kivisto & Faist, 2010). For example, voluntary migrants tend to bring new skills and knowledge which can benefit the destination country's economy, while chain migrations often result in increased competition for jobs in the destination country. Similarly, forced migrations can lead to a loss of skills and knowledge from the origin country.

The theory suggests that potential migrants must adhere to certain criteria before proceeding to immigrate. First, they must find employment in their current abode to amass sufficient funds for travel and transfer expenses to the target destination (Paul, 2017). Secondly, they must possess a justifiable reason to switch homes; the motivation to move must arise from the need to better their living conditions. However, if individuals are content with their present condition, they would not feel inclined to migrate. The last stipulation is that the proposed location should need additional staff and employees. Unlike travelling to Europe and other parts of the world, which require saving sufficient money beforehand, migrating to the Gulf is fully funded. Young Kenyans who wish to migrate to the Gulf often pay nothing, as their travel expenses are met by agents who later deduct the money from their salaries, sometimes up to three times the actual expense (Mburu, 2019). This could explain, albeit in part, why Kenyan youth find it easy to move to the Gulf.

Ravenstein also insists that those wishing to migrate, particularly to a more distant place, must be determined to transform their lives. Without the assurance that life will improve in the new location, migration is unlikely to occur (Kivisto & Faist, 2010). While relocating from rural to urban settings may be easier, travelling to the Gulf requires much more consideration. People

must ask themselves if the motivation behind the move is powerful enough to outweigh the potential risks of abuse, mistreatment, or even death that could occur.

RTM suggests that certain policies can be implemented to reduce the negative impacts of certain migrations while encouraging beneficial ones. For example, policies that provide better job opportunities for voluntary migrants can help reduce poverty in origin and destination countries (Kivisto & Faist, 2010). In contrast, policies aimed at reducing chain migration can help reduce competition for jobs in destination countries by ensuring that only individuals with the necessary skills enter those countries legally. In the case of Kenya, some skilled and well-trained workers are forced to migrate to the Gulf for domestic work. Such opportunities, while good enough for survival, may limit a person from achieving their full potential. Moreover, government policies and directives aimed at discouraging migration to the Gulf have, until now, proven ineffective.

In conclusion, Ravenstein's Theory of Migration provides a comprehensive framework for understanding why people migrate and how they do so. It considers both push and pull factors influencing human mobility patterns and how different types of migrations impact origin countries differently than destination ones. Moreover, it offers insights into how effective policy interventions can reduce negative impacts associated with certain kinds of migrations and encourage beneficial ones, such as voluntary ones, which bring new skill sets into a country's workforce, thus contributing positively towards its economic growth potential.

2.4. 2. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is a popular psychological theory developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in the 1970s. It is an extension of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which suggests that people's behaviour is determined by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Salgues, 2016). TRA can be used to explain people’s migration behaviours and motivations. The theory has been widely applied in various fields to explain different phenomena, including consumer buying decision (Pookulangara et al., 2011), brand switching behaviour (Ghasrodashti, 2017), psychological help seeking (Kuo et al., 2015), migration intentions (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2012), patients’ non-compliance (Donovan & Blake), and students’ decision to engage in physical activities (Hagger et al., 2002), among many others.

According to the theory, people's attitudes towards a particular behaviour are informed by their beliefs about how desirable or undesirable it is (Tao, 2008). Past experiences, societal norms, cultural values, and personal values influence these beliefs. For example, someone who has had positive experiences with migration may have a more positive attitude toward it than someone who has had negative experiences. Similarly, someone who believes migration will benefit society may have a more positive attitude than someone who believes it will harm society (Ratten, 2020, p. 161). The Kenyan case is a pandora's box. While the people discuss and share openly how migrating to the Gulf is dangerous, they still fight to go there. Naturally, a negative experience should be a deterrent, but not in this case, which is the very essence of this study. Despite the popular claims of mistreatment and abuse of migrants in the Gulf on social media and other news channels, the narratives from the study's participants paint a more complex picture.

Subjective norms also play an essential role in influencing people's migration patterns and motivations. Subjective norms refer to an individual's perception of what other people think about a particular behaviour or action (Lange et al., 2011). People are likely to migrate if they believe that their family members or friends approve of the decision or if they believe that society approves of it. Conversely, if individuals perceive that most people disapprove of their decision to migrate, they may be less likely to do so. Undeniably, Africans view any form of migration positively: "When an African migrates, the community views this as a chance for promotion, growth, and improvement of their lives" (Kabuiku, 2017, p. 96). This mindset, as already discussed, is crafted by the communalist society in Kenya and Africa as a whole, giving individual accomplishments a collective meaning and imposing intense pressure on the youth (Sue & Sue, 2012). The big question is why these attitudes have not changed despite evidence of abuse and mistreatment of migrants in the Gulf. Or is it possible that attitudes have changed, and the youth going to the Gulf do so against people's approval? These questions can only be answered through constructive engagement with returnees and migrants who are still in the Gulf region.

Finally, according to the TRA, perceived behavioural control also influences migration patterns and motivations. Perceived behavioural control refers to an individual's perception of how easy or difficult it is for them to carry out a particular behaviour or action (Salgues, 2016). If individuals believe it would be difficult to migrate, they may be less likely to do so than those who perceive it relatively easy. Factors such as financial resources and access to information

can influence this perception; individuals with greater financial resources or access to information may be more likely to migrate than those without these resources or access (Kabuiku, 2017). Kenyan travel agents seem to understand this concept and offer an enticing solution to poor Kenyan youth. Anyone interested in going to the Gulf region has their documents processed for them and an air ticket bought as well. These people pay nothing to migrate. However, the expenses are later deducted from their salaries, with some returnees stating that the amount deducted is often more than double the expense (Munga, 2016). Saving to migrate is difficult, especially when jobless or precarious. The avenue provided by the travel agents could explain the allure of the Gulf.

In conclusion, the Theory of Reasoned Action gives a powerful view of the motivations that influence individuals when migrating. Attitudes towards migration can be shaped by notions of its appeal, external perceptions of approval, and one's individual control. Knowing these aspects can help us comprehend why people opt for migration and what motivates them through this journey.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The methodology chapter of this thesis provides an overview of the research approach taken and the methods employed in the research. It outlines the research design, data collection methods and analysis techniques. Furthermore, it explains the sampling techniques, data collection instruments and procedures, and the study's limitations. The chapter also explains how the results were interpreted and presented. Additionally, it provides an overview of the ethical considerations adhered to throughout the research process. For these reasons, it is a critical component of this thesis.

3.1 Study Approach

I chose the qualitative approach for the study. The approach has been widely acknowledged as suitable for exploring issues that require digging into more profound human behaviour, i.e., emotions, feelings, and attitudes. As put by Bryman (2012, p. 380), it emphasises words and experiences rather than the quantification of data collection and analysis. I found this relevant to my study because my primary interest was to learn about Kenyan workers' views and perspectives on migrating to the Gulf. Having read many articles claiming the mistreatment of workers in the Gulf, I knew a more in-depth approach was needed. It is crucial to understand the social world from the perspective of its participants (Bryman, 2012, p. 380). This further necessitated the adoption of the qualitative approach. I firmly believed that no one was more suited to explain the experiences of survivors than the survivors themselves.

The mistreatment of Kenyan workers in the Gulf is an emotive issue requiring careful and well-planned investigation. The Kenyan government and the governments of various Gulf countries had been involved in numerous diplomatic engagements that were yet to yield lasting solutions. It was critical that any approach chosen to unearth the issue was thorough and brought me closer to the survivors as possible. By selecting the qualitative approach, I allowed myself to feel and understand what the victims had gone through first-hand.

3.2 Data Collection

The choice of data collection method is critical for the success of any study (Bryman, 2016). Given the sensitivity of the data I intended to collect and the need for closer interaction with participants, I firmly believed that face-to-face and online interviews and focus group discussions would be more suited for the study. The use of multiple instruments is encouraged

for complex phenomena like the one I was investigating: “For complex, uncertain, and multifaceted social phenomena, multi-method approaches may be more suitable, which may help leverage the unique strengths of each research method and generate insights that may not be obtained using a single method” (Bhattacherjee, 2012, p. 22). The richness and extensiveness of the data I collected using the three instruments justify their selection and use.

3.2.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are critical to qualitative research. According to DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019, p. 57), they are “an effective method for data collection when the researcher wants to collect qualitative, open-ended data, explore participant thoughts, feelings and beliefs about a particular topic, and delve deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues.” Additionally, they allow a researcher to focus on the interviewees’ perspectives (Bryman, 2016, p. 470). It is for these reasons that I chose semi-structured interviews for the study. I knew they would allow me to collect rich and robust data from the onset. With this approach, it was possible to provide essential guidance while allowing the interviewees to participate freely and openly.

Face-to-face Interviews

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted in Nairobi and involved returnees from the Gulf, people on the travel wait list, a government official, and migrants who were still actively working in the Gulf region. A quick online search about the ongoing debate on Kenyan youth's troubles in the Gulf showed that an increasing number were coming out to speak about their tribulations. I assumed that those who had come out might be more willing to talk about their hardships than those who had chosen silence. Consequently, I put them on my first list of participants -hoping that I would secure consent.

I also had a constructive interview with an official from the Department for Diaspora Affairs in Kenya's Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs. This was considered critical because it could help explain why bans had been put in place and lifted, yet the situation remained unchanged. Apart from answering all my interview questions conclusively, he provided additional details that shaped my study.

Online Interviews

While relatively new, as compared to face-to-face interviews, online interviews have become increasingly crucial to qualitative research. They were especially critical in the COVID-19

period when this study was conceived. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Wa-Mbaleka & Rosario (2022) outlined their importance as follows:

> Specifically, in the COVID-19 and post-COVID period, online interviews will continue to play an important role in qualitative research in four major ways. First, with online interviews, people can continue to maintain the required social distancing, either because of the COVID-19 situation or any similar situation in the future. Second, conducting online interviews is an efficient way to collect data. It saves time for both the researchers and the participants. Next, using online interviews is cost-effective, as can be expected. By conducting interviews online, all expenses related to travel are removed. Last, online interviews give much more flexibility to researchers and research participants than face-to-face ones. Online interviews are not restricted to a specific place and can even be conducted in the evening hours, something which may not be that appropriate for face-to-face interviews – p. 365.

The online interviews involved workers who are still in the Gulf. In the week preceding the official data collection exercise, a Kenyan woman appeared online, pleading for help to return home from Abu Dhabi (Wangechi, 2022). She talked of frustrations and humiliations beyond words. Her case and others showed that avenues for reaching the world were available. On the other hand, people who are lucky enough to get good employers are easily reachable. I intended to reach both categories of workers via online channels.

3.2.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions are equally crucial in qualitative studies. They are widely accepted because they can help expose severe underlying issues that are hard to predict (Bryman, 2016, p. 213). Unlike face-to-face interviews, where some interviewees simply stated their opinions, relevant or not, focus group discussions allowed participants to "probe each other's reasons for holding a certain view" (Bryman, 2016, p. 503). There was an active interaction that only enriched the debates. Moreover, a related study by Mburu (2019): "Human rights challenges for migrant workers: A case of returning Kenyans from the Gulf region," gathered richer data from focus group discussions than structured interviews. As people discussed their experiences openly in a group, they encouraged others who would have otherwise not shared theirs. I held two focus group discussions with three and four members each.

3.2.3 Participant Observation

I also used participant observation to complement the other instruments. This technique is critical because it can collect data that other instruments cannot. In short, it helps you to see, understand, and compare what is said to how the body responds (Garnett et al., 2018, p. 17). It is possible to detect deception, unacceptableness, exhaustion, and lack of interest, among other factors, through body language and gestures such as tonal variation, posture, and body movements. It is particularly important to use the ethnographic approach as it enables researchers to watch how life and situations unfold, in addition to examining the correlation between what people say and what they do, provide insight into the topics that are meaningful to them, what they value, to discern social and cultural trends, and as a result, gain a more comprehensive understanding of an issue or a situation.

Apart from working with undocumented persons on related topics, my experiences as an immigrant have sharpened my senses, allowing me to observe things most people would miss. Additionally, I was able to observe a lot because I lived in Eastlands, the area with the most migrants to the Gulf, throughout my data collection exercise in Nairobi. They say, "The recorder that resides in the body of the ethnographer is always 'on'" (Madden, 2017, p. 64). My entire stay seemed to be a continuous data-collection process. Still, I remained cautious and alert, as emphasised by Madden (2017, p. 64), who warns, "The ethnographer needs to be aware of this, as typically, the participants one works with never forget that you are a 'recorder' regardless of how comfortable they become in your presence." Some observations I dismissed as irrelevant in real time turned out essential to my study, emphasising the importance of staying 'switched on' at all times.

3.3 Sampling and Sample Size

Kenyan migration to the Gulf has some unique characteristics. For instance, most people headed to the region have secondary education and come from low-income families (Bhalla, 2021). Highly educated Kenyans with specialised skills and those from wealthy families often head to the West (Kibii, 2022). Therefore, by design, those heading to the Gulf are often on temporary visas lasting one to three years. I also established that many returnees usually wait for new opportunities, explaining why I chose them as my primary data source.

The initial plan was to enrol approximately 20 returnees and five workers still in the Gulf to participate in the study, bringing the total number of participants to 26. This became impossible

due to several factors. Bryman (2016, p. 502) states, “In much the same way that, in quantitative research, the discussion of sampling revolves around probability sampling, discussions of sampling in qualitative research tend to revolve around the notion of purposive sampling.” Consequently, I used purposive sampling to choose the final participants.

Purposive sampling has a few sub-types. However, for this study, I chose snowball sampling, which “refers to a technique in which the researcher initially samples a small group of people relevant to the research questions, and these sampled participants propose other participants who have had the experience or characteristics relevant to the research” (Bryman, 2012, p. 415). It was wise to engage the few participants I knew to get others since they knew each other better. The technique ensured that I got the most suitable candidates for the study (Bhattacherjee, 2012, p. 22). For instance, I was interested in youth returnees, i.e., 18-35. As qualitative studies primarily focus on the richness of data collected rather than the quantity, I firmly believe the 13 participants involved were sufficient.

3.4 Participant Recruitment and Selection Criteria

Most returnees live in Eastlands, one of many the Nairobi city regions inhabited by low-middle- and low-income earners. My work specifically dwelt around Umoja, Tena, and Donholm, Eastland’s most populated estates. The areas have many returnees and potential migrants – the ones saving money to travel to the Gulf. Dwelling in the region was guaranteed to save time and resources spent searching for participants.

The first stage of participant recruitment involved contacting my friends, acquaintances, and administrators in Eastlands. Since assistant chiefs (administrators in charge of districts) proved busy, I turned to the “nyumba kumi” chairpersons (community leaders). The posts were introduced in Kenyan cities, especially Nairobi and Mombasa, after the numerous terrorist attacks of 2012. I relied heavily on my close friends to establish connections with the first group of returnees. I emphasised being introduced to people they did not know well as long as they were returnees. The rationale was to prevent the echo chamber effect, where I would collect data from within a bubble of like-minded participants. Consequently, I asked each new participant to recommend someone else, creating a generic network.

Three participants became priceless in my recruitment drive, providing invaluable referrals. The interviewees they recommended became key informants in my research work. However, I

did not accept everyone who was introduced. I conducted a series of 'informal' telephone interviews to ask for their basic information. This was to help in the selection process, where demographics were considered vital. Some studies have shown that sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, status, family life cycle, religion, education, income, and race and lived experiences play significant roles in people's behaviours, responses, and perception of justice (Amegayibor, 2021, p. 130). Having a diverse group of participants was essential for getting a balanced view of the fundamental reasons driving young Kenyans to the Gulf. Moreover, it was important to compare narratives of experiences and identify common patterns.

My initial selection criteria included returnees and those in the Gulf only. However, my interaction with a lady on the travel waitlist changed my mind. I met her while pursuing a travel agent for an interview. While he eluded me for the third time, the chance meeting was memorable. My engagement and interactions with her over the following months informed my decision to include her voice in my work. I wanted people who had lived and worked in the Gulf region to provide first-hand accounts. Unbeknown to me, returnees and immigrants abroad often maintained a close relationship with the peers they left at home. These interactions often informed the decision to immigrate. While these messages were second-hand, they proved equally important to my work by bridging some information gaps.

I also avoided participants who insinuated or asked for compensation. As part of my commitment to research ethics, I did not want to 'hire' anyone for an interview. I lost many potential interviewees because of this stand. However, I have a clear conscience that I stuck to the ethical standards expected of a researcher, especially given that I got reliable and committed participants.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Despite my earlier fears of not finding enough reliable respondents to interview, I was eventually successful. I interviewed 12 respondents: 7 returnees, one youth on a travel waitlist, three migrants in the Gulf, and one government official in the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs. The process ran over three months and included face-to-face and online interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions.

3.5.1 Face-to-face Interviews

I travelled to Nairobi after identifying most of my participants. I captured their basic contact information to engage them on arrival so that we could plan for interviews. On my first trip, I had over 20 participants who had expressed interest in the study. However, because I had not received my research approval, my preliminary engagement was purely for "regulating" and standardising my data collection instrument – the questionnaire. Despite having enough time on my side and being assured of availability, the reality was quite different.

Most participants could not afford time for the interviews, as they were busy hustling for their families. Half of those who changed their minds at the last minute did not provide any updates or re-schedule the meetings. Only two participants kept to their schedule. As a result, we met at Greenspan Mall, a local establishment in Eastlands. Another seven asked for a postponement, claiming they could only make it on weekends. Ultimately, I only had three constructive engagements, which were quite revealing, but insufficient.

The first round of interviews was not very successful. Consequently, I organised the second and third rounds using different approaches. In the second phase, I focussed on meeting interviewees at their convenient days and venues. The meetings took place in their homes (2), places of work (1), a local sporting event (1), and other restaurants in town (4). While I have conducted several interviews before, I struggled with leading these ones, often failing to ask vital questions and sometimes letting the talks drift off too far away from the topic. I chose semi-structured interviews to curb such cases but failed to exploit their advantage.

Armed with the lessons from the second interviewing round, I organised a third one. This round included four participants from the second round. Interviewing the same participants multiple times, also known as serial interviewing, is essential where "one-shot interviews cannot produce information of adequate quality, quantity, and validity" (Read, 2018, p. 1). Additionally, it can reveal information that was missed, forgotten, or simply ignored during the first interview. The method is suitable "when studying complex or ill-defined issues, when interviews are subject to time constraints, when exploring change or variation over time, when participants are reluctant to share valid information, and when working with critical informants" (Read, 2018, p. 1). This study met four out of five conditions in the criteria: exploring a complex issue, time-constrained, dealing with sensitive informants, and the informants' reluctance to talk about sensitive issues in the first interview.

This final round of interviews was conducted in one day at the same venue, Wapek Restaurant. It involved 7 participants, with four having participated in the second round. I interviewed them one after another and got invaluable information. My experience with the participants in the earlier rounds enabled me to control the process much better. I provided the interviewees with drinking water and some soft drinks on arrival. I dwelt on making them comfortable and only asked questions that generated engagement. With each interview, participants became more and more talkative and involved.

3.5.2 Online Interviews

I conducted online interviews through Zoom to reach participants working in the Gulf region during data collection. While I expected this to be the most effortless process, it turned out otherwise. Besides knowing only one extremely busy participant, finding the others proved challenging. In fact, it was until the last week of sorting out the data I had collected via face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions that I found willing and available participants.

I conducted three successful online interviews via Zoom. I ensured they were scheduled at the interviewees' convenience, meaning I conducted some late at night. Even though I expected each interview to last 30-40 minutes, they all took over an hour, with one lasting 78 minutes. One participant struggled to set up her smartphone for the interview due to internet restrictions in her residence in Dubai. However, we resolved the problem using VPN.

3.5.3 Focus Group Discussions

This was probably the most demanding data collection procedure. Organising participants who could hardly spare time for a joint meeting was quite involving. I had to postpone the meetings three times after most participants indicated unavailability. The two successful meetings were held at Nairobi's Stanmmer Park, Ngong Road.

The first focus group discussion occurred in the morning between 9 - 12 Noon. It involved three participants, two males and one female. It was a relatively lively session. I had offered to buy soft drinks, but since the meeting ended at noon, I paid for their lunch. The second meeting began at 0230 PM and involved four participants, one male and three females.

The discussion proved more productive than my initial individual interviews. The participants opened up and talked more openly and emotionally about their experiences. I left the members to discuss anything that came up and only asked three probing questions. The discussions went on for over three hours, a fantastic achievement. It was by far my most valuable data-collection exercise. I was so grateful that I refunded their fares – they did not ask for it but truly appreciated the gesture.

3.5.4 Participant Observation

As explained under "participant Observation" as a data collection procedure, I was always alert to learn. I observed and recorded how participants behaved and reacted to various issues. I noted what interested them the most and what raised some concerns. Most importantly, their emotions helped me know when to push for more and when to relax. My observations occurred in their homes and public spaces, i.e., restaurants and malls.

3.6 Data Processing and Analysis

Poor processing and analysis render an entire study useless, even with the richest and most accurate data. Therefore, choosing this study's most appropriate data processing and analysis techniques was critical. Qualitative studies can use content, thematic, narrative, grounded theory, or discourse analysis to determine patterns and trends. However, given the volume of data I collected – over 200 pages of written text – and my time constraint, I settled for thematic analysis. This technique requires a researcher to develop "themes and subthemes [which] are essentially recurring motifs in the text that are then applied to the data" (Bryman, 2016, p. 579). developing themes and subthemes is faster and more efficient, especially when working against a tight timeline.

I coded the texts from interviews, focus group discussions, and observations into over 21 themes and subthemes using repetitive phrases, words, and topics – Only five themes were considered significant. They appeared in the literature in various forms and were mentioned by the participants several times. Simply put, there was enough data to build and support them. Some of the themes that narrowly missed the criteria include family rejection, feelings of shame and dishonour, search for and expression of independence, and toxic gender roles. While I had indicated in my proposal that data collection would be carried out in English, the ground was quite slippery, with most participants shifting between multiple languages, including English, Kiswahili, and Sheng. Sheng is the "corrupted" version of English popular among Gen Z. I had to adapt and take notes in all languages. Recording the information in the languages used by

participants was critical because it helped me separate what they considered important from less important. I noticed that most interviewees spoke in either English or Kiswahili when talking about the issues they considered important and only used Sheng for less important ones. While all these happened subconsciously, English seemed a language of hierarchy in this case.

Reading Alim et al. (2020), I realized that English is often considered a language of hierarchy due to its long and complex history as the language of power, wealth, and privilege. It is largely associated with the upper classes and is often seen as a sign of high social class. In Kenya and most parts of Africa, English was used by the colonisers and became a language of oppression. Today, it is used by elites in power because it carries a certain prestige that other languages simply do not have and so is seen as a sign of superiority (Mortensen et al., 2017). While it could have been about language competency and fluency, I could not help but think that my participants used English to discuss important issues because they considered it superior. On the other, it could have been an attempt to get my attention to the things that mattered to them. Either way, language use came out as a rational decision. Despite collecting data in multiple languages, I translated the texts into English during data processing and analysis to ease coding.

3.7 Gaining Access

Gaining access is a fundamental aspect of conducting any research involving human beings. It is vital for reaching out to and engaging participants while gaining access to information that may otherwise be difficult to obtain, such as data or records. However, this process is never straightforward. Sometimes searching for facts takes researchers "towards those 'formal', 'private' settings where boundaries are clearly marked, are not easily penetrated, and may be policed by 'gatekeepers'" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 49). In most cases, researchers' "initial access negotiations may be focused on official permission that can legitimately be granted or withheld by key personnel" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 49). Similar restrictions characterised my case.

As a student at a Norwegian institution doing fieldwork in Kenya, I was expected to deal with both governments to get permission for data collection. First, I had to seek clearance from the University of Agder and the NSD, which were pretty straightforward. Then I sought research approval from NARCOSTI, the body in charge of clearing students to carry out any research in Kenya. Meeting their safety requirements was hustle-free. However, they demanded Ksh. 45,000 (3800 kroner or USD 350) for approval. Kenyan students pay Ksh. 1000 (NOK 80) for

the certification, but since I presented myself as a Norwegian student, I was required to pay international rates. This added to my financial constraints, but I had no option.

I was also expected to seek permission from the local administrator in whose region I would collect data. On our first acquaintance, I immediately realised he was a typical gatekeeper who needed 'favours' to open the door for me. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) explain, such individuals can prevent a researcher from accessing participants for interviewing by requiring them to go through a lengthy and restrictive process of submitting the research proposal and gaining approval before being able to conduct any interviews. He insisted that I obtain special clearance, follow specific protocols, and provide proof of credentials and qualifications. Furthermore, he tried restricting my access to two estates, Umoja 1 and Umoja 2, claiming that returnees do not reside there.

These measures could have restricted my access to potential participants and thus inhibited the research process. However, I used my persuasive skills to gain access. The experience confirmed to me that gaining access "is a thoroughly practical matter" that "involves drawing on the intra- and inter-personal resources and strategies that we all tend to develop in dealing with everyday life" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 41). In retrospect, being an African, born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya, could have played a significant role in opening doors for me.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Studies involving human subjects must be carried out carefully. The individuals involved and their results could be compromised without appropriate ethical safeguards. This is especially true when the research involves vulnerable members of society, such as children, people with disabilities, and the elderly. While children and the elderly were not involved, returnees can be a tricky group to engage, especially given the study's sensitivity. Therefore, I ensured that I adhered to the highest ethical research standards before, during, and after conducting my research.

First, I made it clear that participation in the study was voluntary. Consequently, any participant who wished to stop cooperating could do so at any time without giving any explanations whatsoever.

Secondly, I sought participants' consent before engaging them in the study by issuing them a consent form to sign (Appendix: 1). The form provided a full explanation of the research objectives and the potential risks of involvement in the study. Only those who signed the form – giving their consent – were allowed to participate.

I also issued participants a cover letter detailing why I was conducting the study, its potential benefits to society, and how they could benefit from it. This was meant to dispel misunderstandings, misconceptions, and fears of being used as guinea pigs for something sinister. It was also done so that they could make an informed decision about whether they wanted to participate in the research.

I ensured participants' confidentiality by using secure data storage systems and anonymising data where possible. Moreover, I did not capture personal data which could be used to identify participants, such as their names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, etc. It is important to note that the names captured in this study are not the participants' real names.

I was aware that my research could pose a risk to some participants by causing them to feel distressed or uncomfortable. The biggest risk I considered was the backlash from other people planning to travel to the Gulf and the possible retaliation from travel agents who want their "work" left alone. Consequently, I provided clear information about the purpose of the research and all potential risks involved. Participants who were reluctant to take any risks were excused.

Upholding human dignity is a critical part of any research process. I carried out myself humbly and did not judge or discriminate against anyone. I also refrained from blaming the victims or making them feel responsible for any misfortunes that had befallen them. This was especially important when I visited two interviewees in a slum.

I ensured that no participant's health was risked. While the COVID-19 pandemic was no longer the centre of world news, I took no risks. I instructed all participants to wear masks during our meetings. I also insisted on basic hygiene, such as washing hands and maintaining safe distances.

I respected and adhered to common etiquette when I visited two interviewees in their homes not to upset anyone. This included eating with the families and asking common family questions that might appear personal in the West but are expected in African traditions.

CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This study aimed to determine the connection between youth unemployment in Kenya and increased migration to the Gulf region. In this chapter, I present the findings obtained comprehensively and in a structured manner, allowing further analysis, discussion and interpretation.

4.1 Motivations for Migration to the Gulf

Migration is one of the most difficult decisions to make. Leaving your family and friends behind and saving money for such a move is difficult. However, from the literature explored in this study, it seems an easier decision for Kenyan youths from economically disadvantaged background than those from wealthy families. My research has revealed four main motivations for migration: Poverty, the search for better opportunities, social exclusion and disillusionment.

4.1.1 Poverty

Poverty is widely prevalent in Kenya and Africa in general. According to a 2018 report, "The proportion of Kenyans living on less than the international poverty line (US$1.90 per day in 2011 PPP) was 35.6% in 2016" (World Bank, 2018). Still, more than 85% of the population are economically unstable (Macrotrends, 2023). Some participants categorically stated that they would not have gone to the Gulf if they were financially stable or from a wealthy family.

One interviewee, 38-year-old Miriam, a mother of four boys who has travelled to two destinations – Qatar and Dubai - claimed, "When my husband left us, I had to feed the children on my own. I had no job. I tried washing clothes for people, but the money was never enough. It was so painful that I left my lastborn when he was hardly three months old when I went to Dubai. No rich mother does that. No mother should have to do that…." Mercy added, "When you live in Nairobi without a permanent job, you are either on the streets at night or hawking products in the hot sun during the day. Poverty is humiliating." Conversely, Maggie travelled to Saudi Arabia to provide for her ageing and poor parents.

Poverty and unemployment are significant drivers of migration rather than pursuing new opportunities (Vlieger, 2014, p. 291). This could explain why participants respected their contracts despite finding different working terms and conditions. For instance, Francisca found

new terms on arrival in Dubai but stayed for six years instead of returning home to “fight for survival.” She could not imagine facing joblessness and hopelessness in Kenya.

4.1.2 The Search for Better Opportunities

Globally, people primarily migrate for better opportunities. In fact, the search for better or new opportunities has been cited as the “most common reason for migration” (Brandão et al., 2020, p. 185). The participants indicated they travelled for better opportunities to improve their quality of life. They had hoped for higher wages, lower taxes, access to better healthcare, and improved social and economic opportunities.

Edwin, a 29-year-old IT expert who travelled to Dubai for work, claimed he got an unbeatable offer. He also stated that he hoped to grow and develop professionally, becoming a top expert while making double what he earned locally. Even though unexplained circumstances made it impossible to attain his plans in Dubai, he did make much more money than he could have made in Kenya. His failure made the four years he spent in Dubai difficult to take. He lamented, “Leaving behind my family and friends, learning a new language, and even dealing with the stigma of being an outsider in a new place was worth the potential for a better quality of life. But it all went wrong! In the end, it’s just regrets.”

Another participant, Treezer, a single mother of a 7-year-old boy, claimed she was offered 100 Omani Rials for a domestic housekeeping role. The amount was four times what she made in a month. She knew she had to take the opportunity for the sake of her child. She dreamed of paying for his schooling and other upkeep needs, but this became exceedingly difficult, forcing her to return home. Eunice, a 36-year-old single mother of two teenage boys married to a primary school teacher, had similar experiences. All her earnings in Saudi Arabia did not help her achieve her dreams.

The experiences of Edwin, Eunice, and Treezer highlight the challenges of migration for people experiencing poverty. Murrugarra et al. (2010, p. 13) said, “Although migration increases income and often reduces poverty, the migration opportunities of the poor are different-among the poor there are fewer migrants, and they travel to 'cheaper' destinations with lower returns.” Despite making monumental sacrifices like leaving behind four months old babies, migration for the poor “translates into lower returns and, very likely, less poverty reduction. As a result of this cyclical interconnection, the poverty-reducing potential that migration holds for

developing countries is often not maximised" (Murrugarra et al., 2010, p. 13). The system is rigged to limit how much progress poor people can make after migration. Therefore, the high hopes they have before migration often turn into disappointments.

4.1.3 Social exclusion

The Oxford Dictionary describes social exclusion as "exclusion from the prevailing social system and its rights and privileges, typically due to poverty or the fact of belonging to a minority social group". In other words, it is a process whereby certain individuals or groups are excluded from full participation in a particular society's economic, social and political life. While the term is often used interchangeably with social isolation, some scholars hold that it goes beyond feelings of loneliness or a lack of social connectedness (Cornwell & Waite, 2009). Social exclusion has elements of marginalisation, discrimination, neglect, and rejection (Riva & Eck, 2016). It breeds income inequality, poverty, and unemployment, which are critical to this study.

From the focus group discussions, it became clear that social exclusion is a powerful motivator for young Kenyans to migrate to the Gulf. Many participants said they were victims of discrimination, preventing them from getting jobs or opportunities. According to Francisca, her tribe (ethnic group) made getting a job in Nairobi harder. She claimed, "When you look for a job, they just read your name, and that is enough. They do not want us (her tribe) …sometimes I feel like changing my name!" Maggie, who comes from the "right" tribe, lamented social exclusion. She claimed, "I do not think it is just about tribes. I am ***, but I still could not get a job. It is the rich being together. They only give jobs to the children of the rich and the ones with connections. My tribe has not helped at all!"

In the cases above, social exclusion led to alienation or marginalisation among those affected, which drove them to seek a better life in the Gulf. A more significant issue was a lack of education and skills training. Participants admitted that having low education levels limited their opportunities, relegating them to precarious labour. Without the necessary qualifications, they struggled to remain in Kenya to compete in the job market and survive. The situation is almost out of their hands, given that poverty prevented them from advancing their education. It is a vicious circle that is hard to break, keeping them socially excluded.

4.1.4 Disillusionment

While Kenya has registered significant economic growth over the last three decades and attained the 'lower-middle income status,' its citizens remain widely disillusioned with its leadership and governance. Whereas some comments bordered 'discontent,' a majority were outrightly disillusioned. Maher et al. (2021, p. 104) state, "Disillusionment arises when life experiences strongly discredited positive assumptions or deeply held beliefs. Under these conditions, people feel lost, confused, and disconnected from their social environments." According to the study's participants, getting a job in the country was almost impossible if you knew no one. Networks matter in the country more than qualifications.

A 34-year-old participant, Francisca, who worked in Dubai for six years, claimed, "I came back with Ksh. 1,400,000 (Approximately NOK 100,000), which I hoped was enough to start me off and pay for a corporate job locally – most Kenyans pay bribes to get jobs. However, it has not worked that way one year on. I cannot get a job because I know nobody. I have used more than half of the money. Now I must return to hawking, which I worked so hard to avoid." Another 32-year-old participant, Mercy, claimed, "Looking for a job here is a waste of time. They conned me Ksh. 200,00 for one. After high school, I searched for one for six years and failed. I chose to go to Lebanon!" All participants shared these sentiments.

When people feel hopeless, they may not have any other option but to abandon their home country and look for a better life elsewhere. For many participants, life's prospects in Kenya were so bleak that migration seemed the only viable option. The situation was exacerbated by tribalism and nepotism, which led to favouritism and corruption, leaving those on the wrong side of the power dynamics feeling powerless and hopeless. Maher et al. (2021, p. 104) describe the situation better: "Ultimately, disillusioned individuals struggle to maintain meaning and inhabit a state of existential concern." The inert desire to provide and protect makes it harder for parents, especially single mothers, to sit and observe as their children starve.

4.2 Sources of Information on Migration to the Gulf

The decision to migrate to another country is often a difficult one. It is even more complicated when the destination country or region has a bad reputation. The Gulf region has negatively dominated Kenyan news for the last two decades. One would assume that migrating to the region is frowned upon or even feared. If so, how do the thousands of Kenyan youths moving to the region find information about migrating?

Finding the answer to this question took me into a long and complex search I did not anticipate. While the question seemed simple and probably straightforward, the respondents seemed restrained when answering it. My first round of interviews revealed 'expected' responses, with many participants stating they used social media connections. For example, Facebook was cited as the most helpful tool for seeking travel information, as young people already working in the Gulf flaunt their success stories. Others openly use the network platform to recruit young people. Treezer mentioned a WhatsApp group that recruits young people while providing an avenue for those in the Gulf to share their experiences. Maggie and many others used family connections. She had a cousin who was already working in the Gulf who informed her about all requirements for travel and what to expect. The family connection, she claimed, "made her more prepared and less worried about the move." I also found out that friends and acquaintances were vital and reliable sources of information. Edwin, for instance, learned about the IT position through a friend. Eunice was invited to Saudi Arabia by a high school friend.

I was astonished to discover an underground recruitment network that operates in the grey areas of the law, ferrying thousands of young people to the Gulf and other regions. While they cannot be said to be breaking the law, they are bending them for profits. For example, they offer unsuspecting Kenyans contracts with conditions that meet the minimum criteria set by the government, only to ask them to sign new ones with completely different terms on arrival. The discovery followed a focus group discussion comment, "Ni wadozi wanapeleka sisi maskini huko. Ndo huwezi ona their kids going there" [It is the rich who organise and ferry us, the poor, to those countries. That is why you cannot see their children going there]. That simple comment was approved by all the participants, either by nodding or openly agreeing. I had to call the participant aside to find out more. After a few minutes of engagement, she gave me a number to call.

The woman who received my call denied helping anyone to migrate. However, when I reached out to the participant who gave me the number, she informed me that "they" would call back after a few checks. Apparently, the government had been on their trail after a series of complaints about irregular immigration. The government is aware of these networks and openly admits they are helpless, as Kenyan youth are desperate enough to travel with unverified persons and organisations. In my interview with an official from the Department for Diaspora Affairs in Kenya's Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, I learnt that the government did

not have the exact number of Kenyans in the Gulf region because some of them use underground networks. Travelling through the official channels is costly and sometimes rigorous since the government has been trying to curtain the movements. These underground channels only require a passport and some basic medical tests.

When I finally got a response from my source, I realised that I needed not to pay anything unless I wanted a white-collar job. With blue-collar jobs, primarily domestic work, they would organise everything, including your travel expenses. They promised I would earn Ksh. 35,000 per month, which is approximately 2,722 NOK. This offer is too good to pass for a jobless Kenyan with hardly any education, socially excluded, and disillusioned.

As it is popularly said, be careful if the deal is too good to be true. According to my interview with an official from the Department for Diaspora Affairs, some people who take these deals disappear, never to be seen again. Others work for years only to return and find that no money was remitted to their accounts. While I could not substantiate it, my participant said they constitute the most abused, mistreated, and killed victims. Even though this claim is unsubstantiated, it only makes sense that people who lack government backing and are "invisible" can be easy targets.

Reading the report by Urban et al. (2020), I cannot stop to wonder what could have happened to the people who used the underground network and have not been seen again. According to the report, human trafficking "occurs when people are captured for exploitation using deception, threats, force, or the abuse of a position of vulnerability." What the young Kenyans consider a discreet and cheap channel to the Gulf could be an elaborate trafficking network that exploits their position of vulnerability through deception. The report further states, "Trafficked persons may be pushed to participate in forced labour, criminal activities, and can also be victims of sexual exploitation and even organ harvesting" (Urban et al., 2020). The prospects of these ills should trouble anyone. Nevertheless, Kenyan youth still use members of these networks to help them decide whether to travel.

4.3 Economic Independence and Socio-Economic Aspirations in Migration Decisions

Economic independence and socio-economic aspirations are major factors that influence migration decisions (United Nations, 2020). Economic independence is the ability to support oneself financially and can be achieved by finding jobs or other sources of income in the chosen

destination (Elder, 2010). Socioeconomic aspirations, on the other hand, refer to the desire to attain a higher standard of living, education, or social status in the chosen country (Elder, 2010). In most cases, migration decisions are made to improve one's economic situation or to pursue a better future for oneself and their family. The Kenyan case is not any different.

Overburdened by poverty and seeing no hope, the participants admitted to seeking greener pastures in the Gulf to improve their economic situation. In the last decade, the Gulf region has been seen as the land of opportunities for manual labour. Qatar, for instance, imported massive manual labour after being awarded the FIFA 2022 world cup hosting rights in 2010 to build its new stadia (Jackson, 2010). Many Kenyans exploited the opportunity, moving to the country in troves. Edwin, for instance, moved to Dubai to provide IT infrastructure support to an organisation that liaised with stadium builders to ensure the work's structural integrity. His motivation was to make more money while gaining invaluable experience in a large and busy company. However, the demand for labour was not limited to the men building and providing technical support for stadia, but also women providing help in homes and other establishments such as restaurants. The Kenyan women took the opportunities in large numbers.

Globally, women register higher unemployment rates as compared to men. This situation worsens in developing countries like Kenya, where most women are homemakers, providing care for households and families (Goldstein, 2010). Eunice, for instance, was married as a 16-year-old girl. Her ex-husband, a primary school teacher, denied her any opportunity for self-development. She was relegated to caring for their two boys, working on the family farm, and doing other chores. Unfortunately, she lost her third pregnancy because her husband failed to give her money to visit a clinic. She had to leave and find ways of making her own money. Jeni, who was married to a Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) soldier, endured an abusive relationship for five years until she could not do it anymore. The husband used money as a weapon, often delaying disbursement or failing to send any. Ironically, he pressured her into resigning from her medical supplies marketing job because of insecurities. She was prepared to live that way until her husband failed to pay fees for her daughter, who joined form one (equivalent to upper secondary in the Norwegian system). Jeni felt humiliated, especially because she joined the marriage with the girl but could not get another child with her husband. She said, "I think he wanted me to know we are not part of his life. I was so stupid not to see it. I had to leave for the sake of my child."

It was clear to me that Jeni's decision to leave was not just about a desire for economic independence but also socio-economic aspirations. She wanted to build herself for her child. To give her a better future and social standing. Her case is closely related to Doris, a 28-year-old mother of one girl. Doris was married but remained economically inactive for the first three years. However, she used the money she got from 'chama' – a women's merry-go-round- to open a Mpesa agency (A revolutionary money transfer system that allows people to send money using their phone numbers). Things started falling apart after that, as the husband claimed being disrespected: "He said I had become big-headed and that making money made me too independent for him." Interestingly, all these were said because she bought their daughter's clothes and made her hair. The husband felt he was losing control of her and soon started accusing her of cheating.

Doris' case is not an isolated one. Women are not just disproportionately jobless in developing countries; some men use that position of disadvantage to control them (Nikki van der Gaag, 2018). Unemployment, poverty, and single-motherhood work together to worsen women's situation. From the interviews, I gathered that the women who ventured into the Gulf were driven by their position of disadvantage. They wanted to change things. Such survival-driven migrants are easy prey for illegal migration networks. They accept to travel under any conditions, exposing them to precarious labour and other social ills. Jeni and Doris claimed they were both lucky to be alive but would still risk it all for their children. Jeni's greatest undoing was leaving her child behind with her brother. All the money she sent to care for the girl was diverted to other things. The girl was often sick and demanded much care that consumed most of her earnings. However, like many other women, her brother exploited her. Francisca was also exploited by her blood brother, who used the money she sent to build their father's house to furnish his own house instead. These cases make you wonder if these poor Kenyan women's economic independence and socio-economic aspirations are just a mirage.

This brings the issue of gender into the migration topic. The testimonies from the returnees indicate a society where women are not only victimised but also exploited. Like Eunice, Jeni, and Mercy, they are exploited by their partners, forcing them to seek refuge away from home. Unfortunately, the people they run to for help to keep their hard-earned money also exploit them. The study by Mintz-Roth and Heyer (2016) on the "gendered landscapes of trust and intimacy in Kenya's digital financial marketplace" highlights how women use Mpesa to increase their economic independence and social standing. The technology has not only allowed

them to receive money directly from their children and saccos but also to circumvent male family members, and sending money discreetly and directly to other women in the family. Inadvertently, Mpesa has improved trust and intimacy among women, while empowering them to make their own money. Like Doris, a few women have been empowered to start their own businesses and even travel abroad after using Mpesa. Like she put it, receiving money and deciding what to do with it independently is an empowering experience.

4.4 The Lived Experiences of Kenyan Migrant Workers in The Gulf and How They Respond to Them

This study was motivated by stories on social media and other news outlets in Kenya depicting the dire situation of Kenyan migrant workers in the Gulf. Some of the stories are heart-wrenching. For instance, in 2014, a video emerged online showing a Kenyan woman being branded with a hot iron rod in Saudi Arabia. In 2015, a local news channel shared a story detailing how a Saudi employer killed a young Kenyan woman and buried her in the desert for refusing to sleep with him (KTN News, 2021). Another video surfaced in 2017 where a child beat a middle-aged Kenyan house help as the parents watched without intervening (Juliana TV, 2022). In another story, a returnee narrated how her boss raped her and forced her to have sex with his dogs (Beja, 2018). In another heart-breaking story by KTN news channel, a young Kenyan woman was raped by her boss and then jailed for three years for adultery in Saudi (KTN Home, 2018). In my last example, a video of a middle-aged Kenyan woman emerged showing her breastfeeding puppies in Saudi Arabia under her boss' instructions (Wangari, 2022). These videos, among others, sparked wide outrage among netizens and sent me on a long journey of inquiry.

I wanted to know why the Kenyan youth still migrated to the Gulf region in large numbers despite the 'overwhelming' evidence of abuse, discrimination, and prejudice. I had expected to record stories of distress and painful experiences and give a voice to the voiceless. I firmly believe that a single study can change many things. However, the narratives and stories I gathered through interviews and focus group discussions contradicted my expectations. Whereas I knew better than to anticipate anything in the field, a part of me was only prepared for the worst. Below, I discuss some of the lived experiences of the participants in the Gulf and how they responded to them.

4.4.1 Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is the most cited form of exploitation against domestic workers, especially in the Gulf (Human Rights Watch, 2020). It often involves rape, inappropriate gestures, sexist remarks, sexual assault, physical assault, and denial of resources (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Whereas participants mentioned some forms of sexual abuse, they claimed they were no worse than what they have faced in Kenya.

Francisca, a 34-year-old participant who had worked in two destinations, Dubai – for six years and Qatar – for four years, claimed her bosses, their relatives, visitors, and the kids in the house often made sexual advances towards her. In Qatar, the boss's wife warned her on her arrival to keep off her husband: "If you let him touch you, I will kill you." Whether the stern warning was based on the husband's history or the woman's insecurities was unclear to her. Nevertheless, the man tried luring her for weeks before giving up. Curious, I asked if the man's attitude towards her changed after the rejection, to which she said, "No. Maybe he just became more respectful. He never came back home during lunch break again."

While the father was easy to deal with, his teenage son was more difficult. She claimed he disabled the house's CCTV one weekend to enter her bedroom. However, he changed tact when she threatened to report him to the parents: "He started treating me better and even brought some gifts. Nevertheless, I could see through his mischief because he was still sending me very explicit videos and photos on WhatsApp." Unlike the father, the young man became hostile when Francisca told his mum to talk to him. She then registered that she feared what he could do to her. In Dubai, things were much more different. The man never engaged her in any way unless in front of everyone. Even if she made a mistake, he had to wait for the others to come home before correcting her. She said, "I felt safe and respected even though he was often harsh."

Daniela narrated similar experiences while in the Sultanate of Oman. She claimed the man of the house tried coercing her into a sexual relationship which she declined. He tried a few times by going into her bedroom at odd hours. However, he stopped after she threatened to report him to her husband back in Kenya. His wife had established regular communications with Daniela's husband, making the threat quite valid. The woman had visited Kenya before and wanted to return to Mombasa, Kenya's second largest city, for a holiday. Daniela's husband, a local tour van driver was very informative and helpful. On the other hand, Leah narrated that her boss

asked her to join in watching explicit videos late at night, which she declined. The man apologised the next day and blamed it on "too much shisha."

While no sexual abuse should be treated lightly, the women agreed that the experiences were "normal." That the men stopped when they became firm and unwelcoming. As Daniela put it, "Ukicheza nao wataendelea tu!" – If you joke with them, they will not stop! The realization that the men who were painted in the media as "rapists" and abusers stopped when asked to do so was unexpected. In hindsight, I thought they feared admitting to being victims of sexual abuse because, in some communities and regions, people frown upon such acts and demean women victims (Kahn, 2015, p. 24). However, they could not have given the finer details they shared if they were afraid of being judged. To admit that the men they grew up with, worked with, went to school with, and the ones in their estates and neighbourhoods have subjected them to worse cases of sexual abuse was unexpected. These confessions do not, in any way, dismiss or downplay the harrowing experiences of so many women who have been sexually abused in the Gulf; they just add a new perspective to the issue. Consequently, evidences of sexual abuse shared by the participants cannot be ignored.

4.4.2 Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse is any communication used to degrade, belittle, frighten, or control another person (Lancer, 2022, p. 40). This can include name-calling, insults, intimidation, scolding, humiliation, threats, and excessive yelling. Verbal abuse is often overlooked and minimised due to its lack of physical contact. However, it can be highly damaging to victims, who often feel powerless and trapped (Lancer, 2022, p. 40). The effects of verbal abuse can be far-reaching, with victims often experiencing various physical and psychological issues. Studies have found that verbal abuse can lead to long-term mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Radell et al., 2021, p. 2).

Verbal abuse came up several times in the interviews and focus group discussions. Treezer's relationship with her female boss was complicated. She said, "I do not think she even knew my name. She always called me strange names in Arabic, which I later realised were abuses." Treezer did not hide how the name-calling made her feel humiliated, unwanted and dehumanised. Francisca also admitted to facing verbal abuse while in Dubai. She said the man often shouted at her and, at one point, banged on her bedroom door to wake her up. Needless to say, she had just gone to bed since she had cared for their sick child the whole night. Jeni

claimed that she was nicknamed “kaput” by her boss and his family. While she had assumed the name meant a short person, it turned out to be “a person who is of small importance.” She asked them to stop, but they still used it to tease or make her angry. She claimed, “It was not something to play about, but they made it one. They enjoyed making me angry. I found it unfair. To make it worse, even the five-year-old learned to call me that way.” She felt her abuses were racially motivated.

Having noticed that the women were keen to state that they faced sexual abuse at home, just like in the Gulf, I also asked if they experienced verbal abuse in Kenya. The answer was affirmative. However, they claimed demeaning remarks were rare. Leah, who worked in the Industrial Area for a company making women’s artificial hair, stated that her boss, an Asian man by origin, was just as bad: “He shouted at all of us and called us all sorts of names.” These accounts made me consider the possibility of racism in verbal abuse. This is especially because derogative and demeaning words that are often used against Black people were used on them.

4.4.3 Religious Intolerance

The Encyclopaedia of World Problems and Human Potential describes religious intolerance as “denying the right of people of another religious faith to practice and express their beliefs freely.” Religious intolerance can lead to discrimination, harassment, and even violence. Most of my participants were Christians. They claimed that moving to an Islamic country was more challenging than they imagined.

They stated they were mistreated and excluded from social activities. Jeni said, “If I failed to join them during ‘sala’ - prayer, I was rebuked. If I joined without an invite, I was reminded I was a ‘kafir’ – a non-believer. Every month of Ramadan was stressful and draining.” Eunice also claimed she experienced psychological abuse due to her beliefs. She was forced to wear the hijab all the time, including indoors, which she found “suffocating.” Doris, who was profoundly religious and carried her Bible wherever she went, had it confiscated. She never saw it again because she was supposed to “learn to be a Muslim.” Laureen had a more positive experience with her bosses. She was allowed to join them in prayers, which she did each time. However, she was against the dress code but had to compromise.

These experiences led to isolation and fear, which can have long-term psychological effects. They also created an atmosphere of mistrust between the participants and their employers,

which only exacerbated the tensions between them. Nevertheless, the participants overcame the hurdles by adjusting or swimming with the waves.

4.4.4 Overworking

Overworking was the most cited problem by participants. Everyone said they did more than they were supposed to do. According to Francisca, her work in Dubai was characterised by long hours, excessive workloads, and lack of breaks which led to physical and mental exhaustion, which in turn led to decreased productivity and morale. She claimed, “The mother even forgot she delivered a baby. She was all mine to take care of. To feed, bathe, clean, and lull to sleep. Moreover, when the child woke up at night, she called me to take her away!” There were times she hardly slept. For instance, when the child was ill or constipated. She added that she did not know when her working hours began or ended because she always worked.

Daniela said that she was told Sundays would be her off days. Even so, she was never free because she worked from Monday to Monday. Mercy, on the other hand, was allowed to rest on Fridays. However, the home was always full of visitors on the said day, making cleaning tedious the following morning. As a result, she was forced to help around each week to reduce her Saturday workload.

Treezer claimed she once fainted out of exhaustion and sleep deprivation in Oman. Apart from house chores, she cleaned the compound and sometimes the cars. Not to mention that she cared for 5- and 9-year-old boys. She claimed the boys were often troublesome and difficult to handle. She could have lost it if it were not for her boy. However, the thought of her boy in Kenya gave her comfort and strength to fight. As Maher et al. (2021, p.104) put it, “The past can provide solace as a refuge of meaning and social connection. Indeed, nostalgic reflection is a source of meaning in life.” Treezer’s statement showed that parenthood forced most single mothers to the Gulf and kept them there against all odds.

4.4.5 Racism and Discrimination

Racism and discrimination featured prominently in my interviews and focus group discussions. To deny the role of racism in the discrimination and prejudice against people of colour is to lie to self and others. Whether positively or negatively, Kenyan workers' treatment in the Gulf had the colourism of race written all over it.

Racism has a long and deep-seated history in the Gulf. Many pre-Islamic writings from the region testify to its contempt and dislike for Black Africans and anything of African origin (Bourg, 1994). While Islamic doctrines tried to neutralise, if not eliminate, the disdain, little has been achieved toward the objective. The evidence is deeply entranced in their languages, where black is associated with everything evil, undesirable, sinful, damnation, and deviltry, while white is the complete opposite (Bourg, 1994). Colour prejudice birthed social status in the Gulf region, making it very hard to change. The privileged citizens would like to maintain their status, while those of colour remain at the bottom of the social pyramid.

Even though some people claim that cases of racism have reduced globally, the truth is that things have hardly changed (Fredrickson, 2015; Alichi et al., 2016; Rosenberg, 2022). The participants talked of being called names, discriminated against, and enduring derogatory remarks. Treezer stated that her employer called her "kaput", which was humiliating. The other participants recalled incidences where demeaning languages such as "eabd" -slave in Arabic, "hartani", "iswid", and "aazi," meaning "servant", "nigger", and "second-degree citizen" were used. As Lewis (1992, p. 8) states, "The attitude towards black Africans remains on the whole negative." No other group of migrants today faces such pervasive and entrenched discrimination as Africans. Edwin, who has worked in the USA and the Gulf, even joked about it by saying, "The black man is discriminated everywhere, probably in heaven too!" Francisca reported that she began having peace when she accepted being a "lesser human being," allowing anything thrown against her. I found this quite troubling.

The cases of racism reported by my participants are not isolated. The Black communities in the Gulf, especially Basra, Iraq, continue to experience unimaginable discrimination because of their skin colour. Whelan (2022) states, "Persistent discrimination has manifested in poor literacy rates, high unemployment and little to no social mobility for Black Iraqis." In Basra, racism is not only exhibited in everyday practices and experiences, but it is also institutionalised and systemic. Institutionalised discrimination results are "reflected in disparities regarding wealth, income, criminal justice, employment, housing, health care, political power and education, among other factors" (Wells et al., 2022, p. 81). For instance, in Basra, the black community has resorted to menial jobs, e.g., washing cars, because the Iraqi government has refused to recognise them nor give them jobs (Williams, 2009). This explains why most migrants from Kenya only ended up as housemaids. If blacks born and raised in the region are unrecognised, the possibility of recognising international ones is slim.

The kafala system has been used to further racism and discrimination by many countries in the Gulf region, including UAE, Qatar, Oman, and Jordan. The framework was introduced to govern domestic workers, but it has been accused of aiding or allowing room for discrimination, abuse, rape, mistreatment, exploitation, oppression, and violation of fundamental human rights. The framework gives employers absolute control over their domestic workers, ensuring they cannot stop working, change jobs, or leave the country without permission (Transparency International, 2016, p. 199). There has been a global outcry against the system, but the region is adamant about changing it, exposing many domestic workers to abuse (Scott, 2017, p. 141).

While societies change over time, it is hard to expect a region with a deeply rooted history of racial hierarchisation not to prejudice and discriminate against people of colour. Therefore, the experiences of Kenyan workers in the Gulf may be racially related. Because they are seen as lesser human beings, they can be subjected to just anything. Or perhaps, because they travel knowing they are lesser humans, they can take anything, if not encourage it.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF EMERGING THEMES

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the analysis undertaken in this thesis. It weaves the information gathered through empirical literature review, interviews, and focus group discussions. I also discuss the results in detail and conclude on the research questions raised in chapter one. I go further to expose potential limitations of the study, any possible biases, and how they could have affected the results.

5.1 Single Motherhood Stress

Single motherhood is an incredibly challenging experience for many women globally. Juggling the responsibilities of raising children alone while managing a career or other obligations can lead to high stress and anxiety levels (Condon & Sadler, 2018, p. 872). This stress can significantly impact mothers and their children, affecting their mental health and overall quality of life. I established that it could be a source of frustration and extreme risk-taking in Kenya.

The theme of single motherhood stress was dominant throughout the study. Apart from 90% of my respondents being single mothers, their experiences were overwhelmingly linked to their status as single mothers. While it was impossible to mistake their pride as mothers, the burdens associated with the responsibility were equally evident.

The primary manifestations of the stressors of single motherhood were financial worries, lack of support, and feelings of isolation, which can all contribute to feelings of overwhelm and burnout, leading to depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues that can ultimately impact the mother's ability to provide for her children (Condon & Sadler, 2018, p. 872). It emerged that single mothers were boxed in tight spaces where their options were limited, forcing them to risk everything to provide for their children.

Eunice’s case, for example, shows how poverty can render women helpless. Despite being married to a teacher, she could not get medical help to save her unborn child because her husband refused to support her. Even though she was jobless, she opted to leave the marriage, which put her under immense pressure to provide for her children. Her husband fits the profile of men who use money, resources, and their positions of authority to manipulate and control vulnerable women (Shanneik & Moors, 2021, p. 17). Having left her marriage due to humiliation, Jeni found herself in the same desperate situation of providing for her daughter

without a stable job. Jeni, Doris, and Treezer also shared related experiences. Using different phrases, words, and languages, they shared one common belief, “I will do anything for my children.” This shared belief highlights the role of attitude in decision making.

According to TRA, attitude is an individual’s evaluation of the potential outcomes of a behaviour. They are formed on the basis of one's personal beliefs and values. While this could be considered a motherhood instinct to protect at all cost (feelings), I firmly believe it was shaped by beliefs (cognitive) as well. The mothers had seen their children suffer, and rationalised the decision to provide for them against all odds. Attitudes are seen as important predictors of behaviour because they influence the likelihood that an individual will engage in a certain behaviour (Wallace et al., 2005). As put by Allport (1935, p. 810) they “determine for each individual what he will see and hear, what he will think and what he will do.” Moreover, the cognitive component is made up of beliefs about the consequences of a behaviour (Wallace et al., 2005), emphasizing that the women were aware of the possible negative outcomes of going to the Gulf, but chose to do so anyway.

The extent of what the mothers could do for their children is unimaginable. In the focus group discussions, Mercy stated, “When you live in Nairobi without a permanent job, you are either on the streets at night or hawking products in the hot sun during the day.” While this may pass off as a simple statement, it is the epitome of desperation displayed by the participants. It shows the extreme levels the mothers are willing to go to provide for their children and their pessimism. The belief that while you are poor in Kenya, you can only hawk products or sell your body was disheartening. This shows that the choice to migrate was not just about the pull of a better life and income but also an attempt to escape the other possibilities – a case of pull and push, as outlined in Ravenstein’s Theory of Migration (RTM).

Interestingly, the participants insisted that prostitution was the last thing they could consider to provide for their children. This brought a moral perspective to the decision to migrate to the Gulf. Were the single mothers who travelled to the Gulf too desperate or unwilling to explore other ‘immoral’ options to care for their children? It is hard to tell. However, they made one thing clear; they would do anything to provide for their children. The decision between one desperate choice against another even more desperate one aligns with the provisions of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), as discussed in the literature. When confronted with two difficult choices, the women chose the one that aligned with their moral values.

This choice also brings the element of subjective norm into play. The participants reacted to the idea of prostitution very strongly. I could tell it was not just about their morals, but societal expectations as well. According to TRA, subjective norm refers to a person's perception of how others view a particular behaviour and how they think they should behave (Wallace et al., 2005, p. 214). It is based on beliefs about what other people think about an action. One could assume that the participants were influenced by the fear of making unpopular 'career' choices. This is especially important because one participant, Miriam, stated that she left her community because she was treated differently after separation.

The frustrations of single mothers in Kenya are exacerbated by their government's inactivity and lack of policy to care for them. Single motherhood rates in Africa are alarming. According to Ntoimo and Chadoka-Mutanda (2020, p. 147), "In Africa, data shows that over 22% of women aged 20-49 were unmarried mothers." East Africa has the highest number of single mothers in Africa, with Kenya being amongst the top three - 38.9% (Ntoimo & Chadoka-Mutanda, 2020, p. 147). While the government introduced a social protection program for the elderly in 2010, it ignored the plight of single mothers completely, leaving most of them vulnerable and desperate.

The bigger problem is that most of them are illiterate or have low levels of education, making it harder for them to get well-paying jobs. The condemnation to live their lives in the shadows, surviving from hand to mouth, has provided enough drive for many of them to seek opportunities elsewhere. I discovered that the Gulf is not their preferred destination but the only one that admits illiterate and semi-literate workers – domestic workers. This demonstrates active decision-making, which involves weighing different options stipulated in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Even though the women have few options, they know which ones to avoid and which to risk.

5.2 Shattered Dreams

My engagement with the returnees and the migrants still working in the Gulf revealed a trail of shattered dreams. Failing to achieve an objective for which you risked so much can be a painful experience for anyone, but it can be particularly excruciating for poor single mothers. These women left Kenya hoping for a better life for themselves and their families but faced numerous challenges that shattered their dreams. Not even a single returnee achieved everything they hoped for when they left Kenya.

Eunice's story shows the difficulty of breaking the vicious circle of poverty. Born in a low-income family and married at just 16 years, her decision to leave her marriage and go to Saudi Arabia did not change her fortunes. The cost of educating her two boys consumed all her income. She worked for four years and had little to show for it. Caught between extending her contract for another three years or returning to see her maturing boys, she chose the latter. Francisca's case is even more heart-breaking. She spent four years in Qatar only to return and find empty bank accounts. Her brother used all the money on "family" issues. Hoping to return her life on track, she signed another six years contract to Dubai. Unfortunately, her brother duped her again. He used the money she sent to build their father's house to furnish his own house instead. Apart from feeling betrayed, she claimed she had achieved "nothing."

Jeni was also a victim of shattered dreams. Her brother, with whom she had left her daughter, exploited her. He diverted all the money she sent to care for the girl to other things. Edwin, who had a better job as an IT expert, also failed to achieve his dreams. Apart from earning less than he had anticipated, he spent most of his money on pleasure and other "unplanned" expenses. His story is closely related to that of Mercy, who admitted to spending most of her earnings on a flashy lifestyle.

These narratives brought to my attention the importance of gender norms and values in determining the success of women as migrants. Some studies have shown that women face numerous challenges such as discrimination, sexism, and exploitation which contribute to their inability to succeed (Klugman et al., 2014). These challenges range from societal stereotypes that suggest women are less competent than men to limited access to resources and job opportunities. The Kenyan case presents a twist. The women are victims of their "networks of trust." Due to cultural expectations, they seem inclined to 'submit' to a male figure, who often turns out to be unreliable. Furthermore, it seems they rely of limited sources of information that keep them in a 'conditioned' state of mind, limiting their possibilities for social and economic mobility. For instance, they gained freedom by breaking away from abusive partners, but remained tethered to their own male siblings and relatives.

This behaviour can be explained, at least in part, by TRA - motivation to comply. The Theory of Reasoned Action posits that people are motivated to behave in ways that are socially acceptable and in line with the expectations of important others in their lives to gain positive

reinforcement or avoid negative repercussions (Zeigler-Hill & Shackelford, 2017). Salient referents, or those individuals whose opinions matter most, can influence a person's decision-making process and ultimately, their behaviour. This motivation can come from internal factors such as personal values and beliefs, or external factors such as peer pressure or the opinions of others (Zeigler-Hill & Shackelford, 2017). The women's decision to give their hard-earned money to male family members could be out of the desire to maintain family ties, especially given that they left their children behind, or the influence of cultural beliefs that make women subordinate to men in some African communities (Klugman et al., 2014). It could also be a desire for a sense of belonging, approval, and acceptance by those relatives.

The migration of an African to a foreign country is viewed in many positive ways. According to a study by Kabuiku (2017, p. 96), "When an African migrates, the community views this as a chance for promotion, growth, and improvement of their lives." Once you leave the village for a town, city, or another country, you are seen as having achieved something or set yourself up for great things. Ironically, the belief holds for both the learned and the uneducated. The people's expectations are shaped by the collectivist culture in Africa that makes personal achievements communal, putting so much pressure on young people (Sue & Sue, 2012). My participants are no worse off than their peers. However, the pressure of working in a foreign country is eating them up. When they left their villages for the Gulf, they did so with much hope and pressure on their shoulders – according RTM, changing one's life is the primary reason for migration. They hope to improve their lives and conquer the pressure not to return to the village as failures. As Nwoye (2009) puts it, the ones who return without achieving anything become village laughingstocks. Their lives fade, and they end up in despair, confusion, denial, cognitive discord, and general decline (Nwoye, 2009). Often, returning to the village or estate after a failed foray into foreign lands and cities is a ticket to the grave. While it is always possible to start again and build yourself up, facing one's community as a failure is a decision most young people cannot take.

While they did not say it, I could sense regrets in some of them. Miriam, for instance, seemed to regret leaving her children behind, especially her three-month-old son, for a better future, only to return and struggle again. The experience was harrowing. She missed all his milestones, including birthdays, first steps, and words. I could tell she was feeling a sense of guilt and sadness for not being able to provide the best life for her children after such a momentous sacrifice. It is hard to tell whether my participants' dreams failed out of poor planning or trusting

the wrong people. However, the decision not to return was a weighted one. According to RTM, migrants will only move when the opportunities available promises to improve their lives (Seiger et al., 2020). This seems to hold in this case, as the returnees resorted to local casual jobs instead of migrating again. Having faced the reality of migration and the little it offers to the poor, most participants reasoned against new deals.

5.3 Migration as A Route for Escaping Abuse and Discrimination

Migration has long been a route for escaping abuse and discrimination globally. For centuries, people have left their homes for safety, opportunities, and a better life (Albertazzi et al., 2019). I established that most participants did not only travel to the Gulf for greener pastures but to escape abusive relationships and communities and an oppressive regime. The most concerning reason for migration was cultural norms that enslaved women who had lost their husbands. Solvine, who lost her husband after a long illness, said she was left extremely poor and vulnerable. Her father-in-law forced her to be "inherited" – a cultural practice requiring widows to be taken by other men in the community to continue the dead husband's lineage.

The new life was difficult for her. She stated, "I did not even know the man but I had to stay for my children. They had paid my pride price, and I could not refund." Solvine endured the cold and abusive relationship for four years before finally choosing to leave. Her migration to Oman was more about escaping cultural practices that bound and limited her freedoms and choices than making money. She stated, "I was a community property. I did everything my father and mother-in-law said." Miriam also claimed discrimination by other women and community members for her separation from an abusive husband. Women bear the responsibility of sustaining a marriage in her community. Therefore, a broken marriage is always blamed on women, leaving most divorcees with lasting scars. She could not handle being treated differently and finally left.

Eunice's case was quite different. The man she loved and married abused her several times. Apart from the emotional abuse, which often involved days and weeks of complete silence in the house and non-engagement, he was also physically abusive. He berated her in front of the children and her siblings. She knew the man could not give his control easily, thereby choosing to move far away to Saudi Arabia. She jokingly said, "I wish I could see the look in his eyes when he returned home and found me gone! I did not say anything. I was best with him the last three days before I travelled." The abuse was so bad that Eunice feared he would kill her at one

point. She admits that her employer overworked her in Saudi Arabia. However, she slept peacefully, knowing no one plotted to kill her in her sleep. While the home should be a safe, welcoming, and comforting place, hers was the opposite, making her more than willing to migrate. The belief that migration offered a safer option drove her to the Gulf region, as posited in TRA: A person's attitudes and beliefs about a behaviour (migration) significantly affect their likelihood of engaging in that behaviour (migrating) (Zeigler-Hill & Shackelford, 2017). It is unfortunate that the safety she sought abroad did not materialise in its entirety.

Kuschminder (2020) established that migration is often the only viable option for escaping abuse and discrimination for many Africans. This is particularly true for women and marginalised community members who face systemic oppression and violence in their home countries. To women like Eunice, Solvine, and Treezer, migration offered a way out, providing an opportunity to escape imminent dangers and start a new life. They were subjected to gender-based violence, sexual assault, and emotional abuse at home but had few options for protection or escape. Unfortunately, some of them did not get the reprieve they had hoped for when they made the long journey to the Gulf.

In recent years, migration has become more complex and risky. Globally, many migrants face the dangers of human trafficking, exploitation, and abuse (Reisen & Mawere, 2017). My participants highlighted several cases of discrimination and prejudice in their new countries. As already discussed under racism, overworking, social exclusion, religious intolerance, and sexual abuse, their situation was not always ideal. Nevertheless, most participants indicated they would rather suffer in the Gulf than face discrimination at home. I could not stop wondering if their attitude towards mistreatment and abuse in the Gulf was meant to justify the decision to go there or was an outcome of years of discrimination at home. It is also possible that they prepared for the worst and could handle anything thrown at them.

5.4 Media Bias in Framing Migrant Experiences in The Gulf

The Gulf region has been a hub for migrant workers for decades, attracting millions of people worldwide for better job opportunities. While a significant number of migrants have found success in the Gulf, there are also many who have experienced various forms of exploitation and abuse, including poor working conditions, low wages, and limited access to basic rights (Al-Arian, 2022). Unfortunately, my findings have revealed that the media often portrays a

biased, inaccurate, and incomplete picture of the migrant experience in the Gulf, which perpetuates harmful stereotypes and misconceptions.

The media plays an influential role in shaping public perceptions. Before I travelled to Kenya to investigate what was happening, everything I read online painted a hopeless picture. The Gulf was a horrible destination where many Kenyan youths disappeared or died. The lucky ones returned with stories of pain, discrimination, dehumanisation, and discrimination. These stories were shared across all platforms, including social media, TV stations, Radio, Newspapers, and websites. As already stated, I was prepared for heart-wrenching stories. However, my interviews with returnees and the workers in the Gulf then disputed most of the narratives.

One common bias I noticed in media coverage of migrant experiences in the Gulf is the focus on extreme cases of abuse and exploitation. While it is important to shed light on these issues and hold employers accountable, this type of coverage creates a distorted view of the situation for many migrants who are not experiencing such extreme circumstances. But what is the motivation for such skewed reporting? According to Covello (2021), the approach is informed by the fact that negative stories are more likely to attract attention and sell newspapers. In this era of digital media, such stories generate engagement and clicks. Even more concerning is that the media failed to highlight the day-to-day struggles of Kenyans in the Gulf, such as long hours, limited access to healthcare, and difficulty sending money back to their families.

This problem is not isolated to migrants' struggles. Biased media framing has been reported in the link between terrorism and Islam (Powell, 2011; Rindrasih, 2022), Blacks and violence (Holt, 2013), and poverty and Africa (Poncian, 2015). On the other hand, some scholars argue that the media "cater to the needs of their audience and might in some sense write and publish stories that their readers want to read about, rather than what is in the best interest of stakeholders" (Larsen, 2022, p. 73). Therefore, it can be argued that the Kenyan media are fulfilling the interests of their clients. This could be in line with claims of increasing negativity bias globally (Stafford, 2014). Nonetheless, the impact of such negative framing cannot be overstated.

According to Edwin, things could have been better with objective reporting. However, the Kenyan media "likes sensational news at the expense of objective ones." The youth who migrate to the Gulf know there are risks, but not to the extent the media tries to make people

believe. Mercy said, “The media does not share information because they care; they do so to make money.” On the other hand, Jeni believed the government pays the Kenyan media to discourage the youth from going to the Gulf. Therefore, one bad story is shared repeatedly in different versions, each worse than the previous one.

Miriam brought to my attention a TV program, Daring Abroad, which had been screening for several years. The series, hosted by Alex Chamwada, a renowned Kenyan journalist, visits different countries and interacts with Kenyan entrepreneurs who have established successful businesses abroad. With hundreds of episodes and visits to several countries, the program only explored two businesses in the Gulf region. Most success stories were from the West, the USA, and other parts of Africa. According to Miriam, this was a demonstration of the deliberate attempt by the government not to show anything positive in the Gulf region.

I also noticed over-reliance on stereotypes when reporting Gulf news. In one television interview, a reporter said: “I know how Arabs (people of Arabic descent) can be cruel” (NTV, 2022). While this could pass off as a simple statement, it resonates with popular stereotypes about the cruelty of people of Arabic descent. Whereas there is irrefutable evidence of cruelty against black people in the Gulf, this framing ignores the individual experiences and circumstances that shape each migrant's life there.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This section summarises the research conducted, emphasising the main findings and outcomes. It reflects on the implications of the findings and offers suggestions for further research on the connection between unemployment in Kenya and the migration of youths to the Gulf region. Here, I condense the main takeaways and raise a few questions that need further examination.

6.2 Overview of Findings

When I set out for this study, I did not recognise how gendered the migration pattern to the Gulf region was. It was surprising to realise that over 90% of my participants were females. The initial pool of over 32 participants I had contacted to participate in the study only had four males. Even more surprising was the realisation that most participants were in the domestic work sector in the Gulf. While the discovery did not change my approach to the study, it made me emphasise other demographic factors, such as religion, age, ethnicity, and race, when selecting participants since balancing males versus females was unfeasible.

The findings suggest that the motivation of Kenyan youth to migrate to the Gulf region is driven by a complex set of factors. I argue that poverty, and by extension, unemployment, are the most prominent reasons for migration, with many young people lacking necessities such as food, shelter, and education, forcing them to seek alternative solutions elsewhere. Many participants stated the inability to provide for their children and families as the primary motivation to migrate. Their situation was compounded by the fact that they lacked proper education to secure good jobs.

I also determined that social exclusion played a significant role as marginalised groups struggled to access even the most basic resources and opportunities. The Kenyan government adopted the structure of colonial rule, giving power to the ruling elites who excluded other citizens from opportunities and resources. More so, ethnicity and cronyism deny people from poor families who lack reliable social network opportunities. A lack of opportunities, bribes to buy jobs, and education leads to hopelessness and disillusionment, leading many young people to seek out alternative paths to success.

However, it is important to note that searching for better opportunities is, perhaps, the most critical factor driving migration to the Gulf. Young people are increasingly aware of the vast

wealth and opportunities available there and are willing to take risks and make sacrifices to access them. Whether through formal employment or informal networks, many Kenyan youth are drawn to the promise of higher wages, better working conditions, and improved living standards.

Another major factor for migration is to escape gender-based discrimination and domestic abuse. Many women claimed abuse from their partners, families, and communities, making it harder for them to cope. Unforgiving and strict cultural norms that bind women, especially widows, to emotionless relationships of convenience were also mentioned. These women are viewed as vulnerable in their home communities yet face further discrimination and violence in the Gulf region.

Despite these motivations, it is crucial to recognise that migration is not a panacea for poverty and exclusion. Many young people face significant challenges in their new homes, including language barriers, cultural differences, racism, religious intolerance, and exploitation by employers. Additionally, while migration may offer short-term relief from economic hardship, it does little to address the root causes of poverty and inequality in Kenya.

I also explored the experiences of Kenyan youth in the Gulf region and determined that numerous challenges characterised them. The most prominent issue was racism, which was manifested in various forms. The participants reported experiencing workplace discrimination, especially from their employers, their children, and, in some cases, their relatives. They were often treated unfairly and denied basic rights, such as the right to rest, exercise their religious freedoms, and fair pay, simply because of the colour of their skin. This disturbing trend continues to affect the lives of many Kenyan youth in the Gulf region.

Another challenge was religious intolerance. The participants were mainly Christians, while their employers were Muslims. This often put them at odds with each other, with their employers insisting that they observe Islamic laws, including wearing the Hijab. Some of them were discriminated against or even punished for observing their religious practices. Everything had to be done in adherence to Islamic laws.

Overworking is another significant issue that Kenyan youth face in the Gulf region. Many employers demanded long working hours from their employees, even beyond what was stated

in their contracts. Some returnees stated that their work had no specifications, boundaries or hours. They could be called to do anything at any time. This often led to exhaustion and burnout among domestic workers, who had no choice but to continue working or risk losing their jobs or physical abuse. Overworking sometimes led to physical and mental health problems, with long-term effects on well-being.

Verbal abuse also emerged among the experiences. Some employers used abusive language towards their employees, demoralising and dehumanising them. Moreover, such cases created hostile work environments, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness among the workers. Lastly, sexual abuse was also identified. Many young women reported being sexually harassed or assaulted by their employers. However, these experiences were downplayed by the participants, who noted that they had experienced the worst cases of discrimination and sexual abuse in Kenya.

From the findings emerged the themes of single motherhood stress, racism and discrimination, shattered dreams, and media bias in framing migrant experiences in the Gulf. While the literature review prepared me for some outcomes, such as racism and single motherhood stress, some were completely unexpected. For instance, finding out that the Kenyan media dwelt so much on the negative experiences of workers in the Gulf, painting a biased picture of their experiences, was unexpected. I was also surprised to find out that the cases of discrimination and abuse that were taken out of proportion were not any different from those experienced by migrants to other destinations, e.g., Europe, USA, and Canada. Drawing from the comments of my participants, people of colour face racism everywhere they go. While significant progress has been made to improve the situation, we still have a long way to go. Having found no evidence of significant negative experiences such as rape, murder, assault, and other heinous crimes, I conclude that workers' experiences in the Gulf are not any different from those in other regions. However, the situation is blown out of proportion by the media.

6.3 Recommendations

While the migration to the Gulf has numerous benefits, it also comes with some burdens that need addressing. For instance, while many women migrate because of desperation and a lack of options in Kenya, some return even more desperate and optionless. And despite their growing numbers, there is no system in place to support them nor resources to help them navigate the stress of single motherhood. I recommend that the Kenyan government should create

community programs, online support groups, therapy, and counselling to help them cope. By seeking out these resources and managing their stress, single mothers can provide a stable and loving home for their children, even in the face of significant challenges.

Even though the Kenyan government fails to admit it, they have failed to control migration to the Gulf. Attempts to discourage the youth from migrating through warnings, bans, and restrictive legislation have only led to an increased flow of people to the region. While the restrictions have failed, they have opened room for underground migration networks that are not safe. The governments should work to ensure that migration is safe and legal and that migrants are protected from abuse and exploitation. This can only work if they accept the reality and embrace it. Young Kenyans will continue migrating if the country's economy remains unstable. Therefore, it is prudent to make the process safer for them.

Over the last two decades, Kenya has focussed on girl-child empowerment with programs to prevent teenage pregnancies, female genital mutilation, HIV and AIDS transmission, and gender-based violence. While the impacts of these programs remain largely undocumented, the rate of teenage pregnancies has continued to rise. These young mothers remain neglected. It is critical for the government to divert some resources to them.

The study's participants expressed deep concern over gender-based violence, victimisation, abuse, and discrimination in their own country. It is unacceptable that women should feel unsafe anywhere. Therefore, policymakers should make Kenya safer for women to live in and raise their children. This can be done through public awareness campaigns discouraging all kinds of violence against women or enacting harsher penalties for perpetrators.

While the media is regulated, bipartisan interests seem to overshadow their reporting of migrant workers' experiences in the Gulf. They seem more interested in alarmist news that brings engagement and clicks on digital platforms. There is a need to review this approach. It is critical for the media to adopt a more nuanced approach to reporting on migrant experiences in the Gulf. This means highlighting both the challenges and successes that migrants experience in their daily lives and recognising the diversity of experiences among different migrant populations. By providing a completer and more nuanced picture of the situation, they can help to dispel harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about migration in the Gulf.

The Kenyan government is taking steps to tackle the issue of unemployment. They aim to reduce unemployment and the resulting poverty through financing and other financial incentives, but they will have to overcome several obstacles. Policy interventions should focus on inactivity and job quality. As long as the jobs in the city remain precarious, the youth may not find any substantial difference between their struggles at home and in foreign lands. A desperate youth is unlikely to heed government warnings if they are not presented with better alternatives. Furthermore, the issue of political impunity in Kenya further exacerbates the concern that disgruntled youth are likely to become radicalised and willing to commit violent acts, as postulated by Alava et al. (2017).

6.4 Limitations of the Study

While the study was conducted professionally and in line with the regulations of NSD, financial constraints limited me. For instance, I had to cut my last visit by five days to save money. Consequently, I did away with my last round of interviews. Nevertheless, I had enough data to complete the task.

The stigmatisation of rape and other sexual offences in most African cultures made it hard to discuss such experiences with migrants. Even though I got enough information to derive conclusions, I firmly believe some participants held back. The specific question could have benefitted from an extra round of one-on-one interviews.

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APPENDICES

Appendix: 1. Informed Consent Form

DISSERTATION TITLE: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HIGH YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND INCREASED MIGRATION TO THE GULF REGION: THE EXPERIENCES OF KENYAN WORKERS.
DATE: 9/1/2023

The project's primary aim is to determine why Kenyan youth are migrating to the Gulf in large numbers despite government bans, negative testimonies from returnees, and sustained campaigns against migrating to the region. By establishing the drive behind the migration, I may be able to help the government stop cases of torture, physical harm, sexual assault, emotional abuse, dehumanisation, and other forms of abuse that workers in the region and returnees have reported. Furthermore, I might recommend viable solutions to risky employment abroad. To achieve these objectives, the study will be guided by the following research questions:

i. What is the role of economic independence and socio-economic aspirations in migration decisions?
ii. What are the motivations for the Kenyan youth to migrate?
iii. How do potential migrants seek information to help them decide whether to go to the Gulf?
iv. What are the lived experiences of Kenyan migrant workers in the Gulf, and how do they respond to them?

Who is responsible for the research project?
While I will conduct the study, it will be guided by the regulation of the University of Agder.

Why are you being asked to participate?
The success of this study largely depends on the quality of data collected, which is why your experience and expertise are needed as one of the chosen participants. With your background being relevant to the study's objectives, you will play an integral role in helping me achieve the desired outcome of this research. I anticipate interviewing 12 participants, and your corporation will be vital.

What does participation involve for you?
Your participation in the project will involve either a face-to-face interview or an online interview via zoom - whichever is more convenient for you to minimise any disturbances. It is estimated that each interview will take 45-60 minutes. I will use a few open-ended questions for guidance, but you will be free to talk about the more pressing issues concerning your trip to the Gulf. I will rely on note-taking to record your responses for future analysis.

Participation is voluntary
Participation in the study is voluntary, meaning you can choose whether or not to participate. Moreover, you may withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation or negative consequences.

Risks and benefits of participation
As a participant, you will not be facing any significant risks. The present risks are no greater than the risks you take when conducting any normal internet activities or sitting while chatting with peers. Even though the information gathered may not have a direct benefit to you, it will be used to help inform youth migration, which has the potential to save millions of lives.

Your personal privacy and confidentiality
The data collected from you will be used for no other purpose nor shared with third parties. I will uphold your confidentiality by using pseudonyms. Most importantly, I will not collect personal information such as emails, phone numbers, addresses, names, etc., which could be used to identify you. I will strictly adhere to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) guidelines for personal data protection. The Kenyan Data Protection Act No. 24 of 2019, which is in line with the GDPR, will also be adhered to. Most importantly, your data will be stored safely on the university's encrypted cloud server.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?
The study is expected to be finalised by December 2023. After which, the data collected will be discarded from the university's encrypted cloud server.

Your rights
As the study's participant, you have the following rights:

- Right to access the study's findings
- Right to request your data deleted
- Right to update your data
- Right to receive a copy of your data
- Right to contact the university's Data Protection Officer or the Norwegian Data Protection Authority if you suspect data breach or abuse.

What gives us the right to process your personal data?
None of your personal data will be processed without your permission.

Where can I find out more?
If you have any reservations, concerns, or general questions, don't hesitate to get in touch with the following:

- University of Agder via Margit Ystanes
- The university's Data Protection Officer: Margit Ystanes

- Data Protection Services, by email: personvernombud@uia.no or by telephone: +47 38 14 10 00

Yours sincerely,
Pamela Jared Lando
(Researcher)

Consent form
I have read and understood the details of the consent form. I voluntarily give my consent to participate in the study. I understand that I have the right to stop participation without giving any explanations whatsoever.

- ☐ Participation consent (tick)

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix: 2. Interview Form and Questions

Interview protocol

Interviewees will be able to begin their stories from any point they choose. They will have a great deal of control over the narrative, and those who want to convey their story with few interruptions will be able to do so. Pauses will be filled with probing questions or encouragement to continue. Finally, any concerns that do not arise naturally or sufficiently will be investigated thoroughly later.

Introduction

I will introduce myself to the participants and ask them their names and other basic family questions that will not be recorded. As a Kenyan, I understand the importance of asking people for their names and their family's welfare. It is often seen as a sign of concern and respect.

Part 1: Questions to returnees

1. When did you travel to the gulf, and when did you return?
2. Which country were you in?
3. What kind of work were you doing there?
4. Which factors influenced your decision to migrate to the Gulf?
5. Can you share with me, if any, some objectives you had set to achieve by travelling?
6. Tell me about where and how you found information about your destination country before travelling.
7. Did you sign any work contract before travelling for work? If so, did you understand its contents? Was it honoured?
8. Can you describe your regular workday for me, please? (Seek information about workload, off days, breaks, waking and sleeping time).
9. What kind of treatment did you get from your employer?
10. If a negative experience is mentioned, i.e., abuse, ask for the form of abuse endured, e.g., physical beating, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, etc.
11. Did you have any positive experiences you can talk about?

Part 2: Questions to migrants in the Gulf

1. Please tell me more about your home and community.
2. Tell me more about your family.
3. Share with me your education and work experience while you were in Kenya.
4. How did you learn about work in the Gulf?
5. What were your expectations before you left, and have they been met?
6. What are the reasons behind your migration?
7. Talk to me about the role of economic independence and socio-economic aspirations in your decision to migrate.
8. Tell me about the stories you heard about the Gulf region before travelling?
9. What are the main reasons behind your migration?
10. Tell me how you paid for your agency and travel fees.
11. Talk to me about your work, please.
12. What about where you live?

13. How would you describe your treatment over there?
14. Is there anything in your life that you would describe as stressful?
15. How do you cope with them?
16. Talk to me about your safety and protection (if you feel the Kenyan government has your back and will assist in case of any problem or if the local and international laws protect you).
17. If you could return to Kenya, would you do it immediately?

Part 3: Questions to a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

1. Is migrant abuse and discrimination still a challenge in the Gulf?
2. Share the procedures and protocols in place for rescuing Kenyans suffering abuse in the Gulf?
3. What is the trend and pattern of migration to the Gulf over the last 10 years?
4. Bans and negative narratives failed to curb migration to the Gulf. What new measures are used by the government to control it?
5. How would you describe the diplomatic relationship between the Gulf countries and Kenya?
6. How do you think the increased migration to the Gulf impacts Kenya's economy?