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By Guy Zurkinden | Palestine and the Middle East

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Interview with Quentin Müller, independent journalist

"The kings of oil and their slaves"



Sources: Press Correspondence

"Poor conditions of work, water in poor condition, long working hours, we know It's not good for our health, but can we really choose? Qatar and the bosses use us to build the stadiums, and then They kick us out when our bodies can't take it anymore." Testimony of a Nepalese worker who worked on the construction site of the Qatar World Cup.

"The father of the family He said to me in a demonic voice: 'If I kill you, here and now, your country will not He will do nothing for you.'" "Baba was behind me. When I was able to get up To look at him straight ahead, he threw boiling water on my arm. I felt that my skin melted, without any pain. I had so much anger in me, so much adrenaline (...) I wasn't cured after that. Baba and Mama sat in the living room table. On the table, there was a pistol and, next to it, two Bullets. The kafeel ["protective" pattern, according to the kafala

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system] He hinted that he might kill me if I didn't agree to record a video in which I must have said I accidentally burned my arm." –Testimonies of two Kenyan women who returned to their country after work as domestic workers in Saudi Arabia. The first was raped by the son of the family she worked for.

To through some sixty testimonies – from the worker who builds the World Cup stadiums to the maid who works in the houses Saudis or Qataris, through security guards, employees of the restaurants or even the mercenaries sent to fight for the Gulf States in wars, sometimes forced, in Libya or in Yemen - a surprising book, *Les esclaves de L'homme-pétrole*,^[1] gives voice to modern slaves whose work forced made possible the organization of the World Cup in Qatar, and thanks to which the "prosperity" of all States is built. of the Gulf.

To throughout these accounts, Sébastien Castelier and Quentin Müller, Independent journalists, trace the contours of an entire region, the Persian Gulf, in which "man-oil (...)" is at the origin of a Modern slave trade, a trade made possible by silence of the international community and the poverty and corruption of States accomplices of Asia and Africa. We use the term 'slaves' because we don't It is an exaggeration to describe a significant number of slaves as slaves. Asian and African workers in the Gulf."

One a situation that was not an obstacle for the federal councilor of the UDC (Central Democratic Union, Switzerland), Ueli Maurer, 'Ueli the normal', announced very proudly that he would go to Qatar to watch the matches of the Swiss National Team. It is true that Maurer, who compared (in 2014) to the Women with "used kitchen utensils", should feel like a fish in the water (or in the sand?) in a state where women are still subject to their male guardians (husbands, fathers, brothers, grandparents or uncles in general) and remain subject to the permission of their guardians male "to make key decisions in life, such as getting married, study abroad on government scholarships, occupy many of the government jobs, traveling abroad up to a certain age and receiving certain types of reproductive health care." [2]

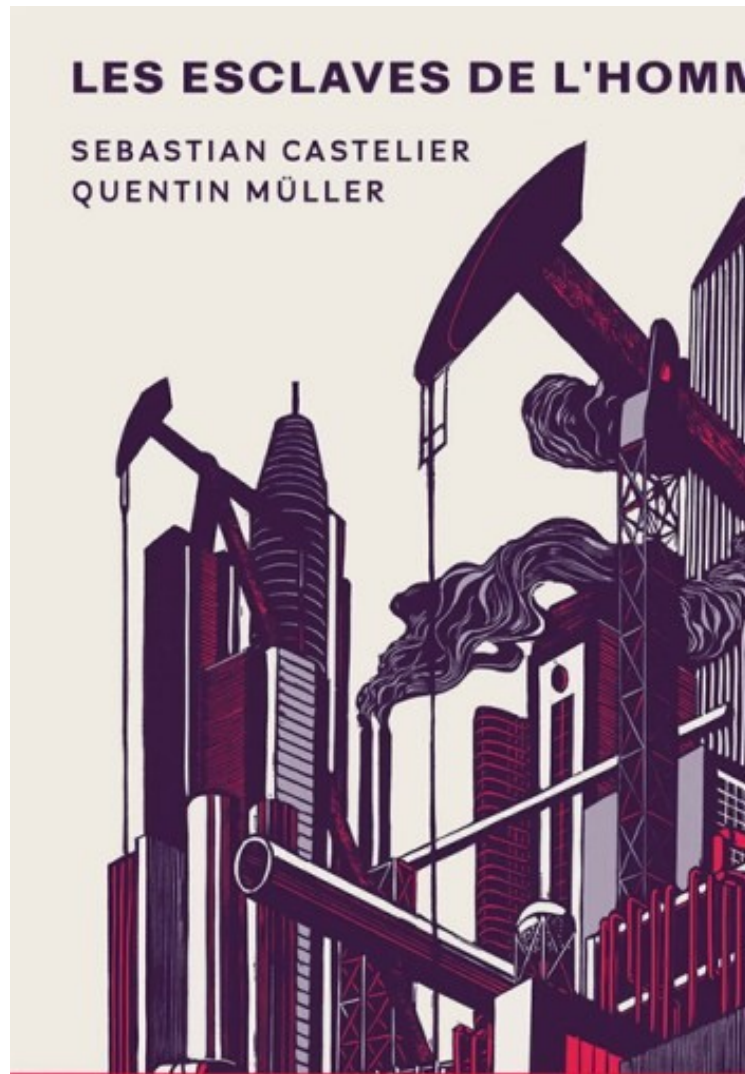
Maybe the federal councillor of the UDC also takes the opportunity to Addressing with the EMIR the increase in the participation of the sovereign wealth fund Qatari at Credit Suisse,^[3] or the future establishment of the bank private Julius Bär in the emirate.¹

-Through Sixty testimonies, you give voice to the migrant workers of the Gulf countries, as well as their families. What motivated this approach?

Quentin Müller – Many quality documentaries and reports have shown the abuses suffered by workers in Qatar. But the voice of these Very little has been heard. It was almost

impossible. Know their motivations, their emotions and their intimacy. They are people who are doubly dispossessed: deprived of their rights and of their dignity at work, and dispossessed of their voice in the media communication. Therefore, we try to give back to these workers their part of humanity, putting their stories at the center of our book.

-This year visited the Industrial Zone of Doha, the capital of Qatar, where they live 400,000 workers working on World Cup construction sites. ¿What were able to verify



In this area, which serves as dormitories, isolated from the city center, workers from Africa and Asia (there are no European workers here or Arabs, since it is Africans or Asians who carry out the hard and low-paid jobs) are housed in unsanitary buildings. Occupy Overcrowded and dusty rooms and sleep in bunk beds infested with fleas. Often there are only two small kitchens for every Three hundred employees. The water is of poor quality. A true slave deposit!

In addition Of these catastrophic living conditions, there are the abuses they suffer These workers: some work up to nine months without a single day of rest, for fear of being fired; others go hungry because they don't they are paid their wages every month; Working days can last 12 hours in sweltering heat; Exhausted workers fall into the alcoholism; accidents at work are hidden...

Without However, the Qatari authorities emphasize social progress, an argument taken up by the International Labour Organization (ILO)...

Qatar It states that it has improved the Labour Code. It is also the only country in the Gulf that has abolished kafala, that system that allows an employer exercise near-absolute power over a worker by prohibiting him from changing of employment or leaving the country without your consent.

The The problem is that these new rights are theoretical. Why are they Theoretical? Because if a worker decides to assert them before the Courts, the consequences are immediate: stop charging, lose your employment and can be deported. The legal process, on the other hand, It will last for months, during which the worker will not be able to send anything from money to your family. These migrant workers don't have time to Justice. Companies know this and continue with impunity with their Abuse.

***The Guardian* newspaper estimates that 6,750 workers have died at the World Cup construction site. What do you think of this figure?**

This Cifra had the merit of exposing the poor working conditions in Qatar and to arouse international outrage over the organization of the World Cup in that region. However, I think it underestimates the magnitude of the phenomenon. The British newspaper did not take into account the numerous deaths of workers from African countries or from Philippines. Nor did it take into account the tragic reality of the many workers who develop pathologies in Qatar due to disastrous working conditions, and they are sent back to their countries of origin when they get sick and die there.

Also The point could be expanded: how many immigrant workers have dead building Qatari prestige, luxurious buildings and urbanism that were necessary for the emirate to achieve organize the World Cup?

What motives lead these migrants to go to the Arabian Peninsula, despite the risks?

One vital need. These workers come from very poor countries: Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Uganda, Kenya, Philippines, etc. Without the salary which they send home each month from the Gulf States, their Families wouldn't be able to eat every day and their children

wouldn't be able to go to the school. That's why they endure years of abuse in the Gulf region.

And It is also due to the dependence in which these are located. workers, in an extremely unfavourable power relationship vis-à-vis your employer.

You interviewed domestic workers. Their stories are terrifying...

Work day and night, beatings, rapes, torture. The mistreatment suffered by women Domestic workers are above everyone else. For a Reason: The hell they endure takes place in the privacy of home. This is where the true face of these rich families is revealed. Saudis, Qataris, Emiratis or Bahrainis, who have impunity almost total.

Your book describes a "modern slavery" that goes far beyond Qatar...

All the Gulf countries practice forced labor of immigrants. This system has been maintained since the creation of these countries and their independence after World War II. The kafala is a Legacy of slavery, abolished very late in the region. By Give an example: until the 60s, the great Qatari families They sent their slaves to work on oil rigs. British and then appropriated the wages that these companies gave them Paid.

Herself it often says that oil is the main wealth of the States of the European Union. Gulf. In reality, it is their foreign workforce. In Qatar there are 2.6 millions of foreigners compared to 300,000 Qataris. Without their work, they do not There would be nothing: no gas extraction, no construction, no airports, no restaurants, no transportation. Without immigrants, these countries do not They would exist, despite all their oil, gas and huge reserves! Financial!

How can this system of slavery be combated?

Is very difficult for migrant workers to defend their rights, due to their extreme dependence on the employer. And in several of these countries, including Qatar, trade unions are simply banned!

I think which corresponds to the African and Asian countries of which These immigrant workers act, uniting to demand more rights and dignity for its citizens. Unfortunately, we are far from it.

What do you think of the debate on the boycott of the World Cup?

How Journalist, our job is not to give court orders. Our The job has been to show how this World Cup was made and, above all, how it was It is part of a dynamic that dominates the entire Gulf region.

Without However, I think it is very important to be aware and indignant with what is that has happened around this World Cup in Qatar. A country starts to go Wrong when your

people stop being outraged by serious things. Then it's the people who must form their own opinion. (November 2022)

Notes:

1] Sébastien Castelner, Quentin Müller: *Les esclaves de l'homme-pétrole*. Éditions Marchialy, 2022.

2] Amnesty International: Qatar Rapport 2021.

3] Les Echos, 2 November 2022.

4] Le Temps, 7 June 2022.

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– [Domestic workers' hell](#), Rachida El Azzouzi.

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– [6500 migrant workers have died in the works of the 2022 World Cup](#), The Guardian.

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