

Foreword

by **Samir Amin**

Translation by Salimah Valiani

Salimah Valiani's study traces the relations underlying international nurse migration from circa 1990 to present. The richness of her analysis lies in the grand synthesis approach of world historical political economy which she employs. Through this approach, Salimah is able to expose overlapping processes of the global North and the global South which are relevant to the particularities of international nurse migration in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries – a moment now well-understood to be one of major restructuring and reorganization in the world capitalist economy.

In this study of one instance of restructuring in the world capitalist economy, Salimah combines: a) a description of little known, labour migration policy discussions currently in play among states around the world, b) a reading of the post-1950, political economy of health care in key countries of the global North to uncover the causes of a shift in Northern employer demand for internationally-trained nurses, c) a reading of the post-1950, political economy of development in a key country of the global South to uncover the cause of increased world supply of temporary migrant nurses, and d) an interpretation of what the flow of predominantly female, caring labour from the periphery to the core of the world system means in terms of unequal exchange, a concept first elaborated in the 1960s. In contradistinction to most studies of contemporary migration, Salimah's study underlines the rise of temporary migration via "work permits" and the concomitant fall of permanent migration in immigration policies of the global North. This shift signifies the loss of the moderately redistributive function of permanent migration whereby certain numbers of workers of the global South, from about the 1960s to the 1990s, were able to migrate permanently to the global North, along with their families, and draw from relatively better social and economic conditions.

The ability to combine several elements, time frames, and layers of analysis is surely not unrelated to Salimah's multiple vocations as multidisciplinary academic researcher, trade union based policy analyst, and advocate. She pointedly raises and draws connections between issues relating to labour markets, class struggles, gender inequality, super-exploitation in the labour process, unequal exchange, and the historically uneven development of countries in the world capitalist system which is fundamental to all of these issues.

The capitalist strategies of monopolists, whose goal is to collect imperialist rent, consist of two complementary vectors: the control of the flow or migration of workers, and the control of the flow of capital. I will focus my remarks on the first of these vectors, which is the subject of Salimah's study. While Salimah provides what I will call a *micro-structural perspective* of migration on a global scale, I provide here a *macro-structural perspective* of migration on a global scale.

1.

The constituting of the world capitalist system, as it exists today – which may also be called *historical capitalism* – has occurred over the past five centuries, as rendered through the conquering of the Americas.

This historical process involved, for the initial core of the world capitalist system – Europe – massive migrations of Europeans who conquered and populated the Americas, in addition to Australia, New Zealand, and a significant portion of South Africa. The mass migration of Europeans increased the proportion of world population represented by those of European origin from 18 per cent in the year 1500, to 36 per cent in the year 1900. The migration of Europeans occurred in two historical moments. The first was the Mercantilist period of 1500 to 1800. The second was the industrial revolutions in Europe and the United States of America – circa 1800, and again from the early twentieth century to the Second World War – during which emigration from Europe accelerated.

These waves of European migration were part and parcel of the agrarian capitalism of the beginnings of historical capitalism. Agrarian capitalism was based on the adoption and application of the principle of private property with regard to the control of agricultural land. The “modern” notion of private property replaced the previously existing, “feudal” form of controlling land, with the bourgeoisie now determining the rules and regulations around access to land for the peasantry. Inherent in the new form of private appropriation of land was the exclusion of a large and growing proportion of peasants with regard to access to land. Now landless, these peasants became “poor,” or in more exact terms, they were impoverished.

Along with all this came accelerated urbanization in the centres of capitalist development of the time – Europe and the United States of America – at a slower pace before 1850, and quicker thereafter. Considerable numbers of peasants were absorbed in the new urbanization, thus becoming the new working classes. The relatively gradual, labour intensive nature of the processes of industrialization in Europe and North America allowed for such an absorption to occur.

There were, however, limits to the absorption of “surplus rural population”, as the language of neoclassical economics would have it. A colossal “oversupply” of displaced peasants fed massive waves of emigration to the Americas. Without the outlet of the Americas, the cities of Europe would have been overpopulated by the “unemployed”, taking on the characteristics of the “planet of slums” that is the reality of cities in the global South today. It is impossible to know the consequences for Europe had there not been the outlet of migration to the Americas. Also impossible to know is how or whether the massive impoverishment of the peasantry would have been sustained within the logic of capitalism. What we can say is that the democratic management of European societies of the time would have been an unfathomable challenge.

2.

Due to the history of the constitution of world capitalism as described above, peoples of the periphery of the world system have not benefitted from the “advantage” of accessing alternate destinations to dispose of “surplus rural populations.” As in Europe a few hundred years ago, the current “surplus rural population” in the global South has been created through the class-determined transformation of peasant agriculture into capitalist agriculture.

It is indeed unforeseen within really-existing capitalism, that the development path of agriculture in the periphery should unfold any differently from the way it unfolded in Europe. This development

path, based on the private appropriation of agricultural lands, is at the origin of the massive migration of rural peoples to the slums of urban centres in the global South today. The agrarian question cannot be resolved on a global scale within the logic of world capitalism. The world capitalist system has resolved it in a limited manner, that is, for the core of the system, which constitutes 15 per cent of the world population. It cannot do so for the periphery, which constitutes 85 per cent of humanity. In the global North, a comprehensive grasping of the global agrarian question is non-existent within economic and other dominant perspectives. These perspectives can do no better than to approach the symptom of the problem – rural-urban migration within countries of the global South – from a prejudiced perspective which may be called naïve, at best.

Given all this, I do not hesitate to conclude that historical capitalism has “done its time” and is rendering itself obsolete. The alternative suggests an entirely new vision for the organization of agriculture, a vision which is necessarily outside of the realm and logic of capitalism and its profit motive.¹

3.

The discourse of neoliberalism does not even address – much less respond to – these fundamental issues at the roots of world inequality. Neoliberalism is little other than propaganda of a most vulgar form. If the proponents of neoliberalism were true to the logic of liberalism, they would insist that the “globalization” which they so intimately expound be applied consistently – such that all borders be eliminated for all flows: flows of capital, flows of goods and services, and the flows of human beings.

The proponents of neoliberalism, however, cannot be true to their own logic because capitalism, as it exists today, is structured on the monopolistic ownership of the means of production – a structure which is in complete contradiction to the liberal notion of “free markets.” The free movement of displaced peasants and others from the global South, to the global North, is not in the best interests of monopolists, most of which are employers, and is therefore not permitted. Impoverished people of the global South are in turn further excluded from the benefits of “development” as we know it.

Beyond the proponents of neoliberalism, it is clear that human civilization as a whole still lacks the capacity to imagine or accept the free movement of all human beings, across all borders. Given this, it would follow to refrain from propounding upon the notion of “global citizenship.” This notion is particularly advanced by the “bobos”, or “bourgeois bohemians” of the opulent urban centres of the global North. The “bobos” of various countries seem to be in denial of the fact that the movement of most “others” is subject to the policing inherent in immigration instruments such as the “visa” and the “work permit.” To put it slightly differently, global citizens cannot come into being in the world of today, a world which has not yet disentangled itself from the contradictions of historical capitalism. Recalling the contradictions of past and present migrations, Bolivian President

¹ I have elaborated on this vision in my article (2004), “Les Réformes foncières nécessaires en Asie et en Afrique.” See <http://www.dakar-agricole.org/DkAgri/contribution/sm1.pdf>

Evo Morales points out that European immigrants who appropriated lands and embattled indigenous peoples in the Americas did not carry visas.

Given the current lack of free movement for peoples of the global South, the latter should resist the dictates of neoliberal globalization as it exists today. Peoples of the global South must protect their own home-grown forms of social and economic development. In other words, peoples of the global South must take and deepen control of their collective production, thereby subverting the flow of migration to the global North. This is one of the conclusions and principal “policy prescriptions” which may be drawn from Salimah’s analysis of the causes and consequences of the global integration of nursing labour markets.

4.

The discourse of states of the global North on the question of migration is one of “security”, as illustrated by the policies of the European Union (EU). The EU is currently attempting to impose policing policies upon states of the global South – especially African and Arab states – in the name of collaboration.

On the whole, the totality of strategies of monopolistic capital in the world economy today – which continues to be in crisis – allow for the extraction of monopolistic rent, or profit, based on the labour power of workers of both the global South and the global North.² On a global scale, this rent may be considered an imperialist rent which reproduces and deepens the inequality between societies of the current imperialist core of the world system (i.e. the United States of America, Canada, Australia, Western Europe, and Japan), and societies of the periphery dominated by countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.³ As Salimah demonstrates in this study, the deepening of unequal exchange between the global North and global South is particularly salient in the absorption of predominantly female caring labour of the global South by the global North.

In addition to deepening inequality between the global North and the global South, the current strategies of monopolistic capital, and other employers including states – simultaneously allow for the possibility of new forms of super-exploitation of workers in the imperialist core of the world system. In particular, this is occurring through increasing underemployment as well as long term unemployment for growing proportions of workers in the global North. The casualization of employment of registered nurses in Canada, as portrayed here in Chapter four, is one instance of this phenomenon. This, in turn, is increasing inequality between various categories of workers within the global North.

The overall effect of the totality of strategies of monopolistic capital in the world today is the creation of the possibility of a “fifth international” of workers and peoples of the world – a global integration of solidarity more necessary now than ever before.⁴

² See my article (2009), “La crise, sortir de la crise de capitalisme ou sortir du capitalisme en crise?” (Paris: Le Temps de Cerises)

³ See my book (2011), **The Law of Worldwide Value** (New York: Monthly Review Press).

⁴ See my book (2008) **The World We Wish to See** (New York: Monthly Review Press).