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Global Capitalism, Informal Economy and the Question of Labour



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Global Capitalism, Informal Economy and the Question of Labour

**Byasdeb Dasgupta
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2018

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Refugee Economy – An Inside of Global Capitalism

Byasdeb Dasgupta *

Global capitalism as it has evolved in the post World War – II era always looks for cutting edge competition in the market and the firms always seek sustainable ways to stay in the competition. This is more so under neoliberal globalization all over the world since the decade of nineties. Under neoliberalism labour has become the risk-bearing factor in the global market. Labour bears all the risk of neoliberal capitalism, which is market driven, by becoming as cheap as possible over time. And to make labour cheap there are various ploys instituted by the neoliberal global capitalism within the market. One of the most successful means as enunciated by neoliberal global capitalism in recent times is informalization of the space of labour which helps make labour as cheap as possible. And refugee economy or the influx of refugees at the heart of the market helps sustain this process of informalization. Hence, refugee economy is not something abnormal which is shaping today. Rather, it is something normal which is happening inside the very heart of global capitalism today.

Immediately after the World War-II global capitalism was facilitated by the direct intervention of the state, which is not the case during last three decades with the advent of neoliberalism all over the world. Neoliberalism is an ideology which is based upon the *laissez faire* concept of the market. Market under neoliberalism is at the centre of all economic activities and the accumulation and circulation of capital take place through different markets here. Market is panacea. It is held that market can cure all economic ills and can bring in the much-coveted harmony in the system which is essentially global capitalism induced.

Gone are the days of welfare state in the West. Now, neoliberalism demands market to be given free hand in all economic activities with the state remaining as minimal. State will only facilitate the process. With welfarismwaning out in this age of neoliberalism so has waned out many social securities which used to be provided to the citizens of many welfare state-oriented countries in the fifties, sixties and seventies. So, what one can expect for protection of refugees so generated since the nineties with the dismantling of the erstwhile socialist block? It is at this stage is a difficult question to answer.

Before we answer this question let us take a look at global capitalism and then refugee problem as they have evolved in the last thirty years.

The immediate post-World War II era was quite anxious about the sustainability of capitalism as a world-wide system. This fear was more so because of the emergence of the Socialist Block as an alternative to capitalism in reality. The Keynesian policies which warrant state intervention and state-based protection to capitalism and market were adopted in the newly emergent

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welfare states of the West and also in the newly liberalized countries from the colonial rule. State based planning was given the task to reconstruct Europe and develop the newly emerged Third World countries. So, global capitalism remained dependent on state intervention and markets remained subservient to the state. It was accepted all over the world given the fear of socialism as an alternative. However, during the early seventies inside this capitalist system there emerged a crisis. By the beginning of the seventies it became very clear that Keynesianism was not working to solve the problem of rising unemployment and inflation together. So, gradually all the countries of the West which till then adhered to welfares started shading off Keynesianism as a policy tool. And slowly the passage to neoliberalism was set in.

Global capitalism received immense boost with the advent of neoliberalism, although the period immediately after WW-II was coined by some scholars as the golden days of capitalism. The West adopted the neoliberal economic policies making state as mere facilitator of market and at the same time forced the Third World towards the path of neoliberalism.

The basic features of neoliberalism are the following:

- (a) Market will replace state as the most significant socio-economic institution in the functioning of capitalism – both locally and globally.
- (b) Anything private – especially entrepreneurship – will be favoured replacing thus public investment and state-aided social security system. Private investment (read investment by the giant multinational corporations) will thus replace public investment. Even social sectors like health and education will be taken care of by the private entrepreneurship, not by the state anymore. Foreign capital or global capital will be the determining factor of economic growth and development where development signifies large MNC-led industrialization thus increasing the degree of what is dubbed as primitive accumulation of capital and also, creating huge reserve army of labour. Thus, labour of any sort became the risk-bearing factor for the ascent of (global) capital.
- (c) Free Market is so idealized as the essence of neoliberal doctrine that free and perfect competition has been theoretically set as the shape and structure of this market. It is so held that market is a level playing field and harmony always prevails and market cannot fail but government can fail. So, for this competition to take place and for the entrepreneurs to strategize their survival cost cutting became the strategy of every private entrepreneur (even for the public sector where any remnant of such public sector still prevails) and in this cost cutting practice the onus should fall upon labour. Thus came the notion of flexi labour.
- (d) The basic idea of labour flexibility rests upon four types of flexibility – numerical flexibility (easy hire and fire and no voice representation right of labour), wage flexibility (wages can be revised up and down as and when required), functional flexibility (a labourer should be skilled with multi levels of skills as opposed to the Fordist notion of specialization) and temporal flexibility (this is numerical flexibility over time or it can be dubbed as seasonal flexibility).

Given the above features of neoliberal economic policies since the eighties global capitalism actually has operated through various circuits of capital globally as well as locally and in so doing it has contacted with various types of class processes¹ – some of which are essentially capitalist class process and some are not. Some might have remained outside it. From the point of view of performance and appropriation of surplus labour (which is a Marxian concept) one can distinguish between six different types of class processes. These six class processes include (i) Independent or self-appropriative class process, (ii) Sole proprietorship which may be serf-based/feudal/capitalist class process which is essentially exploitative where exploitation is as conceptualized by Marx, (iii) Communistic class process-I where one person performs surplus labour but the appropriation of that

surplus is decided by the whole community jointly where the performer of surplus labour is also included, (iv) Communistic class process – II where the entire community performs surplus labour but its appropriation is decided by a one person who is representative of that community, (v) Capitalist class process where collective of labourers performs surplus labour say within a factory but its appropriation is done by the owner or share-holder capitalists (the latter resembles corporate capitalists), and (vi) Communistic class process where the collective of labourers perform as well as appropriate surplus labour.

With global capitalism playing the hegemonic role in the socio-economic system all over the world, all these class processes may exist simultaneously. And a global capitalist enterprise or an MNC may have connection with these various class processes taken together.

As shown above, not all the six class processes are exploitative. Marx defined exploitation as an economic category and as appropriation of surplus labour by non-performer(s) of surplus labour. Note that under capitalism surplus labour becomes surplus value through market exchange. Market plays the role under capitalism by commodifying every single object meant for economic exchange including labour power. Class process (i) (Independent Class Process), (iii) and (iv) (Communistic – I & II) and (vi) Communistic are non-exploitative class process. The remaining two (Class Process ii and v) are essentially exploitative class processes. A capitalist class enterprise (including the global one) essentially is signified by class process (ii) and/or (v) above. At the main centre or hub of a capitalist class enterprise (including global capitalist enterprise) the class process has to be exploitative – otherwise generation of surplus value and accumulation of capital cannot take place. But as we have said above in this age of cost-cutting-based competition among the capitalist enterprises the main target always is to go on cheapening or devaluing labour so as to intensify surplus generation and capital accumulation many-fold. So, the networks or circuits of global capital are created by joining various types of class-process based enterprise with the main centre of the enterprise. In today's virtual world may be there is no centre! But the circuits are there connecting various capital and non-capital enterprises including the independent class process-oriented enterprises with the global capitalist enterprise. Two things are justified thus which we find in our concrete real – (a) labour flexibility in the form of casualization and contractualization and (b) outsourcing and sub-contracting. Network between different varieties of class enterprises (including self-employed mode) by the global capitalist enterprise is built in order to cheapen and control labour as far as possible.

Inside global capitalist system or rather the global capitalist networks there are plethora of nodes of informal enterprises. In fact, if one critically assesses the existence of informal enterprises in the context of global capitalist system one may come across two different types of informal enterprises – one that is linked with the global capitalist chain and the other not linked. We may call the first type as Informal Sector – I and the second Informal Sector – II.

That an informal enterprise (which may be a one man show) is linked with global capitalist chain does not mean that the class process within the enterprise will also be capitalist. But they are essentially exploitative. So, Informal Sector – I (even signifying class process different from capitalist class process) is very much inside of the global capitalist system. Informal Sector – II (which mostly cater to the needs of the local economy) although outside the global capitalist chain, is in someway or other related to global capitalist system by fulfilling some of the needs of global capitalist economic system.

Through the process of outsourcing and sub-contracting an informal enterprise in the Informal Sector – I is inside the global capitalist system. On the other hand, through market exchange an informal enterprise in the Informal Sector – II is related or connected with the global capitalist system in this neoliberal age. Neoliberalism has in fact accepted the existence of informal

enterprises and talks in terms of providing social security to the workers in the informal sector which is a façade in the name of inclusive development.

Of late, one of the distinctive characteristics of global capitalist system is the process of informalization. According to some scholars, some informal space is the space of non-capital. But even if some of the informal space is space of non-capital the very space is hegemonized by the global capital. One particular reason for this rapid pace of informalization all over the world is to create space of cheap labour so as to contain the labour cost of production or variable capital *a la* Marx. Another way of cheapening or devaluing productive labour² is to create mass reserve army of labour as far as possible in the present socio-economic context. And one way to do this is by generating refugee influx for some political reason or other. While capitalist system is global one, the problem of refugee influx at first instance may look like a local problem for the host economy where the refugee inflows have taken place. However, in recent particularly in the European context we find the refugee flows are cutting across international borders and some time has called for some sort of global protection system but in vain.

While the global capitalism is an economic issue mainly the refugee influx is mostly viewed as a political issue. However, if one closely evaluates the global circuits of capital and also, generation of refugee flows both are having political as well as economic underpinnings.

Global capitalism needs the political domination of a space to spread its circuits including the webs of informal networks. On the other hand, influx of refugee has economic bearings on the host economy. A refugee is always envisaged as an anathema to the working population in the host economy and political atmosphere is built generally around that sentiment of local citizens. The rise of extreme populist rightist political parties in recent time in many parts of the world, particularly in Europe and USA is a great example of that. Slogans like “America is for the Americans” has of late gained popularity against providing global protection to the refugee population.

The above political is a ploy in recent context of global capitalism which is quite comfortable with these refugee flows as the reserve army of labour expands by this and it turns out to be more and more easy to control and devalue productive labour in various class processes mentioned above. Such is the hegemonic role of global capital.

We need to mention here that “the origin of global capitalism”, characterized by original or what is dubbed popularly as primitive accumulation, “is a continual moment of creation- destruction-recreation of labour power through violence over the conditions of existence” of third world societies.³ And the origin of creation of refugees to a certain extent is inter-related to what is referred to above as original accumulation. If the latter is a continual process for global capitalism, so is the refugee creation through political turmoil, war and other reasons as continual generation of refugee flows in a sense signifies displacement of local population from their means of subsistence and also from their land without which original accumulation or what David Harvey described as accumulation by dispossession cannot take place. So, refugee creation which goes to expand the global reserve army of labour and original accumulation from where refugees have been displaced or dislodged go hand in hand. And in this sense, the issue of the refugees, which is foreclosed in the discussion of global capitalism being envisaged as an abnormal subject in the host economy is very much a *normal subject* to be hegemonized by the global capitalist system. Generally, global capitalism as a philosophical order forecloses what it finds abnormal from its own perspective. A refugee in the host economy is abnormal in the sense that it lacks what a natural citizen in the host economy has a right to. And in this sense, any concern for refugee population is framed outside the workings of the global capitalist chain. In the political sphere, it calls for special attention including the question of statelessness of the refugee population in the host economy.

What happens then to the global protection of the refugee population from the perspective of global capitalism? As we have shown above, a refugee is very much inside of global capitalist system, not outside it, from two concerns. First one is related with the continual process of original accumulation. The second one is in terms of the absorption of the potential refugee labourforce in the informal enterprises (be it in Informal Sector – I or Informal Sector – II). As a refugee lacks the basic rights of citizenship in the host economy he/she cannot be absorbed in the formal space of the economy which cannot absorb a stateless person by law. So, a refugee has no other option left but to get absorbed in the informal space – most of the time at a monetary return or necessary labour value much less compared to a citizen in the host economy. Moreover, this absorption is not without violence and contestation with the local working force and also, contests within the refugee populace itself. The productive labour of a refugee thus is much devalued which in a way facilitates in cheapening labour or variable capital. Since refugee population (particularly the working population of the refugee community) lacks most of the basic rights of a citizen in a modern nation state, so their voice representation capability remains quite weak and, thereby, it helps the productive capitalists to control labour much more easily. As is well-known in Marxian tradition, more is the control of productive capital more will be the generation of both absolute and relative surplus from different exploitative class processes which we have noted above. Informal labour space helps the global capitalism to absorb the refugee population and thereby, devaluating further productive labour. This once again vindicates our claim that labour is the risk-bearing factor in neoliberalism. So is the productive labour of a refugee in general. And hence, global protection of refugee population is a far cry.

Let us understand the global protection of refugee as some sort of social security to them. This social security as global protection may include economic income security, job security, workplace security, skill security, voice representation security and some financial security (other than income security). However, as shown below, this very idea of global protection system for the refugee as a subject under global capitalism is a very contested issue. This can be explicated in terms of the Marxian concept of production and social surplus as delineated below.
In fact, in a society total surplus generated from various class processes is distributed as production surplus and social surplus⁴

We can write

$$\text{Total Surplus (TS)} = \text{Production Surplus (PS)} + \text{Social Surplus (SS)}$$

Production surplus is meant as subsumed class⁵ payments to meet the conditions of existence of the Fundamental Class Process, where Fundamental Class Process consists of performance and appropriation of surplus labour. On the other hand, social surplus is spent to meet various socially determined needs which are in no way connected with the condition of existence of Fundamental Class Process. Socially determined needs may include needs for poverty alleviation, environmental protection, unemployment, needs of old, children, physically handicapped etc. It may also include if society at any point of time feels the need for global or local protection of refugees. But note that the need for global or local protection of refugees is quite different from the other socially determined needs mentioned above. The socially determined needs for poverty alleviation, environmental protection, unemployment, needs of children, old and physically handicapped etc. constitute those particular needs of a society at a particular point of time which may be dubbed as developmental needs. On the other hand, need for global or local protection of refugees cannot be

considered as a developmental need. And there may arise contest between payments for global/local protection of refugees and payments for different developmental needs.

In a political democracy, which we observe today in many parts of the world, developmental needs do not just have economic significance but also have political significance. Whether payments from social surplus for the protection of refugees will be made or not depend to a great extent on the political climate in the host economy.

Suppose social surplus along with socially determined developmental needs also includes protection of refugees. Then, we can write:

$$\text{Total Surplus (TS)} = \text{PS} + \text{SS} = \text{PS} + (\text{SSD} + \text{SSA} + \text{SSP}) + \text{SSR}$$

Where PS = Production Surplus, SS = Social Surplus, SSD = Payments for needs for old, children, physically handicapped etc., SSA = payments for environmental protection, SSP = payments for social need of poverty and SSR = payments for protection of refugees.

It is clearly discernible that first there is a contest between production surplus (PS) and social surplus (SS). In fact, $\text{SS} = \text{TS} - \text{PS}$ which implies social surplus is the residual amount left from the total surplus (TS) after meeting the class-based needs in terms of production surplus.

Both production surplus and social surplus are in over determined and contradictory relation. If the class needs are quite pressing at any time in a society then it is expected that a large share of total surplus generated in that society is distributed as production surplus and therefore, little is left for payments as social surplus. On the other hand, if the political compulsion warrants meeting the socially determined development needs then, it may be expected a greater share of total surplus is distributed as social surplus.

Further, there is a contest between social surplus as socially determined development needs and global/local protection of refugees. In fact, we can write:

$$\text{SSR} = \text{SS} - (\text{SSD} + \text{SSA} + \text{SSP})$$

So, protection of refugees as social surplus payment is residual from the total social surplus after meeting all the socially determined development needs. And as we have noted above, this protection of refugees in the host economy always becomes a political question and if and only if political climate is favourable for protection of refugees then and only then such payments from social surplus will be made. Otherwise, not.

Now, coming to the question of global protection of refugees, one may come across further complexities in the above distribution of social surplus for refugee protection. If we consider the total surplus globally generated at any point of time then its distribution between production and social surplus is also global. For example, total surplus may be generated in country A, B and C whereas their distribution as social surplus (after meeting the class needs in the form of production surplus) may be in country D, E and F. Now suppose country F is in need of refugee protection. Whether the global surplus will be distributed as social surplus for protection of refugees will always be contingent upon the global political conditions and the international economic relations between country A, B and C on the one hand (from where surplus is generated) and country F on the other hand (where refugee inflows have taken place). So, for a meaningful global protection of refugees a global struggle for surplus for the needs of the refugee has to be there. And this struggle is a political one.

Summing up our main arguments in this paper we can assert that generation of refugee inflows and global capitalist system are compatible with each other both economically and politically,

especially under neoliberalism. Refugee population swells the ranks of reserve army of labour (both productive as well as unproductive in the Marxian sense). Generally, a refugee economy is built up on the basis of continual informalization of the production space. And refugee generation and original accumulation are over determined and both are continual process under global capitalism. Refugees are generally absorbed in the informal enterprises – some in the Informal Sector I (linked directly with the global capitalist chain) and some in the Informal Sector II (not linked directly with the global capitalist chain but may be hegemonized by global capitalism). In this sense, refugee as a subject is very much an inside one of global capitalism. But when it comes to the question of protection of refugees in the host economy, in the beginning it remains or is visualized as a local problem and distribution of part of social surplus for refugee protection becomes a politically contingent issue. And there are several layers of contest for the claim of social surplus for refugee protection. First there is contest between the class needs (production surplus) and socially determined development needs. And then as far as claim of social surplus is concerned there is political struggle between claims for socially determined development needs and refugee needs. Note that socially determined developmental needs are meant for the citizens of the host country whereas claim or need for refugee protection is meant for those who mostly have become stateless. Finally, the very idea of global protection of refugees is contingent upon global political needs along with the global economic needs of global capitalism.

Notes

¹ Class is a process of performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour. Performance and appropriation of surplus labour can be dubbed as Fundamental Class Process while distribution and receipt of surplus labour as Subsumed Class Process. Both Fundamental and Subsumed class process mutually constitute each other or are over determined where over determination is an Althusian concept. See Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff (1987), *Knowledge and Class*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

² By productive labour we mean labour which performs surplus labour in any class process. We are not using the word productive labour as Adam Smith used it. Rather, we use it following Marxian connotation.

³ See Anjan Chakrabarti, Anup Dhar and Byasdeb Dasgupta (2016), *The Indian Economy in Transition – Globalization, Capitalism and Development*, Cambridge University Press; pp. 65.

⁴ See Anjan Chakrabarti, Anup Dhar and Byasdeb Dasgupta (2016), *The Indian Economy in Transition – Globalization, Capitalism and Development*, Cambridge University Press; pp. 297-298.

⁵ Subsumed class process consists of distribution and receipt of surplus labour.

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Challenges Faced by Asian Women Domestic Workers in the Gulf: A Comparison of Experiences from South India (Kerala), Sri Lanka, and the Philippines

Ilina Sen *

Introduction

This paper focuses on the challenges faced by women domestic workers from three sending countries, and discusses the commonality and differences in their experience. Contrary to popular belief, women domestic workers and caregivers are often the main earning members of impoverished families in Kerala and Sri Lanka. Single Muslim women dominate the migrant streams from South Asia, although women from Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian communities migrate as well, breaking yet another myth about women's mobility for economic purposes. Domestic workers from Kerala and Sri Lanka are both documented and undocumented. The undocumented women workers from Kerala live and work in insecure conditions and are heavily dependent on a network of touts and corrupt officialdom like the infamous and unofficial 'Kasergode Embassy' (KE) who sometimes provide assistance at a price, and at all times, function as a surveillance and regulatory agency over women's lives. While working conditions differ between employment at Emirati and expatriate South Asian households, women workers, particularly the undocumented ones, live in perpetual fear of running foul of the criminal justice systems in the Gulf. In this situation, the touts of the KE who are their exploiters, assume a double role as their helpers and protectors, thereby tightening their control on the women.

Among the sending countries, the Philippines is unique in running (since 2015) a sustained pre migration training programme for unskilled women workers prior to departure that include components of legal literacy, skill development, financial accounting and savings systems, as well as reintegration issues into the family and community once they come back home. This offers a certain level of formal protection to them during their sojourn in the Gulf. However, in view of the sheer volume of migrant workers, male and female in the major Gulf countries, there is in effect only minimal protection from home government consular services in ordinary situations. It is important that official agencies take cognizance of the phenomenon of single women's migration in the lowest rung of the job market in the gulf, and of the extent and volume of the same. It is also incumbent upon bilateral, multilateral and international agencies to work together and bring these women under the protective net.

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Women's Solo Migration for Gulf based Domestic Work: Is It an Indicator of Empowerment or Vulnerability?

The oil price hike of 1973 and the consequent earnings of large revenue had accelerated a process of industrialization and social change in the West Asian countries necessitating the services of a large number of foreign workers. Large number of workers began to migrate to West Asia from India since then. Migration which started with a few thousands per year during the mid-1970s assumed large proportions, given the availability of better jobs, opportunities, living conditions during 1980s and 1990s.

A general assumption is that gulf migrants are mostly single men. However, as scholars like Oishi (2002) have pointed out, feminization of international labor migration is a global trend. The percentage of women in the migrant population (both permanent immigrants and temporary migrants) has been increasing in the postwar period, and now women comprise the majority of international migrants. Quoting Zlotnik (1998), Oishi estimates that the number of female migrants across the world has increased by 63% — from 35 million to 57 million — between 1965 and 1990, an increase 8% higher than that of male migrants. In the United States, 53.5% of newly admitted immigrants were women in 1998.

Women are no longer just following their fathers or husbands. They migrate in their own capacities as workers. However, as the number of migrant women increased, the number of abuse and exploitation has also risen. Since most migrant women work at the bottom rung of the occupational hierarchy, they are extremely vulnerable. The vast majority of them work as housemaids, entertainers, nurses, and factory workers. Housemaids are especially vulnerable because they work in private homes where the authority can conduct very little inspection. The problems include sexual harassment, rape, non-payment or underpayment of wages, verbal/physical abuse and so on.

Because of these growing problems, many international organizations started addressing the issue of female migration. For instance, the UN Population Conference in Cairo, UN Women's Conference in Beijing, General Assembly, and other international conferences and meetings have been addressing the problems that migrant women are facing. The UN General Assembly adopted the Resolution on Violence Against Migrant Women Workers in 1994. And the Resolution was also adopted by the UN Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights, both of which have started taking initiatives in encouraging member states to adopt and implement effective measures to protect migrant women. However, despite these growing attention and problems, there has not been any systematic research to explain the mechanism and the patterns of international female migration.

Women's larger propensity to emigrate for low skill jobs are an indication both of their comparatively greater 'agency' as in the Philippines and Sri Lanka, but it can also be construed as a response to the desperate circumstances in which loss of rural livelihoods, poverty, conflict, and other variables may be pushing them. Thus, empowerment and vulnerability act in a double bind to push women to migrate in search of the insecure but comparatively better paid jobs which they can access in the gulf. The respective importance of the 'push' and 'pull' factors may vary in individual or group decisions to migrate at any given point of time.

Female Migration into Gulf based Housework from Kerala

Currently, the total stock of Indian migrants in West Asia is estimated as 28 lakhs. Of this, the migrants from Kerala are estimated as more than 14 lakhs. Currently, Kerala is getting an annual remittance of about Rs 5,500 crores from the Gulf as workers' remittances. Migration and the flow of remittances had resulted in unprecedented economic changes in Kerala's economy since the mid-1970s (Prakash, 1998). Extensive economic, social and cultural changes have resulted from this process in the Kerala homeland, including decrease in supply and increase in demand for unskilled workers, as well as social mobility among migrant workers' families. There is by now sufficient evidence to indicate that the Gulf migration story is not a simple narrative. A recent entry in Countercurrents (2018) indicates, on the basis of replies received to an RTI query filed by Venkatesh Nayak that 10 Indian workers die in Gulf nations per day, for each \$1 billion remitted 117 deaths occur. Between 2012 and mid-2018 more than 24,570 Indian workers died in in six Gulf countries, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

One major problem in the existing literature on Kerala's (and more generally South Asian) Gulf migration is an aggregation of Gulf migrant experiences. This is born both of a reliance on statistical data and survey work and of the use of such generalizing glosses as 'migrant' or 'Gulf'. It is important to read the nuances in the gulf migration story. That woman, especially single women are significant actors in the migration story, is generally not understood or acknowledged. Economic hardship, declining returns from agriculture, desertion by male partners are among the reasons that have pushed women to enter the gulf unskilled job market as solo flyers, and in this lies their story of daring, overcoming odds, and at the same time being vulnerable and dependent on systemic forces that are at best semi criminal in nature.

As Osella and Osella (2008) have pointed out on the basis of their oral history collection with migrant women from Kerala working in the Gulf, 'Women have an especially strong future orientation and a willingness to overlook many hardships in order to furnish their kids with a *chance*: sacrifice and struggle now for the sake of an imagined future. Women are not speaking of themselves having a comfortable old age if their children do well: the future being planned for is not their own, but is child-focused. Ascase studies ... suggest, for women, husband's career prospects and aging parents' expectations of support are secondary to the imperative of maximizing children's life-chances. Indeed, there is a clear expectation in both families above that older generations must cede to younger and fit in with their needs. While fathers must balance their own career or lifestyle aspirations with consideration for their children, grandparents also have to make sacrifices.' Their findings also seem to indicate that many of the better educated Kerala migrants use the Gulf as a stage post en route to the UK or the USA, while those who are less qualified and have fewer options, cling on to their Gulf locations.

An important piece of qualitative research by Bindhulaksmi (2018) gives us rare insights into the world of undocumented women domestic workers from Kerala who are working in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The Indian government forbids those with less than class 10 education from leaving the country without obtaining Emigration clearance. Passports issued to such persons carry a clear ECR (emigration clearance required) stamp. However, the process of obtaining an ECR which is supposed to follow statutory checks is where the corruption begins. An emigration clearance is available at a price, and through touts, many of them belonging to the Muslim majority Kasargode district in north Kerala. An organized illegal network based in Kasargode is referred to in popular parlance as the 'Kasargode embassy' (hereafter KE). Since Emirati and Qatari employers prefer Muslim workers, the KE plays an important facilitating role in matching employer and employee, and

in greasing the official channels through which this can be effectively put in place. On arrival, the employee is supposed to deposit his/her passport with the employer for the duration of the contract. In case a fraud is detected at any point, the passport is liable to be seized by the UAE administration. In such cases, as well as in cases of lost passport, the KE swings into action to organize a duplicate passport (sometimes of dubious authenticity) because without a passport, a migrant worker will never be able to leave the host country. In this way, the undocumented or semi legal migrant worker becomes beholden to the KE which exercises considerable power and authority over the worker. For women workers, the KE and its activities are a double edged sword. On the one hand, the KE exercises power and authority over the workers, on the other, they are also a small source of familiarity and security in a foreign land.

In general, Malayalee maids are employed in Emirati or in Indian expatriate households in the UAE. Conditions of work are a little better in Emirati households, and it is common for the maid to have a room to herself and better salaries and working conditions there. In Indian households, since most middle and upper middle class Indians live in rented homes, the maid is generally expected to sleep in the living room after the family has finished its social/family activities for the day. She is also expected to rise early and vacate her sleeping space for the family as soon as possible. The total lack of private space and time can be very difficult for a lonely maid, particularly where the bonding with the employer family is insufficient. Some undocumented maids prefer to live in shared rented spaces, arranged once again by the ever obliging KE. Such maids have a better support structure from the peer group, and access to public spaces like parks and public transport. However, many such maids are more strongly in the clutches of the KE than those who live with their employers. Many women migrate through, and are supported in the Gulf by, kinship networks and/or protective men, who sometimes arrange for sexual labour for the women as an additional way of financial recompense, and are effectively pimps attached to the KE.

Sri Lankan Muslim Women as Domestic Workers in the Gulf

According to Tidball (2011), more than 1.7 million Sri Lankans worked abroad, and nearly 600,000 were housemaids... In Saudi Arabia, the most common destination, they call Sri Lanka “the country of housemaids.” Fifteen to 20 percent of the 120,000 (approx) Sri Lankan women who leave each year for the Gulf return prematurely, face abuse, non payment of salary, or get drawn into illicit human trafficking schemes or prostitution.

Hundreds of housemaids have become pregnant, often after rapes, producing children who, until Sri Lanka’s Constitution was recently amended, were Stateless because their fathers were foreigners. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, U.A.E. and Jordan were the major labor receiving countries that have captured over 86% of the Sri Lankan foreign workers. Their work contracts do not fall under labor laws but under the jurisdiction of immigration authorities. Departures of workers for foreign employment in 2009 were 247,119. Female participation was 51.73% out of total departures, and 89% of total female migrant workers that left Sri Lanka went as housemaids. According to data from the Sri Lanka bureau of foreign employment, physical and sexual harassment of housemaids was common in all receiving countries, with Saudi Arabia topping the list of employer abuse reported. Two of the most notorious cases of Sri Lankan housemaid abuse from Saudi Arabia relate to Aryabathi (who had 24 nails hammered into her hands and foot, as a punishment for complaining that she was overworked), and Rizaana Nafeeq , age 19, who was executed by beheading for allegedly murdering her employer’s child in 2010. A vibrant international campaign for her release failed to move the Saudi authorities, and the aggrieved family refused to demand blood money from

Rizaana's family, which apparently was the only way she could be let off. Rizaana maintained to the end that the child had choked on milk being drunk out of a bottle, and that the police had tortured her and made her sign papers in Arabic that she could not read.

The distress migration of Sri Lankan housemaids to the gulf was a direct consequence of the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the early years of the decade of the 1990s (Hoole, 2001). There were simmering tensions between the LTTE leadership who were mostly Hindu and Christian, and the Muslims of Killinochi who were supposed to be of mixed Tamil, Sinhala, and 'Moorish' origin. The LTTE claimed that the Muslims were agents of the Sri Lankan state and the Indian Peace Keeping Forces. Massacres of Muslims in Batticaloa and Killinochi took place in 1990 and 1992, and those Muslims who were spared and had the means to leave the country, did so. Only the poorest were left, and Rizaana was the oldest child of a struggling fisherman with eight other children. It is fairly clear that she and her family accepted a tout's proposal to send her to Saudi as a housemaid as a way out of a desperate financial situation. Her 'crime' two months into her three year contract, and her unsuccessful entanglement with the Saudi legal system is a tragic reminder of the fate of hundreds of unfortunate migrant house helps in the Gulf.

There is evidence from other locations about the abusive work and life conditions of Sri Lankan female domestic workers. Jureidini and Moukarbel document work conditions of Sri Lankan women working as housemaids in Lebanon, and characterize their lives as 'contract slavery'. According to them, since the early 1990s, there has been a large influx of Sri Lankan women into Lebanon, serving primarily as domestic labour in private households. The Sri Lankan government, as with other countries, has actively encouraged the 'export' of domestic labour as it has become the largest single source of foreign revenue for the country. As part of the feminisation of international migration and trafficking in human labour, both the employment relations and social status of these women leave them extremely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. It is argued in this paper that most Sri Lankan domestic workers fall under the category of 'contract slavery', given the legal and employment conditions which they face. Their analysis of 70 interviews with Sri Lankan women in Lebanon reveals their living conditions, how they are treated by their employers, and how the legal and administrative arrangements of these workers have facilitated the poor conditions and entrapment which many encounter.

UN System Concerns and the Philippines Experiment in Training and Legal Literacy for Aspirant Domestic Workers

Within the UN system, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UN Women have long concerned themselves with the issues of migrant domestic workers. An ILO report from 2004 notes, that migration is recognized as beneficial to both sending and receiving countries. Migration relieves unemployment pressures in countries of origin, and provides productive labour and an economic lifeline for millions of women and men. At the same time, remittances have a very positive impact on home economies representing a significant source of external funding for many developing countries. In the receiving countries, migrant workers usually take on jobs that are not attractive to national workers, yet in demand in the labour market. In addition, migration can be empowering in terms of higher self-esteem, and increased economic independence of the migrant workers. However, migration has also permitted unscrupulous employers, recruitment agents and others, some practices considered abusive by international standards.

In general, abuses and labour exploitation in male-dominated sectors are well-documented and more visible since men usually work in groups in construction and agriculture. Abuses and exploitation against women migrant workers are less well known since they are likely to occur at an earlier stage of the migration process or in more invisible situations. These abuses can include demand for higher payments from agencies, greater exposure to robbery, frequent violations of physical integrity (punishments, intimidations, ridicule, and humiliations) and sexual harassment.

Since women migrant workers often go into individualized and unregulated work environments (e.g. domestic service), data on migrant women in invisible occupations like domestic work are not readily available. Despite the data challenges, the number of women migrating into Arab League States is increasing rapidly in recent years. In several countries, for example, women migrants represented almost 30% of all inflows in 2000 compared to 8% in the early 1980s.

Many domestic workers in four studies from the Arab region complained of not having enough sleep and being "on-call" all the time. Many mentioned having to wake up during the night to take care of babies. The workload recorded by most of these domestic workers comprised of: general cleaning of the house, washing clothes, washing dishes, cooking, washing cars, ironing, looking after children, playing with them and putting them to bed, giving children or elderly persons a bath, taking children for a walk, assisting children to get ready for school and taking them to school, assisting children with their homework, taking care of elderly persons, helping carrying the bags during shopping time, accompanying the family during outings and helping in whatever is necessary, mending used clothes and sewing new clothes, waking up during the night to take care of the sick and crying children or elderly persons.

In addition to these tasks, domestic workers mentioned that their employers expected them to work in their relatives or friends' homes, especially when they had visitors, without providing them any extra payment. Other additional tasks performed by a small number of women migrant domestic workers included giving massages to their employers and hairdressing. Monthly off duty days were either nil or one day per month at the discretion of the employers.

Although the South Asian countries are major sending states of female domestic workers, it was the Philippines, and to some extent Malaysia and Indonesia, which have a better educated profile of expatriate workers being sent out, which took action on some of the ILO's recommendations. With the ratification of ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) and enactment of the Domestic Workers' Act (Republic Act 10361) by the Philippine Government, ILO continues its support in promoting decent work for domestic workers through the Domestic Workers Empowerment Programme (DWEP), funded by the Japan Fund for Building Social Safety Nets in Asia and the Pacific. Collaboration between ILO and tripartite constituents and other social partners will utilize a training module focusing on the financial and skills development of domestic workers in the Philippines, while reinforcing a sentiment of self-value and empowerment throughout the training.

The concept of DWEP came from previous initiatives like the Community-Based Enterprise Development (C-BED) and Migrant Women Empowerment Programme (MWEP), which was developed by the ILO in an effort to make business development training an option in any community. Based on this experience, the project conducted stakeholder mapping and consultations among target implementing partners; designed, developed, and translated a training curriculum and toolkit for self-implementation by domestic workers; and supported domestic-worker associations, trade unions, and government institutions to conduct capacity building and training sessions.

Today, Filipinas who want to work overseas as foreign domestic workers must take a training course approved by the Technical Education Skills Development Authority (TESDA). This

government unit oversees the country's different training centres, which provide these courses at an expected cost of between \$58 and \$144 (P2,000 to P5,000). Certificates are valid for five years. Without the course, the Philippine Embassy may not notarize helpers' contracts.

The idea behind the training is to up skill workers so that they can request higher salaries than workers from other countries. Workers will learn about workplace communication, professionalism, and health and safety practices. They will also learn to clean the different rooms of a house, wash and iron, and will learn how to prepare and serve food.

The demand for positions abroad is high, as finding employment in the Philippines—in many sectors—is becoming increasingly difficult. Domestic work, which does not require higher education, is widely seen as an accessible job for working-class Filipinas that pays substantially more abroad than the same job at home. Helpers will then need to undergo a performance assessment before receiving their certifications (unless they prove that they have years of experience). Once complete, they should take this National Certificate to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), together with their work contracts. The certificate is needed for the POEA to issue the helpers' Overseas Employment Certificate (OEC), which is required to leave the country.

Although the training is supposed to protect domestic workers and up skill them, there are several reports of some training centres taking advantage of aspiring domestic helpers by charging them incredibly high training fees. These fees can be as high as P100,000. The centres often claim that these fees are needed to cover food and boarding expenses. Government advertisements and posters warn aspiring trainees to be aware that domestic workers should not pay more than P20,000 for everything, and also cautions those undertaking a direct hire, to assist domestic helpers by finding an ethical training centre. "[Agencies] know the women can easily be forced into paying that excessive fee—there's a long queue of applicants for [each] job."

At an overseas academy, dozens of women can be seen hurriedly practicing different household chores: tightly folding bed corners, cooking Chinese fried rice, setting tables with swan-shaped napkins, caring for small dogs in cages, and drying laundry on the roof. A large group huddled in a classroom peered at a whiteboard that read, "Duvet—Crosswise, $\frac{1}{4}$ on spot, $\frac{3}{4}$ on top," along with a tiringly long list of other rules for making a bed.

Thanks to the Philippine government's Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)—which accredits scores of training centers to certify foreign domestic workers—women are pouring out of the country in search of work. Though Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates accept the most overseas foreign workers from the Philippines, Hong Kong is also a popular destination, and as of July 2015, about 165,000 of the 336,000 registered foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong were from the Philippines.

But a painful life often awaits many of them there. In Hong Kong, foreign domestic workers must live with their employers, often in notoriously tiny living quarters, to receive a visa and are not legally entitled to the minimum wage for domestic workers from Hong Kong. Mistreatment of domestic workers is rampant. Horror stories of psychological and physical abuse abound. It is common to hear of domestic workers being denied food and having to be on call 24 hours a day.

The Philippines has some 2.4 million workers abroad, and in recent years the government has become increasingly systematic about accounting for their safety. A law passed in May 2013 protects domestic workers "against abuse, harassment, violence, economic exploitation, and performance of work that is hazardous to their physical and mental health." Among its provisions are the regulations of private employment agencies as well as the requirement that all domestic workers heading overseas procure certificates from TESDA-accredited training schools.

Despite the good intentions of the Philippines state, the fact remains that some domestic workers will return to the Philippines without having made any money—and because common fees range from training school to paying the employment agency that brokers their contracts, their debt could be insurmountable before they even start work. The Philippines experiment is very new, and it is too early to figure out whether the desired results are being achieved under this scheme. For the moment, we can conclude that the fact that this scheme could be launched indicates a level of commitment to expatriate domestic workers that is perhaps easier to achieve in the smaller nation states and less hierarchical societies of South East Asia.

Concluding Remarks

The above discussion reveals both the difficulties that female South Asian migrants into domestic work in the Gulf region face, as well as the absence of systematic and consistent data on the volume of migration and issues that the workers might have. This problem is particularly acute in the case of undocumented and semi legal workers. There is no monitoring authority either located in the South Asian consular services in the Gulf countries, or in the emigration or labour departments of any major state in the Gulf region in this regard. Qualitative data and a few highlighted cases indicate that abuses are common, yet women are condemned to leading atomized and isolated existences, and find whatever support systems they can on their own. It is in this context, that they are forced to rely on semi criminal groups like the Kasargode embassy- organizations which offer some protection and troubleshooting services to women at the same time that they control and exploit them.

In this context, the South East Asian states, especially the Philippines have shown that it is possible to better equip aspiring female migrant domestics through compulsory training programmes that they must undertake prior to seeking emigration. While such programmes may increase skill and confidence levels of individual women and improve their legal literacy, there is still no effective support structure at destination which can make a sustained difference for a significant number of women. Unless there is a political commitment to creating such structures in both sending and receiving countries, not much will change. This requires both a recognition and understanding of the dimensions of the problem, as well as serious work in lobbying and putting the basic infrastructure in place. Until this is achieved, there is not much that will change for the better. One sees a long struggle ahead, but let that not deter us from making a beginning, however small, in the right direction.

This paper is based on secondary sources, as well as insights gained during the author's participation in the campaign to halt the execution of Rizaana Nafiq in Saudi Arabia.

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