

# South Korean Nurses to West Germany? Reassessing the Role of the State in Postwar Global Labour Migration

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*Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, 12,000 South Korean women worked as nurses in West Germany. Focusing on this migration allows for a reassessment of the role of the state in international labour migration prior to the era of globalization post-1980. Although Cold War politics shaped the diplomatic relationships that channeled South Korean nurses to West Germany, and contrary to narratives that celebrate the South Korean state's central role in exporting female labour as the basis for South Korea's economic miracle in the decades after the Korean War, the South Korean state played no direct role in the migration of nurses from South Korea to West Germany. South Korean nurses moved largely through the interventions not of the state but of private Catholic actors and not in the interests of South Korea's economy but out of personal economic motivations.*

*Entre le milieu des années 1950 et le milieu des années 1970, 12 000 Sud-Coréennes ont travaillé comme infirmières en Allemagne de l'Ouest. Attirer l'attention sur cette migration permet de réévaluer le rôle de l'État dans la migration internationale de travailleurs antérieure à la mondialisation d'après 1980. La politique de la guerre froide a certes façonné les relations diplomatiques qui ont conduit des infirmières sud-coréennes en Allemagne de l'Ouest, mais, contrairement au discours qui salue le rôle central de l'État sud-coréen dans l'exportation de main-d'œuvre féminine et voit là le fondement du miracle économique survenu dans ce pays après la guerre de Corée, l'État sud-coréen n'a joué aucun rôle direct dans la migration de ses infirmières en Allemagne de l'Ouest. C'est surtout l'action d'intervenants catholiques privés et non celle de l'État qui a amené les infirmières sud-coréennes à agir ainsi, poussées par des raisons économiques personnelles et non par l'intérêt économique de leur pays.*

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SINCE THE 1980s, women's active participation in the international labour market has stood out as a notable phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> Referring to this trend as the "feminization of migration" highlights both the large number of women in global workforces and the fact that women have been the driving force of labour migration over the last four decades. Moreover, this term also gestures to the type of work—care work, nursing primarily—that these women perform. Nursing originated in maternal care and thus can be regarded as a type of care work.<sup>2</sup> But, because it is usually categorized as a skilled or professional occupation requiring advanced education and licenses, nursing differs from such forms of care work as domestic work, child care, and elder care. Nonetheless, it is clear that the migration of nursing labour is a significant part of the feminization of migration.

Although the employment of non-national nurses is closely related to globalization since the 1980s, it began earlier, with about 5% of nurses around the world working outside their home countries by the mid-1970s.<sup>3</sup> The shortage of trained nurses in many developed countries has meant that the migration of nurses has continued to the present and will likely continue into the foreseeable future.<sup>4</sup> There are certain structural, cultural, and personal factors that help account for the migration of nurses, including: an increased disparity in wealth between the Global South and the Global North; perceptions of nursing that underestimate its professional status, such as was the case, as I will discuss below, in West Germany; and women's desire to improve their own and their family's financial situation by sending money home in the form of remittances.<sup>5</sup> Unlike comparatively simple services such as housework, child care, and pensioner care, nursing—as an immigrant labour product—requires institutional support from both the sending and receiving nation-states in order to maintain educational standards and levels of quality. Nursing migrants originate mainly from several Asian countries, including South Korea, that experienced rapid economic development, and

1 In 2010, almost one half of global migrant workers were women. See Marija Ivkovic, "International Nurse Migrations: Global Trends," *Journal of the Geographical Institute "Jovan Cvijic" SASA*, vol. 61, no. 2 (2011), p. 54.

2 The word "nursing" is derived from the Latin *nutrire* (nurture) and the related noun *nutrix*, meaning "wet nurse, nanny," and in this regard nursing has had the meaning of child rearing and women's labour from its beginning. Nicola Yeates has expanded the sense of nursing by placing it in the category of care. Nicola Yeates, "A Dialogue with 'Global Care Chain' Analysis: Nurse Migration in the Irish Context," *Feminist Review*, vol. 77, no. 1 (2004), pp. 79-95.

3 Barbara Stillwell et al., "Migration of Health-Care Workers from Developing Countries: Strategic Approaches to its Management," *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, vol. 82 no. 8 (2004), 596.

4 For example, in 2009, the shortage of nurses in the United States was expected to reach 29% by 2020. See Ayaka Matsuno, "Nurse Migration: The Asian Perspective," *ILO/EU Asian Programme on the Governance of Labour Migration Technical Note* (2009), pp 1-2, [https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS\\_160629/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_160629/lang--en/index.htm).

5 See Saskia Sassen, "Women's Burden: Counter-Geographies of Globalization and the Feminization of Survival," *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 53, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 503-524; and Arlie Russell Hochschild, "The Chain of Care and Surplus Value of Emotions," in Will Hutton and Anthony Giddens, eds., *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism* [Korean trans.] (Seoul: Thinking Tree Publishing, 2000), p. 265.

scholars have become increasingly interested in nurses as a migrant workforce and, more specifically, in the role of the state vis-à-vis that workforce.<sup>6</sup>

South Korea has been receiving material and technical development support from Western capitalist countries since the 1950s.<sup>7</sup> This support was crucial for growth in a country lacking economic resilience following Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953). Between the late 1950s and the mid-1970s, about 20,000 South Korean migrant workers moved to West Germany, of whom about 12,000 were nurses.<sup>8</sup> Scholars have begun to explore the role of the state in relation to changes in the economic status of South Korea and labour migration to West Germany. For example, in a 2009 study of contemporary nursing labour migration, Nicola Yeates mapped the role of the state in managing and promoting female migration, in educating nurses, as well as in ensuring the quality of care they provide.<sup>9</sup> Yeates's use of South Korea as an example in her multinational study hints at the rich stories that could be uncovered upon close examination. This research note builds on Yeates's work to suggest avenues for future research on postwar South Korean nursing history. By examining the role of the state in the migration of South Korean female nurses to West Germany from the end of the 1950s until the mid-1970s, this research note also comments on the political culture of South Korean society.

### **The State and Labour Migration**

How is it that more than 12,000 South Korean women found themselves working as nurses in West Germany between the 1950s and 1970s? In the immediate postwar period, South Korea was so far removed from West Germany—geographically, linguistically, culturally—that it would have seemed an unlikely destination for South Korean workers. South Korea was similarly an unlikely source of labour for West Germany in the immediate postwar period. The West German state had entered into formal agreements that encouraged the migration of labourers from several, more proximate, Southern European and North African countries between 1955 and 1973.<sup>10</sup> Such agreements point to the importance of institutional and diplomatic interventions in creating corridors for migrant labour, and they also reveal the lack of such a formal corridor between South Korea and West Germany

6 In particular, nurses from the Philippines and India have been major targets of international recruitment. See Xu Yu, "Strangers in Strange Lands: A Metasynthesis of Lived Experiences of Immigrant Asian Nurses Working in Western Countries," *Advances in Nursing Science*, vol. 30, no. 3 (2007), 246-265.

7 Today, South Korea has become a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and has taken on the role of supporting developing countries.

8 Some returned home after their contracts expired or migrated on to a third country, though many stayed in West Germany, struggling for and eventually obtaining in the late 1970s the right to stay and work long-term.

9 Nicola Yeates, "Production for Export: The Role of the State in the Development and Operation of Global Care Chains," *Population, Space and Place*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2009), pp. 175-187.

10 The West German government made agreements on employment with Italy in 1955, with Spain and Greece in 1960, with Turkey in 1961, with Morocco in 1963, with Portugal in 1964, with Tunisia in 1965, and with Yugoslavia in 1968. See Jürgen Fijalkowski, "Gastarbeiter als industrielle Reserverarmee? Zur Bedeutung der Arbeitsimmigration für die wirtschaftliche und gesellschaftliche Entwicklung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, vol. 24 (1984), p. 404.

during this period. So, how did South Koreans, and South Korean nurses more specifically, find their way to West Germany?

In today's globalized world, people migrate frequently, and it has become much easier to cross borders. Scholars continue to study the frameworks within which the migration of labour—from, for instance, the Global South to the Global North, from comparatively poorer parts of the world to richer ones—operates.<sup>11</sup> At the macro-level, examples include Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory and, more pertinently here, the work of Saskia Sassen and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas on globalization and reproductive labour.<sup>12</sup> Others have focused, at both the meso- and micro-levels, on the roles of social identity and transnational family networks in global labour migration.<sup>13</sup> And as the number of micro-level gender studies in migration increases, women's pursuit of self-emancipation through migration has come to be recognized as a contributing factor to the increase in women's migration.<sup>14</sup> Despite structural and cultural impediments, money remains a strong incentive to migrate for employment.<sup>15</sup> However, the state also continues to play an important role in precipitating migration.<sup>16</sup> Yeates points out that the state's role in this has been underappreciated. For her, the state is more important than any other factor in accounting for the increased migration of nurses, and she sees South Korea as a case in point.<sup>17</sup> According to Yeates, the state functions in three ways: "Firstly, through the management and promotion of female migration; secondly, through the development of nurse education involving public-private partnerships; and thirdly, through a concern to ensure the 'product quality' of the nursing labor it exports."<sup>18</sup> Echoing Yeates in her study of nurse migration from the Philippines, Ayaka Matsuno writes, "the nurse-sending countries have also accelerated their efforts to prepare their national nursing work force to perform at the 'international' level so that they can be sent abroad."<sup>19</sup>

11 Michael Samers, *The Migration* [Korean trans.] (Seoul: Purungil, 2013), p. 28.

12 Saskia Sassen, "Global Cities and Survival Circuits," in Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, eds., *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003), pp. 254-274; and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

13 On the influence of various social identities such as class and ethnicity, see Jennifer L. Mandel, "Mobility Matters: Women's Livelihood Strategies in Porto Novo, Benin," *Gender, Place and Culture*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2004), pp. 257-285. On transnational family networks, see Liesbeth Heering, Rob van der Erf, and Leo van Wissen, "The Role of Family Networks and Migration Culture in the Continuation of Moroccan Emigration: A Gender Perspective," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2004), pp. 323-337.

14 According to Anna Satolias, a Greek woman who migrated to Germany, women in the Mediterranean migrated to find emancipation. See Jennifer A. Miller, "Her Fight Is Your Fight: 'Guest Worker' Labor Activism in the Early 1970s West Germany," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, vol. 84 (Fall 2013), p. 239; and Miller, *Turkish Guest Workers in Germany: Hidden Lives and Contested Borders, 1960s to 1980s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), pp. 156-157.

15 Arlie Russell Hochschild, "The Chain of Care and Surplus Value of Emotions," in Hutton and Giddens, *On the Edge*, p. 265.

16 In *Servants of Globalization*, Parreñas's emphasizes this point.

17 Yeates, "Production for Export," p. 177.

18 In this context, the title of Yeates' article, "Production for Export: The Role of the State in the Development and Operation of Global Care Chains," is quite meaningful. See also Manolo I. Abella, *Sending Workers Abroad* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1997), p. 39.

19 Ayaka Matsuno, "Nurse Migration," p. 3.

The state certainly has played an important role in managing and promoting the migration of South Korean female nurses, as the work of Yeates and Manolo I. Abella have demonstrates.<sup>20</sup> However, two factors complicate any historical analysis of the state's role in the migration of South Korean nurses. The first is periodization. The migration of South Korean nurses to West Germany spanned the period from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, prior to the era of globalization studied by Yeates and others. During this period, the West German state's role in labour migration can clearly be seen in the policies and practices related to so-called *Gastarbeiter* [guest workers]—foreign labourers employed for short terms—but this played out in an entirely different era of global politics and international relations than Yeates and others describe.<sup>21</sup> Intergovernmental treaties and state policy on the movement of immigrants was necessary for guest workers to migrate successfully and a detailed look would show that the state generally played an even greater role in regulating migration in this earlier period than it does today. Today, the free movement of capital means that nurses can migrate to the best paying jobs; in the period between the 1950s and 1980, however, political and diplomatic regulations meant a more expansive role for the state in controlling the migration of nurses.

To deal with issues related to recruitment, health examinations, educational requirements, and other necessary administrative procedures, West Germany installed organizations in labour-sending countries and also sent the human resources required to run such procedures.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the implementation and oversight of a rotation policy intended to prevent migrant guest workers from settling in West Germany was another type of institutional intervention. This was an era of migration when the implementation of policy and any necessary interventions were performed by not only the receiving but also the sending states. Robert Rhoades emphasizes that, between 1871 and 1978, the needs of migrant workers were addressed through processes of negotiation and consultation between sending and receiving states.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, certain political, diplomatic, and international factors were also at work in the case of South Korea and in the history of the migration of South Korean nurses to West Germany, and the role of the state can be understood properly only in light of this historical context.

20 Manolo I. Abella, *Sending Workers Abroad*, p. 39. On the role of the state in motivating recruitment and migration, see also Linda H. Aiken et al., "Trends in International Nurse Migration," *Health Affairs* vol. 23, no. 3 (2004), pp. 69-77.

21 In her study of Germany's employment of guest workers (1955-1973), German scholar Heike Knortz argues that Germany's diplomatic relations were an important factor for the country in accepting migrant workers. See Heike Knortz, *Diplomatische Tauschgeschäfte, "Gastarbeiter" in der westdeutschen Diplomatie und Beschäftigungspolitik 1953-1974* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2008). Similarly, Young-Sung Hong emphasizes the impact of development support factors on the employment of Asian nurses in the West. See Young-Sung Hong, "Entwicklungsutopie und globale Identitäten: Südkoreanische Krankenschwestern in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland der 1960er und 1970er Jahren," in Hudertus Bueschel and Daniel Speich eds., *Entwicklungswelten "Globalgeschichte der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit"* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2009).

22 Monika Mattes, "Gastarbeiterinnen" in der Bundesrepublik: Anwerbepolitik, Migration und Geschlecht in den 50er bis 70er Jahren (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2005), pp. 70-75.

23 Robert E. Rhoades, "Foreign Labor and German Industrial Capitalism, 1871-1978: The Evolution of a Migratory System," *American Ethnologist*, vol. 5, no. 3 (1978), p. 553.

In addition to the issue of periodization, scholars addressing the role of the state in the migration of South Korean nurses to West Germany must also attend to South Korea's distinct political culture as a complicating factor. In Asia, where many countries experienced state-led industrial and economic modernization after independence, it was not uncommon that the strong leadership of the state produced a political culture that gave sole credit for economic achievements to a sometimes violent regime. The strength of these regimes and rapid economic growth incited a developmental trend in East Asia referred to as "Confucian capitalism."<sup>24</sup> This was exactly the case in South Korea, and for that reason the discourse on migrant labour and the role of the state needs to be brought more clearly into focus and reevaluated.

Although licensed nurses and nursing assistants started to migrate from South Korea to West Germany around 1966, many young, female nursing trainees moved to West Germany in the mid-1950s. This is important for several reasons. First, it means that the actual number of South Korean migrant nurses in West Germany was higher than the widely reported, official figure of 12,000. Second, it calls attention to the unofficial corridors that migrant nurses, often with the help of Catholic priests, as I will discuss below, travelled. And finally, the fact that trainees—who were not licensed nurses—were employed as nurses in West Germany brings into sharp relief the social and economic drivers of the migration of nurses: the lack of a caregiving workforce in West Germany and the poverty and desire for a better life among young women in South Korea. Together, furthermore, this is significant because it points to a need to problematize the South Korean state's centrality in narratives about the relationship of the migration of nurses to South Korea's economic miracle.

Manolo Abella has classified the various systems developed by Asian states to manage the emigration of labour to the Global North, ranging, for example, from India's so-called "regulated system," in which the state stipulates the rules for migrant labour but private brokers manage the migrant labour force, to the "state monopolies" of China or Vietnam, where the state assumes full and sole responsibility for organizing labour migration.<sup>25</sup> South Korea's "state-managed system" lies between these two systems; the state regulates foreign employment and sets up state-related enterprises to recruit and place workers abroad. In the early 1960s, the South Korean government, which had taken power with a *de facto* coup d'état in 1961, was beginning to establish the institutions necessary to send its people abroad, although these institutions were limited in significant ways. The country enacted the Overseas Migration Act in 1962 to promote overseas employment, and in 1965, the Korean Overseas Development Corporation (KODC) was founded to manage migration affairs, including the recruitment and movement of workers. However, the 1962 Act only revealed the dictatorship's desire to send workers overseas to earn foreign money that they could then send home in the form of remittances; South Korea, because it was not a member of the

24 See Lee Eun-Jeung, *Konfuzius interkulturell gelesen, Interkulturell Bibliothek* (Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz Verlag, 2008), p. 10.

25 Abella, *Sending Workers Abroad*, pp. 8-9.

International Labour Organization, could not make any official agreements with West Germany or other member states for the exchange of workers. Furthermore, the KODC, which had sole charge of recruiting and training workers, was a private company owned by one of the leaders of the coup d'état and did not function as a government agency until 1975. Nonetheless, it cannot be argued that there was no state influence in the migration of South Korean nurses; the regime promoted, recruited, and managed its migratory labour in an effort to have foreign money flow into South Korea. This is crucial to understanding how an oppressive government was able to achieve, and claim credit for the impact of foreign labour migration on, the economic “Miracle on the Han River.”

The period of economic modernization in South Korea in the 1960s and 1970s coincided with the mass labour migration to West Germany. This period largely overlapped with the period of military dictatorship in South Korea. Some South Korean politicians and scholars have argued that the remittances sent home by labour migrants were the foundation of the economic miracle. Pointing to the 1962 Overseas Migration Act and the KODC, they have characterized labour migrants as the main agent of development and thus highly rated the economic and political capabilities of, and, consequently, legitimized, a violent and oppressive regime. As such, contemporary efforts to memorialize and celebrate political actors who were part of that regime—many of whom are still active today<sup>26</sup>—emphasize the state’s role in the period’s achievements, both economic and political. And thus a mythology of the dictatorial government moves easily from celebrating the effects of the labour migration to West Germany to glorifying the dispatching of troops to Vietnam between 1964 and 1973 in support of U.S. military action as successes of the South Korean state, past and present. Moreover, it is worth noting, that the link between labour migration and the country’s economic development is further perpetuated by scholars critical of the dictatorship of the 1960s and 1970s, who argue that the government led its citizens into lives as miserable foreign workers for the benefit of the country’s economic development.<sup>27</sup>

One of the limitations of either celebrating or criticizing the South Korean state for its labour migration policies in the 1960s and 1970s and their relationship to the economic “Miracle on the Han River” is that the traces of the individual persons who chose labour migration are lost. Labour migrants are acknowledged for their contributions to the economic modernization of South Korea, but by establishing a logical structure that takes the sacrifice of the people for South Korea’s economic growth for granted, their sacrifice is interpreted as a means of justifying or criticizing the accomplishments of dictators who achieved economic modernization, and no more.<sup>28</sup> Workers who went to West Germany are called

26 Baek Yeonghun, “*A-u-t’o-pan-e ppu-lin nun-mul*” [Tears shed on the Autobahn] (Sejong City: Korea Industrial Development Institute), 1997.

27 Kim Wŏn, “*Mi-lae-nŭn o-lae chi-sok-toe-chi anh-nŭn-ta: pak-chŏng-hŭi si-ki kŭn-tae-hwa sok-e-sŏ ich-hyŏ-chin i-ya-ki-tŭl*” [The future does not last long: Forgotten stories in the modernization of the Park Chung Hee Period], *Yŏk-sa-pi-p’yŏng* [Yeoksabiyeong] vol. 84 (2008), p. 239.

28 The reason why nostalgia for this period of dictatorship still exists in Korea can be understood in light of the creation of such memories.

“dispatched labour,” with the focus placed squarely on the entity—the state—that dispatched them.

However, it is historically significant that the migration of nurses to West Germany began prior to the 1960s and did not actually progress under any government initiative. This fact is only beginning to be fully revealed with the recent increase in specialized research into the history of the migration of South Korean nurses to West Germany.<sup>29</sup> Their migration process has been gradually revealed, particularly through explorations of the materials of the West German federal historical archives (the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz).<sup>30</sup> Many other studies have drawn on the perspectives of sociology, political science, and women’s studies, using interviews and oral histories of migrant workers rather than archival documents.<sup>31</sup>

One of the key findings revealed by this research is that no treaty between the two governments was established to enable female nurses in South Korea to migrate to West Germany. West Germany concluded intergovernmental treaties with several Southern European and North African countries to employ guest workers and had a treaty with South Korea to temporarily employ male labourers as technical trainees in the mining industry. However, this agreement was an aspect of development aid, and there was no governmental treaty for the employment of nurses. Moreover, governments often took it upon themselves to provide the diplomatic and administrative support required for migration at a time when crossing the border was difficult, but this pertained only to basic terms and conditions for employment. Although the South Korean state provided individuals with information on migration opportunities and intervened in the mediation procedure, it cannot be considered a governmental project or an achievement of the state. Furthermore, South Korean women started working as nurses in West Germany, privately, at a time when it was difficult for the South Korean state to directly intervene in the migration of workers to West Germany.

29 Some investigations conducted by state institutions at the request of the emigrant workers, who were positioned as victims, also partly contributed to the initiation of this research. The research resulting from this occasion was submitted in reports in 2008: “The contribution of the miners and nurses dispatched to West Germany to the economic development of South Korea” and “The 2008 report of the truth investigation committee for truth and reconciliation.”

30 “P’a-tok han-in yō-sōng i-chu-no-tong-cha-ūi yōk-sa” [The history of South Korean female migrant workers dispatched to West Germany],” *Sō-yang-sa-lon* [Western history], vol. 100 (2009); *Tok-il-lo kan han-in kan-ho-yō-sōng* [South Korean female nurses who went to West Germany], Sangwageul [Mountain and letter], 2012; Hye-Sim Na, “Diplomatische Tauschgeschäfte?” *Historische Zeitschrift*, vol. 302, no. 3 (2016), pp. 677-702; Sun-Ju Choi and You Jae Lee, *Umgekehrte Entwicklungshilfe. Die koreanische Arbeitsmigration in Deutschland*, in Kölischer Kunstverein et al, eds., *Projekt Migration* (Köln, 2005), pp. 735-742.

31 Jung-Sook Yoo, *Koreanische Immigranten in Deutschland*, (Verlag Dr. Kova, 1996); Lee Suan, “I-chu-yō-sōng-ūi t’a-cha-sōng-kwa kwan-yong-ūi sang-ho-pal-hyōn-e tae-han i-lon-chōk mo-saek: chae-tok han-in yō-sōng-ūi i-chu chōng-ch’ak-kwa-chōng-ūl chung-sim-ū-lo” [Theoretical research on the otherness of female migrants and interaction of tolerance: With a case study of Korean female migrants in Germany], *Sa-hoe-wa-i-lon* [Society & theory], vol. 12 (2008), pp. 73-108. Notable older sociological studies worth mentioning include, Yoon-Jong Shim, “Haewoe chwieobin-ui siltae” [Current status of overseas employees], *In-mun-kwa-hak-non-mun-chip* [Journal of humanities studies], vol. 2, no. 7 (1975), pp. 1825-1838; and Do-Jin Yoo, *Die Situation koreanischer Krankenpflegeträfte* (PhD diss., Kiel, 1975).



### **The World after The Second World War and the Immigration of Nurses**

The migration of South Korean women as nurses—including nursing trainees prior to 1966, licensed nurses and nursing assistants from 1966, and nursing officers after 1972—to West Germany coincided with the period of West Germany's guest worker policy (1955-1973). After the Second World War, many Western European nations, as well as the United States, implemented guest-worker programs to develop short-term labour forces. These programs allowed those countries to both supplement their domestic labour during the postwar boom and return labour migrants to their countries of origin when their contracts ended. And although Western European nations initially looked to recruit from within Europe, it was previous colonial relationships, as Michael Samers has pointed out, that came to define many of the postwar labour migration patterns.<sup>32</sup> France, for instance, recruited mainly from North Africa; the United Kingdom from India; and the United States from the Philippines.<sup>33</sup> Stephen Castles and Mark Miller argue that the migration of guest workers to Europe from neighboring countries, the permanent immigrations to North America or Oceania, and the emigrations from former colonies to Western Europe were all characteristic of the period's migration profile.<sup>34</sup>

Because Germany's African colonies had been invaded by Allied powers during the First World War and distributed to Belgium, France, Portugal, South Africa, and the United Kingdom in its aftermath, West Germany was not able to utilize those colonial relationships to recruit labour in the postwar period. From 1955 to 1973, West Germany wanted, in principle, to hire people from Southern Europe but found it difficult. As I will discuss below, this was especially the same in their attempts to recruit female nurses. Like the rest of Western Europe, West Germany was eventually compelled to seek labour from outside Europe and was able to recruit women workers from India, the Philippines, and South Korea.<sup>35</sup> Unlike the rest of Western Europe, however, the patterns of migration that brought labourers to West Germany were defined more by Cold War relationships than imperial ones.

After the Second World War, much of the world's international relations revolved around the two great Cold War powers: the Soviet Union and the United States. Both West Germany, as recipients of Marshall Plan aid, and South Korea, which also received U.S. aid support, fell within the United States' sphere of influence.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, South Korea also received aid from other countries,

32 Samers, *The Migration*, p. 63.

33 On the migration of Philippine nurses to the United States, see Catherine Ceniza Choy, "Asian American History: Reflections on Imperialism, Immigration, and the 'Body,'" *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2000), pp. 119–140, esp. p. 121.

34 Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration* [Korean trans.] (Seoul: Iljogak, 2013), p. 178.

35 In 1965, a German newspaper reported that West Germany had attempted to recruit labour for patient and elderly care from Italy, Spain, Turkey, and so on, but failed, and thus turned its attention to the faraway East. Bundesarchiv Koblenz, B. 149, Nr. 22428, "Koreanerinnen warden alte Leute pflegen" *Düsseldorfer Nachrichten*, April 24, 1965.

36 Heike Knortz notes changes in the relationship between Yugoslavia and East Germany in explaining how Yugoslavia, which was originally a socialist state, could send workers to West Germany. Knortz discusses the crucial influences in diplomatic relations in West Germany's 1955-1973 employment policy for

including West Germany, for reconstruction after the Korean War. These relationships facilitated cultural and social exchange between the United States, West Germany, and South Korea, and the migration of South Korean elites to the United States and the economic migration of South Korean women, many of whom were nurses, to West Germany were extensions of those Cold War relationships.<sup>37</sup>

The demand for nurses in Western Europe only increased in the 1960s and 1970s as nations moved toward forms of welfare capitalism. The economic prosperity experienced during France's "thirty years of glory," for instance, or West Germany's economic miracle was accompanied by the expansion of the welfare state and, in turn, the need for more women in service occupations. As West Germany reformed its pension system in 1957, for example, so that retirees could enjoy greater financial independence, service workers were necessary to provide retirees with medical and nursing care, and securing such a labour force became the obligation of the state, particularly after the Federal Act on Social Assistance took effect in 1962.<sup>38</sup>

It was difficult for West Germany to import health care workers from Southern European countries: even though those countries had agreed to labour transfers, they were reluctant to send their young female nurses to a country where nursing was largely considered household and kitchen work. Historically, in Western Europe, nursing had been perceived primarily as care work with religious significance or as wives' or servants' work.<sup>39</sup> In Germany, that notion of nursing had not changed much: it was seen to be an extension of housework and focused on the cleaning or arrangement of patients' surroundings.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the Nursing Act of West Germany (1957) stipulated that nurses should be educated in housework for one year to provide basic care services to patients.<sup>41</sup> As a profession, nursing was held in very low esteem in 1950s and 1960s West German society, and although some efforts had been made in the early twentieth century to promote it as a professional career,<sup>42</sup> West Germans were reluctant to acknowledge it as such until

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immigrant workers. The issues of the influx of South Korean workers into West Germany's labour market related to development assistance were sharply pointed out by Young Sun Hong. See Knortz, *Diplomatische Tauschgeschäfte, "Gastarbeiter"*; and Young-Sung Hong, "Entwicklungsupotie und globale Identitäten."

37 See William I. Robinson, "Saskia Sassen and the Sociology of Globalization: A Critical Appraisal," *Sociological Analysis*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring 2009), p. 9.

38 Similarly, the migration of Philippine nurses to the United States after 1946 was related to the expansion of medical rights in the United States. See Barbara L. Brush, "The Potent Lever of Toil: Nursing Development and Exportation in the Postcolonial Philippines," *American Journal of Public Health* (Sept. 2010), pp. 1574-1575.

39 Antje Grauhan, "Krankenpflege: Ein Beruf mit offenen Grenzen," *Deutsche Krankenpflege-Zeitschrift*, vol. 45 (October 1992), p. 715.

40 In 1957, West Germany mandated that nursing students must be at least 18 years of age and have graduated high school. However, the state had no real opportunity to promote professional standards because so few applied to the profession. For more information, see the *Krankenschwestergesetz* of 15 July 1957, *Bundesgesetzblatt*, 1958, Part I.

41 *Krankenschwestergesetz* of 15 July 1957, *Bundesgesetzblatt*, 1958, Part I.

42 On efforts to promote professionalism, see Christoph Schweikardt, *Die Entwicklung der Krankenpflege zur staatlich anerkannten Tätigkeit im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (München: Martin Meidenbauer, 2008), chap. 2.

the late 1970s.<sup>43</sup> For that reason, Spain and Greece officially objected to sending their nurses to West Germany.<sup>44</sup> Thus, West Germany faced a labour shortage in the health care sector, which led in some cases to hospital closures and patients being sent to temporary facilities.<sup>45</sup> Efforts to solve this labour shortage included recruiting South Korean nurses to migrate to West Germany—and German Catholic priests were crucial to those efforts.

### Private Agents and State Interests

Although states had some influence in creating the conditions for the movement of nurses between South Korea and West Germany, and, in passing legislation and creating the KODC, the South Korean state signalled its desire to export South Korea's labour, the actual movement of nurses from South Korea to West Germany between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s was facilitated by Catholic individuals and organizations and not by intergovernmental agreements. German Catholic priests in particular contributed to the process by serving as facilitators, mainly for women who had just graduated from high school. Many of those priests were activists who worked in Korea as missionaries, assisting with post-Korean War restoration and providing development aid, and were thus familiar with the social and economic conditions there.

A document dated September 9, 1966, and archived in the Caritasverband Freiburg, a Catholic aid organization, states that there were at that time 544 young, mainly Asian, women in West Germany that had been recruited by European Catholic priests. These young women were pursuing either general or nursing educations, or they were employed by hospitals or other health care enterprises.<sup>46</sup> According to the document, these young women were from India and South Korea, primarily, as well as from other developing countries such as the Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Ecuador, Mauritius, and Trinidad, which demonstrates the role played by European priests in introducing women from the Global South into the West German labour force.

That religious persons and institutions provided for the health care needs of West Germans is unsurprising, as Christian institutions have provided relief for the sick and poor in Western Europe since the medieval period.<sup>47</sup> In the German context specifically, religious organizations were active in the health care and social service sectors of the German Empire (1871-1918). In the postwar period, a particularly noteworthy example of the relationship between religious organizations and health care is the *Bundessozialhilfegesetz* (Federal Social Security Law) of 1961 that endowed private welfare organizations, which were mostly operated by religious communities, with the legal right to implement social welfare policies

43 Martin Albert, *Krankenpflege auf dem Weg zur Professionalisierung* (PhD. diss., Buehl/Baden, 1998), p. 70.

44 Mattes, "Gastarbeiterinnen" in der Bundesrepublik, p. 10.

45 Albert, *Krankenpflege auf dem Weg zur Professionalisierung*, p. 217.

46 Archiv des Deutschen Caritasverbandes e.V.(ADCV), Sig.: ADCV 38040.030, Fasz.01. Fachverband: Deutscher Verband kath. Mädchensozialarbeit. 9. Sept. 1966.

47 Donat Wehner and Anke Wesse, eds., *Rasthäuser-Gasthäuser-Geschäftsäuser: Zur Historischen Archäologie von Wirthäusern* (Bonn: Verlag Dr. Rudolf Habelt GMBH, 2015), p. 101.

with priority over the central and provincial governments.<sup>48</sup> Catholic authorities in West Germany played a pivotal role in the operation of West Germany's health care system on a private basis during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>49</sup> In response to the labour shortage in the health care sector during the 1950s, priests who were in developing countries as missionaries or activists and understood the social and economic conditions in those countries recruited workers for West Germany.

In 1961, West Germany established the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, or BMZ) and officially began overseas development aid. At that time, private development aid organizations, including the West German Catholic Church, were allowed to operate independently of government-led projects.<sup>50</sup> In this context, the Catholic Church was able to privately facilitate the movement of women from the Global South to West Germany. Ostensibly, the intent was to educate these young women in West Germany and allow them to acquire a nursing license, so that they could return home to contribute to the development of health care there. However, they were also mobilized as a care labour force, which was urgently needed in West Germany.<sup>51</sup>

By 1966, the migration of South Korean nursing students had led to the migration of licensed South Korean nurses. The South Korean government had been aware of nursing students migrating to West Germany, but it could not actively support them due to delicate perceptions around aid relationships. Some West Germans objected to giving developmental aid to countries only to make their educated labour force care for the patients and elderly in Western countries. This sentiment only intensified when licensed nurses, and not just nurse trainees, began to migrate. Immediately after 128 nurses left South Korea in 1966, the West German government and related agencies were criticized at home and abroad by, among others, Alan E. McBain, the representative of UNESCO's South Korean branch, and the chief of Misereor, West German Catholic Overseas Relief Agency. In South Korea, the heads of hospitals, such as Fatima Hospital's German head Edeltrud Weist, argued that the West German state was responsible for a lack of nurses in South Korea.<sup>52</sup> Because of this controversy, the West German government decided not to permit the entry of licensed South Korean nurses into the country. Nevertheless, nurses continued to immigrate—both because West Germany still had a shortage of nurses and because the South Korean government

48 Cha Seong Hwan, "Tok-il-üi sa-hoe-po-chang ch'e-kye-wa min-kan-pok-chi-tan-ch'e" [A study of non-profit organization for social services in the West German social state], *Tam-lon* [Discourse] 201, vol. 2019, no. 3 (2006), p. 285.

49 Iris Nowak, "Prekäre Arbeitsverhältnisse in Gesundheitseinrichtungen-am Beispiel stationärer Altenpflege", *Vortrag auf dem Fachtag, "Soziale Dialog in der Diakonie"* vol. 6 (Oktober 2011), p. 4.

50 On the beginning of development aid by the Catholic Church, see Ludwig Watzal, *Die Entwicklungspolitik der katholischen Kirche in der Bundesrepublik* (Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1985), p. 96.

51 Hye-Sim Na, "Diplomatische Tauschgeschäfte? Ein alternative Ansicht zur Gastarbeiterscahft in Rahmen eines asiatischen Beispiels," *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 302, no. 3, (June 2016), p. 691.

52 Hye-Sim Na, *Tok-il-lo kan han-in kan-ho-yō-sōng* [South Korean female nurses who went to West Germany], p. 115.

pursued institutional changes to cultivate more nursing labour resources—and the criticism and social debate continued into the 1970s.<sup>53</sup>

In 1966, the South Korean government responded to ongoing criticism by creating new nursing designations, such as nursing aides, in the hopes of producing more care workers. In 1967, South Korean nursing school deans agreed to increase the number of nurses admitted and trained, and the Ministry of Education agreed to increase the number of nursing schools. In some cases, the government established new nursing schools in regions where few such schools existed.<sup>54</sup> The Korean government's top priority in supporting and promoting these changes was not to meet the nursing needs of South Korea but to secure an influx of foreign capital through remittances by allowing for the emigration of as many nurses as possible.

As such, the South Korean government did not officially enter into any intergovernmental agreement or promote the migration of nurses as a national project, but it did unofficially facilitate and support their migration. Some politicians participated in recruitment efforts, but those interventions were unofficial and non-governmental. For example, a Catholic priest and his supporter (named Karl Tacke), who recruited nurses and sent them to West Germany, reported that their efforts were supported by South Korean President Park.<sup>55</sup> There were also interventions by public agencies. For example, on November 11, 1965, the South Korean Embassy in West Germany sent a document to the Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Order) requesting the assistance of Catholic priests, individuals, and enterprises in recruiting South Koreans to be educated for employment in West German hospitals, textile factories, and dyeing plants.<sup>56</sup> South Korean media outlets criticized the negative impact this would have on South Korean society, but immigration continued in various forms nevertheless.<sup>57</sup> The South Korean government was not interested in the domestic impacts of exporting labour, with one major exception: the inflow of foreign capital in the form of remittances that was sure to come in return. And it certainly was not interested in providing any of the support services, which Abella has outlined as significant state activities in support of labour migrants, to help South Korean labourers, who again were mostly women and mostly nurses, adapt to and settle in West Germany.

53 For example, a newspaper article entitled “Der einen Not-der anderen Nutzen,” *Die Zeit* (Hamburg, Germany), January 12, 1973.

54 “T’ü-laen-sü-nae-syö-nöl kwan-chöm-e-sö pon tok-il han-in-kan-ho-i-chu-tü yök-sa” [The influence of South Korean nurses’ migration into West Germany on the nursing culture and policy of the countries: A transnational perspective], *South Korean Journal of Medical History*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2013), p. 205.

55 Bundesarchiv Koblenz [Federal Archive Koblenz], B. 149, Nr. 22428, A letter by Karl Tacke to Thier, West German ambassador to South Korea, on June 30, 1965.

56 Bundesarchiv Koblenz [Federal Archive Koblenz], B. 149, no. 22428, A letter from the South Korean Embassy in Bonn to *Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung* on November 11, 1966.

57 South Korean newspapers reported that the reason for the shortage was that experienced and skilled nurses had emigrated to West Germany “Yang-ho-kyo-sa 27% mo-cha-la” [The number of school health nurses short by 27%], *mae-il-kyöng-che* [The Maeil Business Newspaper] (Seoul, Korea) October 26, 1970; “Kan-ho-wön hae-oe-lo-man ppa-chyö kuk-nae-e t’ae-pu-chok” [Drainage of nurses to overseas countries results in a lack of nurses domestically], *Tong-a-il-po* [The Dong-A Ilbo] (Seoul, Korea), March 9, 1971.

Yeates does mention the role that states played in maintaining a certain level of quality of exported labour, and licensed South Korean nurses were certainly well trained. In fact, considering the nursing needs in West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s, South Korean nurses were overqualified. Whereas nursing in Germany until the late 1970s had been a task assumed by women rather than an occupation that one was educated or trained for,<sup>58</sup> in Korea, American missionaries in the early twentieth century had introduced nursing as an occupation that one was educated for, and by the 1950s nursing had been specialized mainly into medical assistance and administrative work. A four-year nursing college had been established in South Korea in 1957, whereas the Nursing Act of West Germany stipulated that nurses should be educated in housework for one year in order to provide basic care services to patients,<sup>59</sup> and it was not until the end of the twentieth century that nursing courses were offered at universities.<sup>60</sup> When female nursing students migrated from South Korea to West Germany, the German Catholic Church worried that, even if they received a nursing education and acquired nursing licenses in West Germany, these would not be recognized in Korea.<sup>61</sup>

Even though South Korean nurses were very qualified, this was not because the state had any interest in the quality of their training. Maintaining the quality of nurses who would go to West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s was not a role performed by the South Korean government. Of course, the West German government requested that women with nursing licenses migrate to West Germany despite the comparatively low level of specialized training and work available to the nursing workforce in West Germany, but this is simply one of the trends of increased professionalization that can be observed throughout the history of labour migration. In fact, the efforts made by the South Korean government to maintain nurses as an export product were not aimed at guaranteeing its quality but only in maintaining and expanding its quantity. Neither the life of the people exported as a product nor the medical rights of people being treated were a matter of interest to the South Korean government.<sup>62</sup>

58 Claudia Bischoff, "Krankenpflege als Frauenberuf," *Argument-Sonderband AS* vol. 86 (2013/03), p. 14.

59 This can be easily observed in the reactions of the German colleagues working with Korean nurses at that time. "From my understanding, nurses received a very high level of education in Korea. They performed the types of tasks which only doctors are permitted to do in Germany, such as giving an injection, intravenous injection, measuring blood pressure, etc. However, the basic care work, such as bathing, making the bed, washing the dishes, etc., is not their job." Statement by a German nurse who worked at a German hospital in Yoo Do-Jin, *Die Situation Koreanischer Krankenpflegerkräfte in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und ihre Socialpädagogischen Problem* (PhD. diss., Kiel, 1975), p. 243.

60 Schweikardt, *Die Entwicklung der Krankenpflege*, p. 295.

61 "Die deutsche Krankenpflege-Ausbildung (mit körperlicher Arbeit) ist im Still fremd gegenüber der englischen, die mehr schulisch auf die Artz-Assistentin ausgerichtet ist. Die deutsche Ausbildung hat noch nicht die (internationale) Anerkennung für die Heimat der Mädchen." This is from the same documents that mention the 544 young women from India and South Korea who entered West Germany to study nursing. Archiv des Deutschen Caritasverbandes e.V., Signatur: ADCV. 380.40.030 Fasz. 01. Fachverband: Deutscher Verband kath. Mädchensozialarbeit, 9 Sept. 1966.

62 According to a 1971 report, about one-third of the nurses educated in South Korea immigrated to West Germany. See *Deutsches Arzteblatt* [German Doctor Newspaper], a newsletter for West German medical doctors, which quoted in its September 1971 issue an article from *The Korea Times* that of about 3,000 people, one-quarter to one-third of them had been educated in South Korea. See *Archiv des Deutschen Caritasverbandes* [Archives of the German Caritas Association] e.V. sig.: ADCV 380.40+228 Fasz. 01.

### **Conclusion**

Similar to other types of global economic migration, the migration of health care workers has been overwhelmingly dominated by the flow of workers from relatively poor nations to more prosperous ones. This migration of labour has been closely linked to the desire for income from remittances, which motivates workers to emigrate. Other factors also came into play in the migration of nurses in the 1960s and 1970s. Because people could not freely cross international borders at that time, international political and diplomatic factors had a considerable influence on migration. Relationships defined by development aid that linked the capitalist countries of the West and newly independent countries after the Second World War was one such factor.

In the case of South Korea, the government did not officially initiate a project for the emigration of nurses. However, the South Korean president and related organizations intervened in the recruitment of workers and administrative processes that private agencies managed. Apart from that, the government was more interested in the maintenance and expansion of the quantity rather than the quality of South Korean nurses because that was more helpful in securing an inflow of foreign currency.

However, despite such a role, it is far from historically accurate to define this as a case of a national project led by the government. The South Korean government could not officially intervene in the migration process. Indeed, enabled by developmental aid relationships, the migration of nurses from South Korea to West Germany started with private facilitators. Therefore, the state played a role as an intervenor, not as an initiator or manager. It would therefore be more correct to say that a dictator and his personal network, not the state, had been directly involved.

Having an accurate perception of this issue is essential to clearly recognize the contributing factors to the economic miracle of South Korea, which experienced economic development under a dictatorship. In the case of the Asian countries liberated at the end of the Second World War, particularly those experiencing a period of weak social freedoms, the link between state leadership and economic achievements can lend legitimacy to a violent regime. When the state is described as the “dispatcher” of emigrants, labour migration is entirely transformed into a matter of the economic valuation of the emigrants’ remittances, and the many other historical and social motives operating in the emigration process, particularly the personal desire to start a new life, are lost. In this narrative, the migrant workers who went to West Germany are reduced to “dispatched labour,” as has long been accepted in South Korea, and despite their hard work and suffering, their role in the nation’s economic miracle is overshadowed by that of the government, which is credited with the entirety of the economic miracle as their “dispatcher.” The image of such a government capable of producing miracles is reproduced in public discourse as a defense of the regime during each economic crisis and political upheaval, which slowed the development of democracy in South Korea.

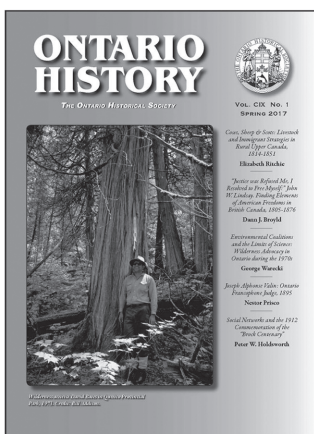
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