

## A Review of Sebastiao Salgado's "Migrations"

By PAULINE JUCKES

Sebastiao Salgado uses the lens of his camera as a mouthpiece for the dispossessed. His subjects stand in front of his camera as if it were a microphone, their mute presence exemplifying their plight. Salgado's wife and partner, Leila Wanick Salgado, sets the tone of the exhibit, "Migrations":

*"Humanity is on the move, urgently, chaotically. In recent decades, hundreds of millions of people have been uprooted from their homes by poverty, wars, and repression. Some flee to save their lives; others risk their lives to escape destitution. Most of them end up in refugee camps or in the slums of Third World cities; a lucky few find better lives in an affluent country far from their own."*

*"Population upheavals have occurred throughout history, but never before have they taken place simultaneously in different parts of the world for essentially the same reasons. With the end of the Cold War, nationalist, religious, and tribal conflicts have erupted in Africa, Asia, and Europe, spawning tidal waves of refugees. At the same time, with global economic change deepening rural poverty in much of the Third World, peasant migration is creating gargantuan, ungovernable cities. Today, almost everything that happens on earth is somehow connected. We are all affected by the widening gap between rich and poor, by population growth, by the mechanization of agriculture, by the destruction of the environment, by bigotry exploited for political ends. The people wrenched from their homes are simply the most visible victims of a global convulsion."*

In talking to fellow-Georgists, I noticed that we (Georgists) tend to treasure the precise moment when we first grasped the full impact of Henry George's theory. A certain panic and depression accompanies the awakening. One is catapulted into a new and different world, all the more terrifying for its lack of Georgist principles. As I read the words of the two Salgados, and studied Sebastiao Salgado's arresting photographs, I felt as if I had been fast-forwarded into a futuristic nightmare, one not only lacking a Georgist foundation, but careening chaotically on the back of corruption, greed, and the sacrifice of many for the few. Millions of people experienced disruption and despair; and, as if war, drought, famine, and displacement were not enough, their miseries were

compounded by two new and powerful forces: Globalization and AIDS. The ultimate victims of mismanagement and corruption stare back at us through Salgado's art, their stories etched into their faces.

The photographs in this exhibition capture tragic, dramatic, and heroic moments in individual lives. They tell a story of our times. They offer no answers. Instead, they leave us with the following haunting question: "As we move forward into the future, are we to abandon a segment of humanity?"

Salgado's attitude to his work is unique among photojournalists. In a sense, he "becomes" those whom he photographs. His approach, both intuitive and highly emotional, originates in respectful empathy, personal warmth, and an extraordinary reverence for his subjects' essential dignity. Able to converse in four languages (Portuguese, Spanish, French, and English), he can communicate, and hence identify, with those whom he photographs. His point of view, however, is motivated by a sentimental, populist Marxism. "You photograph with all your ideology" is the way Salgado has put it.

Ted Gwartney and I were returning from the conference, "Taxation Alternatives for the 21st Century," and I asked Ted what he thought motivated a Georgist. "Compassion," replied Ted without hesitation. There is no doubt that compassion is a strong motivational force. Compassion was perhaps the strongest emotion aroused in the large numbers of people visiting the exhibition as they gazed at the vivid and moving portraits lining the walls of the International Center for Photography in New York. There is concern on their faces; in the silence of their stunned incomprehension, they seem to be asking: "How could this have happened?"

The exhibit "Migrations" is drawn from Salgado's book of the same name. His theme is couched in the unavailability of "land." Yet, he is seemingly unaware of the role that this factor plays in economics. Under the heading, "Struggling for Land," Salgado writes poignantly, "I visited many cities of the world for the first time. When I returned to places I had previously known, however, it was painful to discover that things were generally worse."

In Ecuador, he finds villages of women (left behind in the mass exodus of men to the cities in search of work) left fighting for their survival with little or no land to

farm, and with all the political and economic forces allied against them. "While cattle ranchers hold the best land, Ecuadorian Indians own only tiny hillside plots, insufficient for subsistence." The photos show a backdrop of crisscrossed hillsides, and in the foreground, a straggling line of mature women and young girls, go off to work in the pre-dawn light. Under the heading, "Abandoning the Land in Ecuador," he writes: "In the center of Ecuador, where Indian communities have survived for thousands of years, the delicate balance (between food, land, and population) has been disrupted by the growing use of land for cattle farming. . . . More than poverty, it is the skewed land tenure system that accounts for the exodus."

As his emphasis moves to the burgeoning mega cities, which sprawl for mile upon mile in a crude attempt to absorb millions of migrants arriving daily, he reflects sadly that at times he loses sight of which city he has landed in, whether Jakarta, Manila, Bombay, Mexico City, San Paolo, Shanghai, or Buenos Aires. In describing Jakarta, he could have been speaking for any one Third World megalopolis: "14 million Indonesians live in the capital, which is expanding chaotically in all directions: old buildings or entire shanty towns are swept away by modern buildings, while new satellite towns are added to the periphery. Many unskilled workers live off recycling garbage. Running water and drainage services are almost nonexistent. The wealth is in the hands of a privileged minority, but most people struggle to make ends meet, and the poor live in polluted slums — or squat under bridges."

In his foreword to *Migrations*, Salgado noted sadly: "The dominant ideologies of the 20th Century — Communism and Capitalism — have largely failed us. Globalization is presented to us as a reality but not as a solution."

Would that he were aware of an alternative way, one that would bring the ideas of Henry George into his search for an improved future for those he wishes to help. Salgado's final words reach out to our compassion. "These photographs show part of the present. We cannot afford to look away."

But little is gained by compassion alone. When it is accompanied by appropriate action, then we all stand to gain.