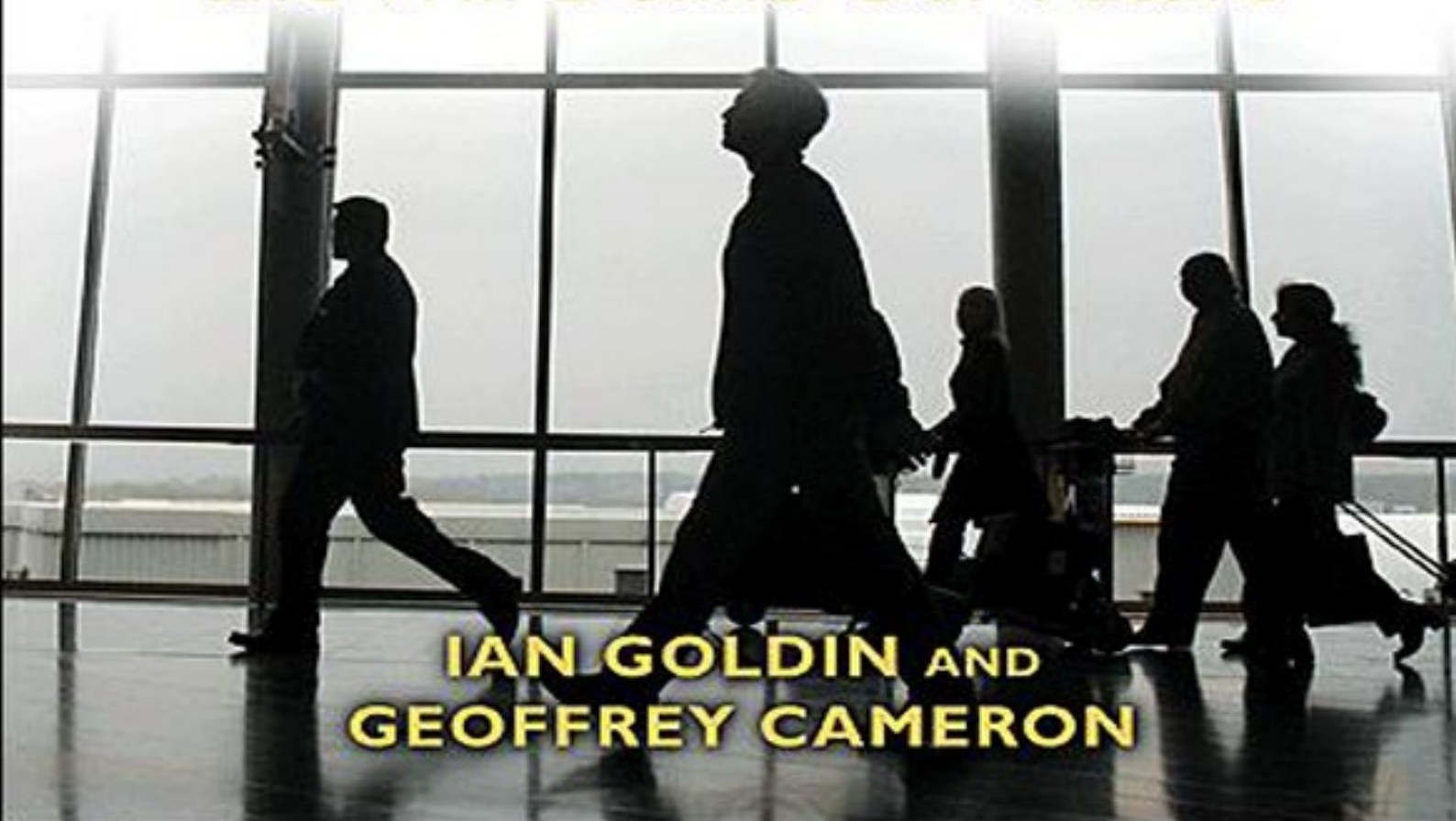




EXCEPTIONAL PEOPLE

How Migration Shaped Our World
and Will Define Our Future



**IAN GOLDIN AND
GEOFFREY CAMERON**

EXCEPTIONAL PEOPLE

How Migration Shaped Our World
and Will Define Our Future



**IAN GOLDIN,
GEOFFREY CAMERON,
AND
MEERA BALARAJAN**

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*To Tess, Olivia, and Alex, who have suffered most
from my migration impulse, and to Andrew Glyn and
Stan Trapido, who had a formative influence on my
thinking and yet left this world
as I was entering theirs.*

Ian Goldin



*To Mom and Dad, for everything, and to Lita, for
keeping new frontiers in our sights.*

Geoffrey Cameron



Dedicated with love to my parents.

Meera Balarajan

~~“it is hardly possible to overrate the value, in the present~~

low state of human improvement, of placing human beings
in contact with persons dissimilar to themselves, and
with modes of thought and action unlike those with
which they are familiar....Such communication has
always been, and is peculiarly in the present age, one
of the primary sources of progress.”

–John Stuart Mill



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*Ian Goldin, Oxford (UK); Geoffrey Cameron, Ottawa (Canada)
Meera Balarajan, London (UK)
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Introduction



We live in a dynamic age of global integration, where the reconnection and mixture of the world's people is challenging dominant norms and practices in many societies. Disintegration and integration are simultaneous and interwoven. Cultural codes adapt. New economies emerge. Innovation prospers. Social institutions struggle to adapt.

To many, the challenges associated with migration are characteristic of our age of postmodernism, multiculturalism, and aspiring cosmopolitanism. Some are nostalgic for an illusory past when people had more in common. While the scale, pace, and intensity of human movement may be greater today, the habits of migration and its disruptive effects are as old as humanity itself. Outsiders have always encountered opposition from their adoptive societies. Nevertheless, the direction of history points to the persistent expansion in the boundaries of community. Our cultural and political frontiers have gradually receded.

In most parts of the world, the old distinctions between clans and tribes are now of less significance than are national boundaries. Whereas at one time a “migrant” may have been one who married into a neighboring village, “migration” now generally refers to moving across a national border, often with the purpose of settling for a period of time. The names “immigrant” and “asylum seeker” have acquired negative connotations in many societies, echoing the ancient fear of the “barbarian.” Our governments and societies retain an antiquated suspicion of outsiders, who were born in one nation, state and seek to make their life in another one. The result is a conventional view that a high rate of international migration should be prevented.

In the current period, “migration” is defined as cross-border movement, and it has come to be seen as something to be managed—a cost to be minimized rather than an opportunity to be embraced. One view is that it is a key driver of human and economic development and that our future will be strongly influenced by policies regarding migration.

How governments craft and coordinate migration policy will determine whether our collective future is defined by a more open and cosmopolitan global society or one that is unequal, partitioned, and less prosperous. This book aspires to set contemporary debates about policy within a wider context. Public debates about migration are limited by a lack of perspective of its historical role, contemporary impacts, and future prospects. This book aims to address these gaps and to contribute to advancing the discourse about the role of migrants and migration in world development.

We seek to shift discussion on international mobility away from narrow national-level immigration debates, toward a more global view of migration. The terms “immigration” and “immigrant” can be obscure more than they reveal, because they imply that people move once, permanently—from outside the country to inside—when migration for the most part is temporary, repeated, or circular. This perspective also ignores the dynamism of human movement: countries that accept large numbers of migrants also typically send similarly large numbers across their borders. Migrants are uncommon people, and they often move several times in search of opportunity and safety. Viewing cross-border movement simply in terms of immigration limits a broader appreciation of how networks and economies function in an increasingly integrated world.

In this book, we question the received wisdom that an increase in the flow of international migration

is undesirable. We offer fresh insights into the past, present, and future role of migration. We begin by reviewing the historical role of migrants and migration in advancing human progress and world development. Second, we analyze the contemporary period of managed migration. Drawing upon the rapidly growing field of multidisciplinary scholarship on the dynamics, flows, and impacts of migration, we make the case that current ad hoc regulations are poorly suited for a world economy that thrives on openness, diversity, innovation, and exchange. Last, we look to the future, presenting projections of demographic, environmental, and social trends that highlight how the number and diversity of migrants will grow over the next fifty years.

PART I: PAST

Throughout history, as remains the case today, people have moved under conditions that are not typically of their own choosing. Even those under the most restrained and difficult circumstances have navigated new social and cultural settings with determination and ingenuity. By adapting, innovating, and combining knowledge across cultural barriers, migrants have advanced the frontier of human development since humans departed from Africa, some 50,000-60,000 years ago. The emergence of the first early civilizations around 4000 BCE drew people from scattered settlements into dense patterns of complex social life. The first civilizations, like social magnets, brought people from the hinterlands into the life of the cities—as labor, merchants, traders, and administrators—and propelled city dwellers into the frontiers to find resources and trading partners.

The growth of civilizations quickened the pace of exchange and the commerce of ideas and technologies. As increasingly complex societies developed in Eurasia, traders, adventurers, missionaries, and conquering armies broke down the frontiers separating distant empires. Valuable technologies and commercial and other practices, which at times took many centuries to develop, were shared over ever-increasing distances. Migrants carried with them religious teachings, agricultural techniques, and commercial practices. The scourge of war and the lure of commerce propelled people across old frontiers, reconnecting communities from eastern China to West Africa, which had developed distinct cultures over tens of thousands of years.

The expansion of seafaring trade during the second millennium brought new levels of prosperity to China and Europe, which both saw the launch of ambitious voyages into uncharted waters to find new markets for their goods. As China suddenly terminated its explorations near the turn of the fifteenth century, Portugal was beginning to fund open-ended expeditions across the Atlantic Ocean; the coincidence of these two developments would precipitate European contact with the Americas and a seismic shift in global power. The European “Age of Discovery” (also termed the “Age of Gunpowder Empires”)¹ between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries completed the process of reconnecting humanity. European ships were now dominating trade within the Indian Ocean and extracting resources in New World plantations. Regional mercantile trading networks became knitted into a global power structure with force and control projected across vast distances.

With the emergence of global networks and the development of a world economy, the pace of economic development began to drive migratory flows, most significantly in the form of chattel slavery. International trade and the industrial revolution fueled competition, promoting innovation and expanding production in Europe. Many people traveled across oceans or continents, some in search of a better life. Millions more, particularly from Africa, were forced to move under the tyranny of slavery or indentured labor. In this new era of globalization, free and forced migrants were the cause and consequences of economic growth.

The twentieth century has witnessed the proliferation of states and the extension of government bureaucracies into the management of migration. The introduction of passports, strict border control

immigration quotas, guest-worker programs, and the distribution of rights on the basis of nationality are all features of the new era of highly managed migration. Passports and border controls are relatively new innovations, and their increasingly strict enforcement in the twentieth century dramatically changed the dynamics of migration. International migration became regulated at the level of the nation-state. Apart from measures to protect refugees, international cooperation has largely neglected the vital dimension of migration.

PART II: PRESENT

Despite the obstacles inherent within highly regulated national migration systems, people continue to move for many of the same reasons that have driven migrants throughout history: to seek new opportunities and to escape economic and political distress. Many factors related to family, wage security, values, and opportunities influence migration decisions. Migration confounds simplistic analysis, as the decision to migrate is nested within relationships, networks, and structures. People frequently move more than once, and migration has evolving social dynamics that take into account economic cycles, immigration policies, and political conditions. Despite the complexity of decisions to migrate, a number of factors associated with the most recent wave of globalization, including transportation and communication technologies, have collapsed social distances and make it easier to move than ever before.

Immigration regulations aim to manage flows to meet public policy goals. These regulations have evolved from earlier practices of using nation-based quotas to encompass a range of migration “channels.” Economic channels bring in students and highly skilled migrants, as well as low-skilled workers to meet temporary labor demands. Families and particular ancestral groups are recognized through social migration channels. Those who have been compelled to move because of civil conflict, persecution, or intense pressure move as refugees or as asylum seekers. In strictly limiting the conditions under which one may legally migrate, states spend heavily on a sprawling architecture of enforcement and control. The effectiveness of new regulatory mechanisms in meeting their objectives of controlling migrant flows remains a matter of considerable debate.

Despite the efforts of many states to halt permanent settlement by certain migrants and distinguish “their” citizens from foreigners, the constant movement of people has continually changed the concept of what it means to be a foreigner. Multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism are now celebrated features of many societies. Yet the contribution of migrants to economic and other aspects of life is severely underestimated. As a result, the focus of governments and public opinion often is on managing the perceived threats posed by migrants, rather than assisting them to fully participate in mainstream society.

International migration pays dividends to sending countries, receiving countries, and migrants themselves. In receiving countries, it promotes innovation, boosts economic growth, and enriches social diversity, and it is a boon for public finance. Sending countries have their economies stimulated by the financial and social feedback of migrant networks. Migrants reap the welfare benefits of high wages, better education, and improved health when they move to relatively more developed countries. High rates of migration do, however, produce costs that are carried unevenly by particular localities and countries. These costs are often short-run, and they can be reduced through resource transfers and by building the capacity of public institutions to manage the social and administrative changes presented by higher rates of migration.

PART III: FUTURE

The forces that have propelled migration in the past are continuing to intensify, and the sheer pressure of human movement requires that more attention be paid to domestic policy and global migration governance. In the next fifty years, the supply of potential migrants will expand alongside economic growth, urbanization, and rising educational attainment in low-income countries—especially in sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia. As always, people will move to seek better opportunities, higher wages, and security, concerns that will become more salient as intercountry inequality widens and climate change threatens livelihoods. Demand for migrants will also increase dramatically in more developed countries and in many developing countries. Population decline and population aging will create new demands for labor, both skilled and less-skilled. National competitiveness is already leading countries to dismantle barriers to mobility for high-skilled workers. Migration is a vital source of dynamism in economies and will become even more important as societies age and fertility rates tumble.

The twentieth century assumption that migration is a strictly national problem to be handled independently by nation-states is no longer valid. A twenty-first century approach to international migration demands that we come to terms with the social and economic forces propelling people across borders and that the instruments of governance equip countries to reap the full benefits of global mobility. Both national and international policy reform is required to achieve objectives that meet evolving national needs, as well as the aspirations of migrants themselves.

At the domestic level, public policy should reflect the understanding that migration is a social process that cannot be turned on or off. Pragmatic policy choices are needed to accommodate the new dynamics of international mobility and to draw collective benefit from the processes of migration and cross-border exchange. Important lessons can be learned from those regions that have open borders (such as within parts of the European Union) as well as those that have tried to prevent all migration. In the light of our analysis of past and current practices, we outline the key objectives for a global migration agenda. For both ethical and economic reasons, we argue that the most desirable future scenario involves freer movement across borders. A global migration agenda ought to be framed around principles that guide pragmatic steps toward a more open global economy that serves the collective interest.

Reforming migration policy at the national level needs to be complemented by coordinated approaches to global migration governance. Migration is the orphan of the global institutional architecture. The international institutional and legal framework is silent on systemic migration issues, other than refugees. Responsibility for migration falls chaotically between several international agencies that currently have neither the mandate nor the capacity to address key global concerns regarding migration.

The twenty-first century will bring major new challenges to migration policy with demographic, economic, and environmental changes leading to fundamental shifts in the flows of migrants. The global community is becoming connected in a manner not experienced since our small-world evolutionary origins in Africa. Our ability to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century requires a better understanding of our deep migration impulse and its impact on our future.

PART 1



PAST



Migration from Prehistory to Columbus

We begin the story of human migration where our collective history began—in Africa, the cradle of humanity. Migrants have propelled the advancement of human communities since these early days, some 150,000 to 200,000 years ago. Our biological evolution culminated in the *homo sapiens* species, whose capacity for language and propensity for trading accelerated a new stage of social evolution that allowed humans to displace other hominids and eventually to develop advanced civilizations.¹ The human gift for cooperation and collective learning made our ancestors particularly adaptive to new environments, and incremental migration gradually populated the earth with human settlements. People continued to move. Merchants, soldiers, adventurers, and religious teachers carried new ideas and technologies between human settlements and civilizations, creating dynamic patterns of growth.

Early in human history, a pattern of cross-community migration appeared. Groups of people would move to new regions, leading to differentiation between the old and newly established communities. A subtle variance in language, technology, and beliefs would develop among these groups. Concurrent with this process of differentiation, however, was that of interaction. The diverse ways of doing things were shared across communities by migrant brides, traders, farmers, and herders. Differentiation between communities and regular interaction among them is a historical pattern that continues to this day.² Migrants have driven forward the development of society and civilization by serving as conduits for the transmission of new ideas, accelerating learning and innovation.

The history of human communities and world development highlights the extent to which migration has been an engine of social progress. By viewing our collective past through the lens of migration, we can appreciate how the movement of people across cultural frontiers has brought about the globalized and integrated world that we inhabit today. We refer to globalization not only in economic terms, but also in relation to social and political transformations and the emergence of global currents of thought. Of course, migrants are rarely the bright-eyed entrepreneurs that this narrative may unintentionally imply, and migration has often been driven by conflict, exploitation, and poverty. More often than not, people have moved out of necessity and under arduous conditions. Human suffering has accompanied migration; nevertheless, societies have been enriched by the dynamism of migration. As people have moved, they have encountered new environments and cultures that compelled them to adapt and innovate novel ways of doing things. The development of belief systems and technologies, and the spread of crops and production methods, have often arisen out of the experience of, or encounters with, migrants.

Early human migrations can be roughly divided into two stages. In the first, humans spread out. “It is safe to assume,” says William H. McNeill, “that when our ancestors first became fully human they were already migratory.”³ Migrants initially moved throughout Africa, before leaving the continent between 50,000–60,000 years ago to populate the world.⁴ As populations of hunter-gatherer groups grew to their geographical limits, members moved to settle new groups, and the process of expansion across the world continued.⁵ The development of agriculture and sedentary communities prompted the second stage in migration: connecting humanity. Despite the global dispersion of

humans, communities remained connected through trade networks and conquest. Diversity emerged through the separate development of populations, but cross-cultural contact ensured continuous interaction between scattered human communities.

EARLY MIGRATION

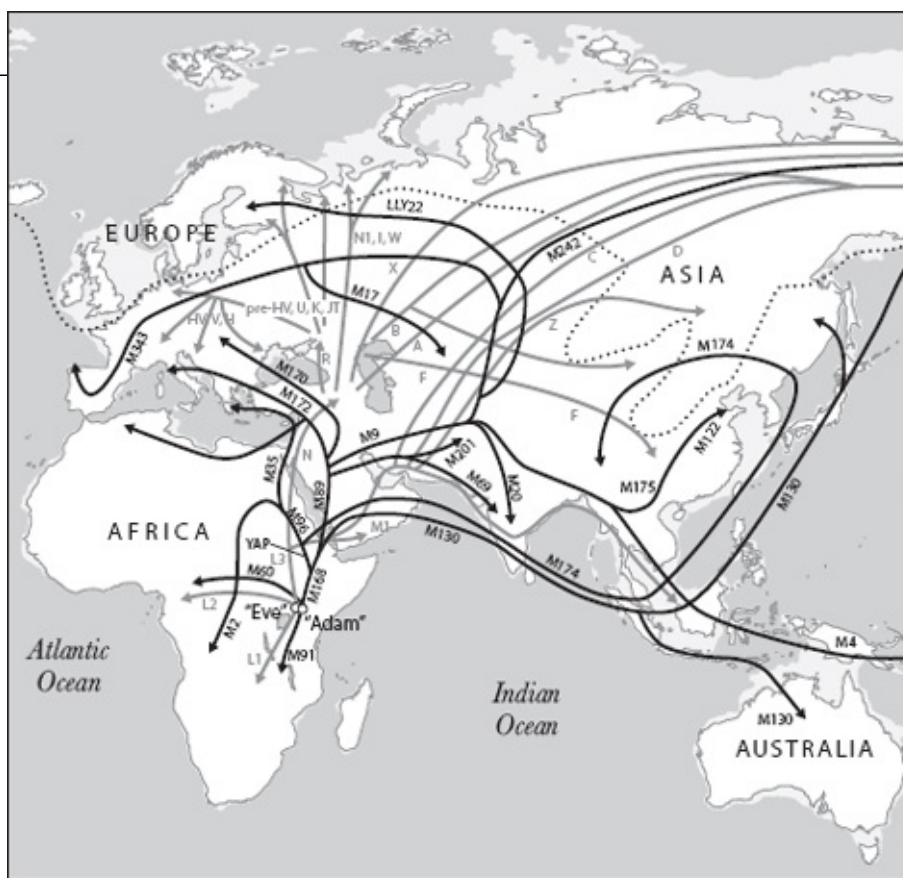
Out of Africa

Every one of us has migrant blood running through our veins. As Spencer Wells put it, “We all have an African great-great...grandmother who lived approximately 150,000 years ago.”⁶ Around 80,000 years ago, the archaeological record of *homo sapiens* grows vague, and Wells argues that the human population dwindled to around 2,000 people. Genetic mutations within this small group of humans led to rapid brain development, giving us the power of abstract thought. With new capacities for innovation and adaptation, populations began to increase and expand, first throughout Africa and eventually into Asia and beyond. Migrants moved within their cultural group; they settled new areas, colonized their neighbors, or just sojourned to foreign areas.⁷ Movement spread knowledge, new capabilities, and belief systems, but it could also spread disease and stimulate conflict.

The earliest migrations followed a pattern of “extensification”: people spread out, but as they migrated, there was limited growth in the size and density of human communities. There were evolutionary advantages to this “roving pattern of behaviour” exhibited by humans, notes McNeill. “Their restless movements continually probed for new possibilities and tested old barriers, usually finding nothing of importance to other human beings, but every so often opening the way for critical and important technological, geographical and/or social breakthroughs.”⁸ In addition to the natural inclination for “roving,” people also moved in response to social conflict or overpopulation.⁹

Within Africa, people initially moved beyond the savannahs of eastern and southern Africa into the east-west belt of the northern savannah between Ethiopia and Senegal.¹⁰ Human communities spread farther north and east in Africa. About 60,000 years ago, men and women moved from Africa's Nile Valley across the strait of Bab el Mandeb into the Arabian Peninsula. This movement initiated a series of coastal migrations that slowly spread human settlements across to the Indian subcontinent and beyond (see [figure 1.1](#)).

Flows of cross-community migration continued to connect members of the slowly expanding human species as people inhabited new ecologies. Patrick Manning suggests that young people “left their home community to visit or join other communities...learning as well as introducing ideas about technology, culture and social relations.”¹¹ Among the most influential of these young people were migrant brides—some of whom would have been captured—by virtue of their complete integration into foreign societies. Knowledge about stone technology, weaving, hunting and fishing techniques, raft and boat construction, and other adaptive creations developed by humans in their new environments, all traveled between communities through cross-community migration. Archeological evidence of seashell jewelry found far from coastal regions and stone tools made out of nonlocal material indicate that humans were also trading over great distances at least 40,000 years ago.¹²



Migration Patterns of Early Humans

→ Y Chromosome Markers (thousand years ago)

M 91 (60)	M 9 (40)	M 201 (20)
M 60 (50)	M 175 (35)	M 242 (20)
M 168 (50)	M 45 (35)	M 3 (10)
YAP (50)	M 173 (30)	M 172 (10)
M 174 (50)	M 20 (30)	M 17 (10)
M 130 (50)	M 69 (30)	M 122 (10)
M 96 (45)	M 170 (25)	M 4 (10)
M 89 (45)	M 2 (20)	LLY 22 (10)

Figure 1.1. The genetic pathways of human migration. Courtesy of Spencer Wells. ©2005-2010 National Geographic Society. THE GENOGRAPHIC PROJECT NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, and Yellow Border are trademarks of NGS. All rights reserved.



mtDNA Markers	(thousand years ago)
L 1	(>100)
L 2	(80)
L 3	(70)
M	(60)
M 1	(60)
N	(50)
B	(50)
C	(50)
F	(50)
R	(50)
D	(45)
pre-HV	(40)
U	(40)
K	(40)
JT	(40)
A	(30)
Z	(30)
HV	(30)
H	(30)
N 1	(30)
I	(30)
X	(30)
W	(30)
V	(15)

Migrants inhabit the Earth

After moving beyond Africa, migrants initially stuck to tropical climates by working their way overland into Eurasia and moving through water's-edge expansion along the coastline into Southeast Asia and Australia. By 50,000-60,000 years ago, people populated the shores of the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.¹³ The group that initially moved to southwest Asia may have initially been as few as 50 people, and it has been estimated that only 500 or so people made the journey over the next 20,000 years.¹⁴ And 10,000 years later, human communities could be found along the tropical belt from the coastal and inland areas of West Africa all the way to Australia.

The settlement of Australia around 40,000-50,000 years ago was undertaken through a series of audacious seafaring expeditions from Indonesia to Australia. Indonesia was separated from Sahul (the continent that connected Australia and New Guinea) by less than 100 kilometers, and the first settlers would have sailed in reed or bamboo boats with the intention of establishing a permanent colony. David Christian writes: "Any humans traveling to Sahul...had to be superb sailors. And they had to be careful planners, for populations that drifted to Sahul by chance would not have been large enough to form permanent colonies. So, settling Sahul required technologies that we do not find in any previous hominine species..."¹⁶ Moving to Australia was the first human movement into an ecology that was substantially different from the tropical zones they had previously inhabited.

Around 40,000 years ago, people began to occupy the relatively colder, though still temperate

regions of Europe and inner Eurasia through several different routes. One involved movement along the rivers and valleys of the Himalayas from South China into the Eurasian steppes. Another would have followed the Pacific shore before turning inland. A final western route may have come more directly out of Africa toward the Black Sea. An ice age between 30,000 and 15,000 years ago, however, led human populations that had initially settled the warmer parts of Eurasia to retreat farther south.

The evidence for how humans occupied northern Eurasia and the Americas is unclear, and there are many competing accounts based on genetic tracing, linguistics, and archaeology. Human settlements were restricted to Africa, Asia, and Oceania until about 40,000 years ago, in part by the formidable mountain ranges of Asia. During the next 10,000–20,000 years, people populated all of Eurasia (including the northern regions) and parts of North America.¹⁷ Several important innovations would have preceded movement into colder regions: hunting techniques and technologies—such as spear-throwing and throwing sticks—were developed, along with methods of sewing heavier clothing.¹⁸ As with other such migrations, movement into a new ecology prompted the development of tools to assist human adaptation.

The movement of humans from northern Eurasia into the Americas was a particularly impressive migration. Recent research proposes that several thousand people survived the last ice age on the former Bering Land Bridge, a grassland steppe that connected Russia and Alaska, protected from glacial expansion by Pacific currents. These migrants later populated the Americas as the glaciers melted around 16,500 years ago.¹⁹ We now know them as Native Americans; the First Nations, Inuit, and Innu of Canada; the Caribs and Arawaks of the Caribbean basin; and the indigenous peoples of Central and South America. There were probably several waves of migration across the Land Bridge, possibly including early journeys by boat around the glaciers. The dates of migrations across the Bering Land Bridge are disputed by archeologists (within the range of several thousand years), but the pattern of migration from what is now Russia into the Americas is by now widely upheld. Despite some past speculation that sailors living in what is now China or Japan crossed the Pacific to the Americas, the most recent genetic evidence shows that all ancient migrants to the Americas came across Siberia.²⁰

The extraordinary challenge of crossing large expanses of the Pacific Ocean did not stop Polynesians from settling extremely remote islands. Humans set off from Southeast Asia in seafaring vessels, progressively populating the South Pacific. Fiji was populated about 3,600 years ago, Hawaii 2,000 years later, and New Zealand 1,000 years ago.²¹

Less than 50,000 years after humans departed from Africa, they had settled on all of the world's continents (aside from Antarctica). By 10,000 years ago, humans had adapted to live in vastly different ecologies across the earth: from West Africa to Siberia, and from Australia to Tierra del Fuego.²² The culmination of this vast enterprise to occupy the planet in all of its diverse climates and ecologies represents humanity's great migratory feat. No sooner had this massive expansion been completed than the first developments in agriculture and horticulture began to generate new energy for migrants to spread technological and social innovations across thousands of miles. As human communities followed separate trajectories of social and cultural evolution, they remained connected by the unceasing movement of people.

CONNECTING HUMANITY

The Agricultural Revolution

Around the time that humans completed their great migration, the ice age also ended and the earth

entered into the Holocene period. The Holocene was marked by radical changes in climate, retreating ice sheets, shifting vegetational zones, and rising sea levels.²³ The environment became more unpredictable in many parts of the world. These pressures contributed to the emergence of the first sedentary communities in the Middle East, which adapted to environmental changes through more intensive exploitation of food sources, food storage, and more permanent settlement.²⁴ While sedentism did not immediately produce recognizable agriculture, as Christian notes, it was “a vital unplanned step toward agriculture.”²⁵

From 15,000 to 10,000 years ago, people living in six regions of the world experimented with harvesting and fishing techniques. In what is today called the Fertile Crescent—which extends from the eastern Mediterranean shoreline along the Syrian Desert to the Persian Gulf—people and settlements began to harvest wild grasses and other plants and to build permanent structures.²⁶ Similar experiments with planting and harvesting grains, grasses, and tubers were simultaneously happening in Southeast Asia, Yunnan (China), New Guinea, West Africa, and Mesoamerica.²⁷ Archaeological finds in Britain indicate that farming was introduced about 6,000 years ago by migrants from France. This allowed the hunter-gatherers to settle, leading to a quadrupling of the population in just 40 years.²⁸

As a result of population growth and intensive exploitation of local resources, sedentism placed increasing pressures on the local ecology. Resource scarcity forced these communities to either innovate with new farming technologies—often focusing on a few crops—or to revert back to more nomadic lifestyles.²⁹

The farming innovations produced by successful sedentary communities spread through interregional networks of exchange. Christian explains: “Exchanges of valued goods between foraging communities...were particularly intense in the early Holocene along the Levantine corridor, between Anatolia and the Red Sea; they might have stimulated communities already exploiting natural stands of cereals on well-watered highlands to try encouraging their growth in lowland regions crossed by flourishing ‘trade’ routes.”³⁰ Sedentism became increasingly prevalent through gentle population pressure, local abundance, and growing networks of exchange. The transmission of new farming technologies anticipated the central role that networks of traders and migrants would play in the development of agrarian civilizations.

The domestication of plants and animals was associated with intensified production, which greatly increased the caloric production in these areas. As farmers settled near fields and orchards, the sedentary lifestyle was associated with the development of more complex fixed abodes. Fertility became higher as mothers were able to care for more children than was possible in constantly moving hunter-gatherer communities. Reduced birth-intervals and higher survival rates generated further increases in population.

While it is important not to exaggerate the distinction between sedentary groups and hunter-gathering groups (in practice, these groups often overlapped),³¹ sedentary food production became more prevalent over time. Population growth and improved hunting technologies led to overhunting and the declining availability of wild game. At the same time, improvements in the selection of seeds, the development of sickles and other implements, and the successful domestication of animals for farming all made sedentary life more viable. In the Fertile Crescent and elsewhere, the balance between the benefits of hunter-gathering and food production had by 10,000 years ago tipped in favor of settled farming.

Around 7,000 years ago, improved agricultural technologies had reached many parts of the settled world, and gains in productivity led to an increasing division of labor and urbanization. The spread of agriculture was partly through colonization by the early agricultural pioneers, but it was equally true

result of the spread of ideas of agriculture; ideas spread more quickly than agricultural communities could move.³² Only a minority of Europeans have been shown to possess genetic markers from the Middle East of 10,000 years ago, which strongly suggests that agricultural and other innovations traveled without the need for large numbers of people to move.³³ A small number of travelers and migrants served as the couriers for big ideas, launching a virtuous cycle: as people moved, they carried ideas that facilitated income and population growth—eventually prompting further movement.

As agricultural technology and the variety of crops proliferated, populations became more concentrated, and a division of labor and social hierarchy developed in regions such as Mesopotamia, Nubia, Egypt, highland Mexico and the lands of the Mayans, Peru, Ethiopia, and the valleys of the Indus, Yangzi, Huang He, Nile, and Niger rivers. Religion became more sophisticated, and priests assumed greater influence. Handicrafts and pottery were improved, and homes were increasingly built to endure. In addition to facilitating specialization, food production was associated with the development of full-time bureaucracies, along with administrative systems and politicians. Inequality in such societies grew as leadership minorities diverted their attention from hunting and gathering to ruling dense food-producing groups and developing standing armies for exploration, conquest, and defense.

Settled life did have disadvantages, however—in a sense, it would have been healthier to keep moving. Settlements reduced the breadth of the resource base, making it more difficult to cope with dramatic climactic shifts. For example, people were more vulnerable to famines when societies were stuck in one place, whereas hunter-gatherers could move to pastures greener. Infectious diseases such as smallpox or typhoid require threshold numbers to survive, and they became more prevalent among settled communities.³⁵ Denser populations with accumulated wealth and possessions were also more vulnerable to warfare and raiding.

More positively, greater population density allowed for faster information sharing and more powerful “collective learning.”³⁶ Christian identifies collective learning, or the ability of humans to pool and share knowledge, as “the most important distinguishing feature of human history.”³⁷ Two factors are critical to collective learning: the volume and variety of information being pooled, and the speed with which information is shared. In this respect, increasingly dense sedentary communities expanded the possibilities for creativity and innovation. As city economies developed, the proliferation of trade routes connecting them to other communities served to transmit learning and promote the spread of superior technologies. Sedentism accelerated the production and spread of significant knowledge about how to manipulate the natural world.

The development of early cities not only brought people closer together, it also generated high population mobility. Rural-urban markets developed. Wealthy elites promoted intellectual exchange among scholars. Merchants traveled to acquire trading information. Newcomers married locals to tap into existing social networks. This increasing tempo of movement required roads and bridges, as well as guides and translators. Cities were slowly connected with the sinews of social and physical infrastructure.³⁸

Long-Distance Trade and Agrarian Civilizations

While the concept of “civilization” has acquired a negative connotation in some corners of academia, it can be used more neutrally to describe societies characterized by occupational specialization among relatively large numbers of people.³⁹ Specialization promotes the refinement of skills, and a division of labor increases production and wealth, necessitating the development of markets and trade routes. The first civilizations emerged where societies could establish control over food sources and manage

the distribution of food for a large number of people. The existence of dense agrarian populations was thus a necessary precondition for the development and spread of the first civilizations.⁴⁰ Religion and governance in these civilizations were impressively integrative forces, but powerful rulers also launched destructive campaigns of imperial warfare.

The earliest known civilization was established by Sumerian seafarers on the Tigris-Euphrates floodplain around 4000 BCE. These warrior-migrants subjected the region's scattered inhabitants to their rule, eventually developing several large temple-centered cities. Under Sargon of Akkad (who ruled from ca. 2350 BCE), Sumerian civilization expanded to include about a dozen cities, each with 20,000 to 50,000 people. Sargon created a standing army and conquered neighboring cities, incorporating them into his expanding empire. Sargon's rule marked one of the first appearances of state formation, where multiple hinterland cities were governed by a central ruler.

This emerging empire also supported growing trade networks that connected Sumer with the rest of Mesopotamia and extended as far as central Asia, the Indus Valley to the east, and south into Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa.⁴¹ Sumerian civilization led to unprecedented technological innovation: the Sumerians developed wheeled vehicles, bronze metallurgy, writing, monumental buildings, and irrigation.⁴² Sumerian cities were also the first to practice year-round agriculture, which would have been necessary to feed their relatively dense populations.

Sumer relied on a continuing flow of migrants from its frontiers to sustain population levels in its cities. Because cities brought people into close proximity with each other, they were characterized by much higher mortality rates than the countryside. Demographically significant epidemic infections became routine aspects of urbanism in Sumerian civilization, a pattern that would continue in cities until the development of modern public health programs.⁴³ The depopulation of the Sumerian-speaking city required increasing in-migration from the Akkadian-speaking countryside. The volume of replacement migration from the countryside eventually led to the Akkadian language displacing Sumerian in administration and record keeping.

The maintenance of civilized life not only depended on a continual flow of migrants into cities, but also required the regular movement of people out beyond the civilizational frontiers to secure raw materials. Early civilization in Mesopotamia needed timber, metals, and stone, which were unavailable near river valley cities. Trade expeditions and raids carried city elites to far-away emerging cities and court centers in order to locate these materials, which were needed for early civilized technologies.⁴⁴

Trade diasporas emerged concurrently with the development of urban life in these first civilizations. Philip D. Curtin describes these early forms of cross-cultural trade:

Commercial specialists would remove themselves physically from their home community and go to live as aliens in another town, usually not a fringe town, but a town important in the life of the host community.... The result was an interrelated net of commercial communities forming a trade network, or trade diaspora—a term that comes from the Greek word for scattering, as in the sowing of grain.⁴⁵

Archeological findings suggest that trade diasporas developed as early as 3500 BCE. Clay tablets dating back to 2000 BCE show commercial records of an Assyrian trade settlement in Cappadocia (modern Turkey)—hundreds of miles away from home.⁴⁶

Early riverine civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley appeared around the same time, probably because trade networks stretching between modern Egypt and Pakistan carried ideas about culture and technology.⁴⁷ Mesopotamian-style artifacts have been found in modern Iran, the

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