

## Contexts: An Introductory Note to Readers

Migration, once defined as a crossing of borders between states, is now understood as a social process and appears as a basic condition of human societies. It begins with departure out of parental households and ranges as far as transcontinental or transoceanic moves—a geographic scope that might be one and the same move of a man or a woman. On the other hand, marriage migration from one village to the next could involve more demands for adaptation than a move from a society to an ethnic enclave a continent away. Dislocation by famine or war could end in death, foraging nearby or afar, or in long-distance migration. In the medieval and early modern periods merchant travel, military service abroad, political exile, and student mobility could and did provide information for others who then migrated permanently. In this survey no restrictive definition of mobility and migration has been adopted, though distinctions are outlined.

The comprehensive approach chosen here—the connection of economic region, social world, polity, and family of departure via intervening inducements and obstacles to a recharting of life-courses after arrival—demands both analysis of the whole of the societies and of human agency of particular men and women. From the point of view of individuals, societies consist of regional economies and cultures and, after migration, of religious, craft, or ethnic networks. I have tried to indicate ranges of options voluntary migrants felt they had as well as the constraints faced by forced migrants.

As to numbers of migrants, it was impossible to aggregate “pluralist” and contradictory information into one set of data. Sometimes individuals were counted, sometimes heads of families; often statistics did not distinguish gross from net migration. States, or rather state administrators, had specific interests to inflate or deflate migration statistics and generally lacked adequate systems of collecting data. Some migrants avoided being counted; others were counted repeatedly; sometimes nonmigrants wanted to be counted. In a state-centered approach, units of counting vary in size from China to Luxembourg or, like the Habsburg Empire or the Southeast Asian states, changed boundaries over the course of history. I refer to estimates and to the revision of estimates, sometimes voicing skepticism of high estimates.

Any work of this scope, unless a synthesis in a few deft strokes, creates difficul-

ties in organization. I have opted for an integrated chronological, topical, and spatial perspective. To help readers interested in one particular region of the world or in one particular topic navigate their way through this study, references at the end of specific sections provide guidance to chapters or parts of chapters that continue the regional or topical discussions. For example, the migration history of Russia/the Soviet Union/the Commonwealth of Independent States begins as part of European urbanization and regional agricultural settlement (chap. 12), separates into a distinct system (chap. 13), then becomes one of several forced labor systems (chap. 17), and opens up again after 1989 (chap 19.9). Similarly, forced labor appears in the Mediterranean system of slavery; expands into Asian bondage, African human pawnship, and European indenture; continues into African slavery and Asian “coolie” labor; and extends into twentieth-century German, Russian, and Japanese forced labor. I have frequently pointed to similarities between migration processes in different cultures—reservoirs for cheap labor, for example, like Polish territories for the economy of Germany and Mexican people for the economy of the United States. Such comparisons are but heuristic devices to understand distant, “foreign,” developments within familiar frameworks. They do not adequately reflect differences between specific migratory movements.

Conventional designations for pre–nineteenth-century states, like “France” and “Britain” or “India” and “China,” impose statist concepts on diversities of regional cultures without even common languages. For lack of better terms, this study, too, has to rely on such defective terminology. Similarly, conventional designations for social regimes are misleading. Serfdom, for example, suggests sedentary ways of life under lordly control. How did enserfed families react when soil was exhausted, when children needed land, or when an epidemic killed off most of their neighbors? Were peasants not agents, if constrained ones, of their own lives? The same question has been asked about slaves in the Americas and about carters and boatmen in China. About one-half of the populations living at any particular time in history change residence by marriage migration. Many migrate to perceived opportunities and to shape their own and their children’s lives—provided the emotional cost in ruptured relationships does not increase beyond expected material advantage. Quantifiers would have difficulties in approaching these multiple scales, but each and every migrant weighs his or her or the family’s options and arrives at a sum total, a chart for their life-course decisions.

One colleague in migration research in exasperation reduced the data for his graphs and maps because otherwise they would have looked like a bowl of spaghetti. Human movement might as well be compared to the grains in a sack of rice. In a way, both spaghetti and sacks of rice would be easy to study; migrants, by contrast, have minds of their own and plans for their futures. Myriads of moves across space result from the will of men and women to fashion lives. The survival of forced migrants depended on their will to reconstruct their identities and attempt to regain some control over their values, emotions, and relationships. In contrast, throughout history rulers and administrators, plantation owners and capitalists, theorists

of race and population planners have reduced human mobility to schemes facilitating their policies and reduced women and men and children to human material. Their constructs were—and are—of pitiful simplicity when compared to the complex choices of a South American Native family faced with armed Spanish and Portuguese newcomers, or those of a Chinese peasant family with insufficient land, or those of a Turkish family caught up in twentieth-century labor migrations. In many of the grand schemes of states and political economies, grains of rice were treated with more care than human beings.

My own cultural world, the Euro–North American one, has shaped my perspective. It has helped me to transcend national histories and to integrate the multiple migrations of particular ethnic groups into the Atlantic Migration System. But as an attempt to provide a synthesis of migrations worldwide, of cultural interaction and conflict, the Atlantic perspective proved to be confining. It did not equip me to deal with cultural intricacies of the Indic World or the cultures of sub-Saharan Africa. In writing this book, I have changed terminologies and viewpoints from one draft to the next in order to move away from Atlanto-centric perspectives. I hope that this global approach will provoke further critical discussion, that my arguments will be expanded and revised by scholars whose background is culturally different.

Exploration of many cultures involves a great number of contrasting and conflicting perspectives (map 1.1). Where is east, where west? America is a western culture viewed from Europe, an eastern one viewed across the Pacific. Maps contain ambiguities, and cartography has been Eurocentric for centuries. According to Harley and Woodward, “Recognition of the ideological, religious, and symbolic aspects of maps, particularly when linked with a more traditional appreciation of maps for political and practical purposes, greatly enhances the claim that cartography can be regarded as a graphic language in its own right.” Early maps have been called “imagined evocations of space”—but is a late-twentieth-century Western map of seventeenth-century Indian Ocean and East Asian trade that merely charts routes of European colonizer shipping more than a self-serving image, an instrument of power? And which chronology do we follow? When in the Latin Christian Era the year 2000 began, Coptic Christians still lived in 1716, and the Jewish world had entered they year 5760. The Tamil calendar pegs the count at 2029; the Buddhist one at 2543, the Sikh one at 301. Or should time be counted not by religions but by arrival in a territory? Then the first people in Australia might count the year 42,000.<sup>1</sup>

Who is the Other? Medieval “heretics” like twentieth-century C.E. “draft-dodgers” espouse different ethical principles, political beliefs, and emotional worlds than those with the power to define and to shape received discourse. An emigrant in one culture is an immigrant at the end of his or her voyage—and perhaps a vagrant in between. An innocuous statement, such as “the farmer sold his grain,” may disguise family labor and migrations.

It is impossible to refashion the whole terminology, chronology, and conceptualization of migration, but I attempt to use it cautiously. Different human ways of living—whether in small groups (tribes), within limited cultural territories (ethnici-

ties), or in large entities (states, nations, empires), or of continental or transcontinental dimensions (civilizations)—are equally valid cultural expressions. Amerindian retreat is as much a migration as Euro-American expansion, and both are connected by power relations. National cultures, a very recent phenomenon in the history and material life of societies, are in constant evolution and transformation. “Race” and “color of skin” are social constructs whose connotations vary over time and across cultures; the White/Colored dichotomy posits that White is no color; designations like the “Indian” or “Negro problem” are White discursive strategies to hide the problem of White racism. Usage of terms also changes over time and from one culture to the other. “Whites” are also called Caucasians, but the peoples of the Caucasus region are not necessarily considered White in the present. Europeans and Americans of European origin think of themselves as White; the U.S. census defines the peoples of North Africa and southwestern Asia as White. On the other hand, Anglo-Saxon and Nordic racist thought of the late nineteenth century considered East Europeans, South Europeans, the Irish, and Jews not to be White. Such constructions are numerous, and there are as many shades of white as of any other color.

In this study, I deal with men and women leaving their homes or, to use a different emphasis, striking out into new directions. They lived under constructs of color and culture but wanted to evaluate losses, options, and chances according to their own terms of reference. I attempt to focus on their lives, cultural expressions, and initiatives, not merely on “streams,” “flows,” or “waves” of migrant masses.