

## Empire and migration

'Empire' describes a wide variety of hegemonic territorial conquests that produce flows of people, goods, and ideas across frontiers. Prior to the making of the modern nation state, the boundaries of contiguous kingdoms and empires remained fuzzy. Nomads circulated across boundaries, peasants fled war from one kingdom to another. However, the analytical value of the term 'empire' (without dynastic appellation) as a conceptual category for the study of history emerged in its relationship to the nation state, defined by territorial sovereignty and the elimination of fuzzy boundaries. After the formation of modern nation states, empire was embedded in two sets of geopolitical relationships: its economic and political relationship with a specific nation state; and the simultaneous control that empire exercises, in the name of the sovereign nation state, over colonies and their peoples.

The sovereign-territory-based nation state, originating as a historical form in Western Europe, rested on processes of mapping and fencing off borders culminating in state-controlled points of entry and departure of peoples and goods. Policed borders were sustained by the political, military and financial institutions of the state. Crucially, the nation state framed legal systems defining nationality, citizenship, and property rights. Definition of 'the nation' marked off the included and the excluded peoples, those of the nation, and those who did not 'belong'. These legal definitions of citizenship made the visa-stamped passport of the 20th century the single most important document in the migrant's life. The nation state recast empire, for both are imbued with transnational and global capital. Migration in the age of national borders began a distinctive chapter in the history of the transnational world.

It is possible to distinguish three periods in this new era. The first, from the 1830s to the 1920s, marks a period when both voluntary and indentured global migrations reached new levels and colonial empires inaugurated controlled transnational migration of their subjects. The period from the 1920s to the 1940s marked the end of the plantation-culture migration and restrictions on migrations in areas such as the US. This was a period of capital contraction due to the worldwide economic depression, which affected both empire and trajectories of

migration. These were also the beginnings of decolonization. The last period, commencing from the 1940s to the present, marks the end of formal political controls of empire with decolonization, but the uneven world that empire made continues to shape the trajectories of transnational migrations. This essay focuses on the first and the last period, when the world was remade through the processes of massive migrations.

In the post-1750 period Europe looked to Asia and Africa for new imperial possessions. As the European powers withdrew from the Americas, parts of Mexico were formally annexed by the US, and Central and Caribbean America became part of its informal empire of 'Manifest Destiny'. By the 20th century, the British empire was the largest in terms of population and territory controlled, followed by the French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Belgian, Italian, American and Japanese empires. The British colonies of South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, used as white penal colonies, became white settler colonies while local peoples were disenfranchised. Some states were controlled by conflicting imperial interests: Somalia, on the strategic entryway to Suez, was controlled by England, France, Italy and Ethiopia. Different areas of China were controlled by various European, American and Japanese imperial interests, but the entire country was not directly subject to the colonial control of any one imperial power. British and French dominion extended over much of the Middle East, while the 'Great Game' between Tsarist Russia and Great Britain divided Central Asia.

As the combined economic and political power of the global North, empire was able to assert its model of capitalist modernization on a global scale. But the lived experience of modernization was uneven and unequal in different parts of the globe. The political structure of Asian and African colonies, while drawing on the legacies and institutions developed during the colonization of the Americas, were not settler colonies. At the political level, the colonial administrators from metropolitan centres ran local government in hierarchical systems of exclusions. At the economic level, the colonial agricultural and manufacturing systems were reorganized and integrated into the demands of global capital. Resources of the colonies were redirected in the interests of the colonial power to flow to the metropolitan centre or to other

parts of empire. Limited social expenditures by the colonial state in crucial spheres of the essential ancillaries of modernization such as institutions of higher learning, scientific and medical research, infrastructure construction, healthcare and primary education over time produced ever greater levels of divergence between the various colonial and the metropolitan worlds. Some colonies, like French West Africa, for example, had fewer than 0.47 per cent of school-age children entering school in 1938, while in contemporary France, school education was free and universal.

Secondly, the colonized were de jure subordinate to the colonial state which controlled all sorts of aspects of life ranging from where the 'natives' could live in their own land, which educational and recreational facilities they could enter, and so on, to outright apartheid and the Code de l'indigénat. The colonized were not de facto citizens of the metropolitan nation state and therefore did not have the same privileges, protections and passports throughout empire. The distinguishing feature of migration under empire was racialization of migrants both at the point of origin and at the point of arrival. Ideas of 'race', evolving during colonization of the Americas and the African slave trade, acquired global salience in the 19th century with the development of 'scientific' racism just at the time when modern colonial empires were extending dominion over vast numbers of people in Asia and Africa. Colonized populations were now marked off as biologically and racially 'different' from the denizens of the metropolitan core and, as relevantly, also from each other. Hierarchies of race and hierarchies of difference became pivotal factors in migrant lives with state-mandated exclusions/inclusions, miscegenation laws, citizenship, and property rights.

### **The concomitant rise of colonial empires and migration**

From the 1830s to the 1920s, expansion of colonial empires furthered asymmetrical economic relationships. Raw materials for industry, and food, goods and beverages for industrial workers of the global North expanded plantation economies in the South. Transnational migration patterns diverged. In the global North migrants left rural sectors for more rapidly industrializing sectors within Europe or the Americas or fled from

political inequality in new nation states, as did the Jews from Eastern Europe and Russia. In the global South, the major trajectory of transnational migration was within the tropical zone to plantations and mines, with very limited numbers moving to North America and Europe. Migrations in the global South, from the 1830s to the 1920s, can be viewed under three rubrics: the self-financed trading communities, forced migrants, and labour migrants.

Trading communities in Asia and Africa, with activities ranging from those of packpeddlars, retailers and small-time money lenders to those of entrepreneurs, multinational bankers and industrialists emerged as partners in empire, largely building on precolonial trade and migration patterns. Merchants from Fujian and Guangdong in China, Chettinad and Gujarat in India, and Arab Hadrami had trading communities throughout the Indian Ocean that extended into the Pacific at one end and the Mediterranean at the other. Other long-distance networks, such as those of the Sindhis and Parsees, stretched throughout Central Asia overland into China, Russia and Syria, and then under empire extended into the Pacific and the Atlantic. Senegalese (Togotalan) merchants ranged from west to central and east Africa, and major Omani slave and ivory traders like Tippu Tipp linked the east coast to the Belgian Congo. Lebanese Christian merchants, one of the major trading groups in the Ottoman empire, spanned the globe by the early 20th century from South Africa to the Andes. These trading-community migrations included annual and multi-year sojourns alongside permanent settlement.

Transnational migration was a collective family decision. The percentage of women migrating depended on marital status, landholding, and whether local social cultural practices included polygyny. If the husband owned land, the wife's labour in sustaining the family farm and keeping the husband's share, providing care of the elderly and raising his children was too vital to allow for her migration. In systems with polygyny, the husband could take a secondary wife with him or marry a local woman where he lived, and return home to reclaim status, including burial in the lineage land. Women migrating with their husbands tended to be from landless and land-poor families. Out-migration of women from smallholder

cultivation economies, where the men intended to return, was comprised primarily of single women, widows, and the wives of merchants and wealthier migrants. For married working women, their earnings were not controlled by them but by the male head of household and portions were remitted back. Some women did run independent businesses. But for the majority of trading communities, ranging from the Indians in Malaya and Uganda to the Syrians, Lebanese and Chinese in the US, the wives of small merchants, migrant pack-peddlers and grocery-store owners kept businesses going with their unpaid labour.

At the other end of the economic scale, empire increased transnational migrations through forced migrations, penal labour and transfer of prisoners of war. The Dutch brought Chinese, Indians, Sinhalese and Malays to Cape Town and took East Africans and Bengalis to Java as part of the 18th-century slave trade. Chinese bonded labour was recruited for construction and ship-repair from Australia to St Helena. The East India Company brought several hundred Cantonese to St Helena in the period from 1806 to the 1820s, to work as gardeners, mechanics and builders, including on the infrastructure for Napoleon's exile. Many stayed and married emancipated slaves. Today, 25 per cent of the St Helena population is of Chinese origin.

The hegemonic power of empires increased forced migrations and created a patchwork of racialized communities throughout the globe. Between 1820 and 1873, when the convict migration system ended, over 250,000 people were shipped within the British empire. Besides Australia, convict workers from India, China, and Madagascar were taken to British colonies in Malaya, Sumatra, Mauritius, and the Andaman Islands. Over 10,000 Indians were sent to Burma, and 25,000 along with several thousand Chinese to Singapore, Penang and Melaka. Prisoners of war were everywhere. The last Mughal emperor and empress, exiled to Burma (1858), died there, while Thebaw, the last Burmese king, queen and court were packed off to western India (1885). When the border between British India and Afghanistan was drawn (1893), Afghan Pathans on the wrong side of the border ended up in Guyana. Several thousand Boer prisoners were sent to Sri Lanka while others were sent to Bermuda. Between 1854 and 1922, the French banished 22,000

Parisian socialists and Kabyle Berber nationalists out to Melanesian New Caledonia.

However, the most significant impact of empire on migration came with abolition of slavery (1807) and eventual emancipation (1833) in the British empire. This transformed the existing patterns of African and Asian migrations in volume and direction. While African forced migrations to the Americas did not cease until 1850, British emancipation decrees intensified trans-American Afro-Caribbean migrations. Former slaves, denied living wages and conditions little changed since slavery, moved to other colonies. By 1835, of the 22,359 Trinidadian slaves, only 8,000 stayed, others moving to labour in Central American plantations, railway and canal construction. To supplement Afro-Caribbean labour on plantations, empire turned to Asian sources. The collapse of dynastic empire – Mughal, Qing and Ottoman – accompanying wars of colonial conquest, economic restructuring, domestic rebellions, and religious strife, dislocated millions from Lebanon to Japan. The coolie trade, a generic term for Asian labour, became dominant. All of Asia produced large migrant labour pools with labour arrangements ranging from indenture contract or credit ticket to wage labour. Populous China and India provided the most migrants. Between 1846 and 1940, transnational Asian migration numbers are estimated to have been around 48–52 million.

The great arc of sugar plantations extending from Suriname-Guyana and Cuba in the Atlantic to Mauritius and Reunion in the Indian Ocean were primary destinations. Each new surge in world demand for sugar, tea, coffee, palm oil, bananas and rubber brought more lands under plantation culture, and with it the need for more labour. Plantation culture spread to the Pacific Islands from Fiji to Hawaii where disease and labour recruitment had decimated local populations. New crops were introduced to meet world markets: rubber for the automobile industry brought the Brazilian plant to plantations in Indonesia, Malaya, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. US agrobusiness transformed the Asian banana, a food crop for Caribbean slaves, into mega-plantations shaping the economy and politics of the Central American states. Brazil's coffee plantations drew around 190,000 Japanese. Italy transformed Somalia with over one hundred banana plantations and moved Bantu

labour in from Tanzania, Mozambique and Malawi. Demand for tin to line and waterproof tea-chests, tinned palm oil from Malaya and Nigeria for machine lubrication, and tinned foods for the soldiers in wars of empire meant more tin mines in Malaya, Sumatra, Thailand. Some 200,000 Chinese worked in these mines. The Nigerian tin mines of Jos drew southern Igbo migrants. Diamond and gold mines in British South Africa operated by recruiting labour from Mozambique. Soil depletion in the American South cotton plantations drove the market for guano fertilizer. Recruiters brought 100,000 Chinese coolies and 3,500 Easter Islanders to the guano mines of Peru. Along with several hundred Mayan Indians from the Yucatan, 125,000 Chinese were brought to work Cuba's sugar cane fields between 1847 and 1874. And when the American colonies stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific after 1898, Puerto Ricans were brought to Hawai'i to join Chinese, Japanese and Filipino plantation labour.

Empire managed labour by residential segregation according to 'race'. Diversity of food cultures, language, and social and religious practices of the workers were amplified into hierarchies of pigmentocracy and the residential 'plantation pyramid' from Fiji to Guyana to Hawai'i. Interracial relationships brought social sanctions. Mines and towns throughout empire from Indonesia to South Africa operated with the 'pass' and 'quarter' and township systems limiting internal travel and residential locations. The only meeting points between the different peoples of empire were the small businesses started predominantly by the Chinese and Indians who became shopkeepers and moneylenders when their labour contracts ended. For the local communities, dislocated by empire and new migrant labour, these small businesses were the most visible faces of empire and exclusion. The owners were also the first victims of racial antagonisms, economic nationalism, and exclusion.

Empire shaped transnational settlements through the management of quotas of female labour for plantations and miscegenation laws. In non-plantation areas of the US and Canada, successive restrictive regulations from 1875 onwards curtailed entry of Asian females and males. Similar Asian-exclusion laws were passed in New Zealand (1881) and Australia (1901). When planters and colonial officials found that

men extended term-contract labour services if they had families with them, and that women workers on plantations doing the same jobs as men could be paid lower rates, active female recruitment began. Emigration quotas to plantations ranged from 25 to 40 women per 100 men. The Japanese government negotiated similar terms for female migration. Indian-labour-dominant plantations on Fiji, Malaya, Mauritius, Guyana, and Japanese-labour-dominant plantations in Hawai'i, Brazil, and Peru had larger numbers of permanent settlers. Colonial ordinances sometimes restricted male, but not female, migration. British Malaya (1929) stopped Chinese male, but not female, labour leading to feminization of migration.

Outside plantations and family shops, women worked as domestics and nannies, known as *ayahs* and *amahs*. The trend towards Asian domestics started early. Chinese *amahs* and Indian *ayahs* could be found throughout empire, including the metropolitan centres. In 1855, one study found 200 Indian *ayahs* fending for themselves in London slums after employment ended. 'Chinese Emmas' lived riverside at Lower Shadwell. Today, Asian female domestic workers constitute one of the largest groups in transnational labour. Sex work, then and now, was another major arena of women's work. The expansion of male-labour-dominant industries of mining, railway construction and transportation brought worldwide increase in sex work from London to New York to Buenos Aires and Johannesburg. Workers from China, Mexico and Peru in the gold- and silver-mining towns of the American West, Chinese and Javanese sex workers in the mining towns of Malaya, and Indian women in Burma would have had much in common with prostitutes from Lesotho working in South Africa's gold and diamond mines of the Rand. Most worked under indenture or contract. These 'private sector' sex workers replicated imperial arrangements. Military procurement of local women to work as prostitutes to service soldiers existed throughout empire. A system of registered sex workers serving military barracks developed throughout British India, to protect British soldiers from venereal disease. During World War 2, over 200,000 women from Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Burma and Thailand were sent to serve as 'comfort women' at overseas Japanese military camps.

Today, Japan has over 100,000 sex workers from the Philippines and Thailand while the oil-rich Gulf Emirates and Saudi Arabia have large numbers of Filipino and South Asian sex workers. The connections between military bases and sex workers continue most notably around the more than two hundred American military bases throughout the world.

Colonial demand for roads and railways, harbours and docks for the transportation and export of commodities produced transported labour across imperial lines. The US Transcontinental Railroad (1864–69) employed 10,000 Chinese, many imported directly from China. Japanese and Indians built railways in the resource-rich but labour-poor Pacific Northwest in the 1910s. Chinese labour moved to Texas and the southwest United States for railway construction in the recently acquired expansions of the American empire, where they met up with some 20,000 Mexican workers recruited for the railway. Between 1850 and 1880, more than 55,000 Mexican workers had migrated to the southwest US to work in what had been Mexican territory. Construction of the Ugandan railroad (1899–1901) relied on 38,000 Indians from Gujarat and the Punjab. The British West African railway moved thousands of workers from Lagos to the then Gold Coast and Sierra Leone; each construction post of the Sierra Leone railroad cost 545 deaths and ‘invalidity’.

Intensified colonial expansion and trade brought sailors and soldiers into migration streams. Tens of thousands of lascars, Indian, Chinese, Malay, Arab, Yemeni, Somali, Filipino, and Pacific Islander seamen came to England and America. Some abandoned ship, and became part of working-class settlements in port cities. Imperial might was backed by the ‘martial races’ of Ghurkhas from Nepal and Sikhs from Punjab from the 1840s onwards. The British Indian army numbered 1.3 million in World War 1, and 2.5 million in World War 2. British East African troops fought in Burma while Burmese troops fought in France. Fascist Italy recruited 40,000 Somalis for the 1935–36 invasion of Ethiopia. Like the seamen, servicemen did not always return ‘home’. The first Punjabi immigrants to British Columbia (1897) and California (1899) arrived after stints in the British army and Hong Kong police. Soldiers from the Maghreb, including 173,000 Algerians, served in the World War 1 French forces, as thousands more did in World War 2. Declared ‘surplus to requirements’ after 1919, most

were repatriated, but others started Maghrebi communities in France.

### The legacies of empire

A second pattern of migration commenced with the end of World War 2, amidst decolonization and formation of new nation states. At the founding of the UN (1945), there were 50 nations; today there are 192. The birth of nations, dismantling of colonial control, and revolutions were, and are, bloody affairs. Refugees became the first major group of transnational migrants in 1945–50; some 50 million people moved from one nation to another, including 14 million people between India and Pakistan. Refugees continue to be a very large group among transnational migrants. The UNHCR (June 2007) estimates there are almost 10 million refugees, with an additional 20.8 million people living as internally displaced peoples, some of whom will join transnational migration flows. Very poor refugees cannot afford to move to distant lands permanently unless sponsored through refugee migration and family reunification programmes. Before 1975, there were some 300,000 Vietnamese living outside Vietnam, mostly in France. When some 3 million Vietnamese left after 1975, most settled in the US, sponsored through refugee programmes.

Decolonization was a deeply contested process, and the result of nationalist struggles which also gave rise to ideologies defining the new nation and its peoples. Colonial policies of racialization assumed new vicious forms of exclusion marking off the rights of ‘sons of the soil’ versus ‘others’. Transnational colonial migrants became targets in Fiji, Indonesia, Myanmar, Malaya, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Kenya, Guyana and other locations. Without rights in lands they had lived and worked on for decades they migrated again. Return to ancestral lands left decades ago was impossible. These were the ‘twice migrants’, Uganda-Indians in the UK and the US, Indo-Fijians in British Columbia, Hoa (Sino-Vietnamese) in Paris and Los Angeles, Indo-Guyanese in New York and Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto. Some came as refugees, with little to call their own. Others moved with transferable economic and social resources. East African Indians invested in the undervalued periurban American hotel-motel industry. Fifty per cent of all lodging properties in the US today are owned by Asian-Indians, many with an East African connection.

Lastly, and perhaps most unexpectedly, for the architects of *bracero* and 'guestworker' policies, these labourers became permanent settlers. Underdevelopment and incomplete modernization of the global South, exacerbated by the cutbacks in social expenditures through Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), created pools of migrants for the global North. Cheap blue-collar labour was required to rebuild postwar Europe, and the expanding North American agro-industry. As in the case of plantation labour, recruitment was from within each empire's sphere of influence. *Bracero* programmes brought millions of Mexicans to the US, Algerians and Moroccans to France, Koreans and Chinese to Japan, Pakistanis and Indians to Britain, and Italians, Greeks and Turks to Germany. Conditions of farm work remained akin to the experiences of contract workers on plantations, with exorbitantly priced credit tickets, lower wages than promised, and travel papers and passports held by the employer. Today there are almost 3 million farm workers employed in the US, 77 per cent of whom were born in Mexico. Schooling, as on the plantation, remains limited. Children work with parents. Life expectancy of farm workers is 49 years, while the national average is 75 years. Everywhere, able-bodied men were the first targets of recruitment and the assumption was this would be migrant contract labour without settlement rights. But a new, culturally diverse working class began to form instead. South Asians currently represent about 5.3 per cent of the population of England. In Germany, 3.4 per cent of the population is of Turkish origin; almost 10 per cent of France's population is Muslim. One in eight people in the US is of Hispanic origin.

Another unanticipated group of post-imperial migrants came from ranks of professional and technical white-collar workers brought to sustain the welfare-state health programmes initiated after the 1950s and 1960s. From Britain's National Health Services (NHS) to Johnson's 'Great Society' project in the US, health services for ageing inner cities, collapsing mining towns, and growing suburbia faced inadequate numbers of medical personnel. While working conditions and wages were poorer for immigrants than those for Europeans and Euro-Americans, they were many times better than those in the decolonized South. Thousands of Caribbean and Filipino nurses, and Indian,

Pakistani, Taiwanese and Filipino doctors were recruited. By 1965 there were 18,000 Indian doctors in England alone. In the US today, 1 in every 20 doctors is of Indian origin. In 2002, the WHO found that there were over 250,000 Filipino nurses working in the US, the UK and other developed countries. High proportions of professionals from the global South in scientific research units and in engineering corps are common. The sum total of these initiatives has contributed to an unexpected cultural and racial diversity of the global North, a reality for which national populations raised within the ideological frames of the homogenous nation state are poorly prepared. The Migration Policy Institute notes that currently there are 175–200 million migrants worldwide, and that 1 out of every 35 people on Earth is an international migrant. By the end of the decade, the foreign-born population of the US will surpass 14.7 per cent. Empire has come home, and it is not yet the end of the imperial impact on migration.

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Africa; agriculture; childhood; Chinese Diaspora; commodity trading; decolonization; diasporas; displaced persons; domestic service; empires and imperialism; ethnicity and race; executives and professionals; exile; family; food; forced migrations; genocide; gold; guestworkers; human mobility; indentured and contract labourers; international migration regimes; labour migrations; Lebanese Diaspora; marriage; nation and state; nomads; nursing; pedlars; pidgins and creoles; railways; refugees; remittances; rubber; scientific expeditions; slavery; Thailand and sex tourism; United Fruit Company; white men's countries; White Slavery