

Migration

Migration has been a fact of life since the dawn of time. It's as natural to all flora and fauna as breathing and drinking. When situations arise, we escape our potential demise. Survival mode kicks in and away we go. Fight or flight.

In his intriguing book, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Yuval Noah Harari explains that since humans first arose in East Africa 2.5 million years ago, we have been on the move, and we haven't stopped. Two million years ago, some of our ancestors got itchy feet and left for North Africa, Europe and Asia. The humans living in these vastly different areas evolved different characteristics to suit their terrain, but all were part of the human (*homo*) family. In East Africa, *Homo rudolfensis* arose, while in Europe and West Asia, *Homo neanderthalensis* was the human representative, and in Eastern Asia, *Homo erectus* became dominant for almost two million years. There were many other human siblings early in our development, but our ancestors eventually arose in East Africa and called themselves *Homo sapiens*, or 'Wise Man'. Ultimately, around 70,000 years ago, our species became the dominant force, and both bred with and somehow displaced the many other human bands, leaving us as the only human family on Earth. We still have proof of this fascinating past in our DNA. People living in Europe and the Middle East today have around 1-4% Neanderthal DNA while Melanesians and Aboriginal Australian DNA is up to 6% Denisovan (146).

Sapiens wandered within their territorial range looking for food, and sometimes they went outside of their natural terrain. According to Harari, natural disasters may have instigated exploration, or it may have been conflicts between groups, the emergence of too many people for an area to sustain or possibly at the behest of a leader. Around 45,000 years ago, *Sapiens* crossed into Australia and likely went on to wipe out all the megafauna that existed there.

Not content with the settling of Australia, around 16,000 years ago, we headed off across the land bridge that connected Siberia and north-western Alaska to settle the American continent. Within 2,000 years, humans had made it all the way to Tierra del Fuego, at the southern tip of South America. Unfortunately, we left a trail of absolute destruction in our wake. Rodents the size of bears, herds of horses and camels, oversized lions, mammoths and mastodons, sabre tooth tigers

and giant sloths were just some of the incredible fauna that made way for the arrival of man (146).

Man has been marching in different directions ever since. Whether it is the Mongols marching from east to west and raping and pillaging everything in their way, or Europeans sailing west to east and conquering all of Africa, India and SE Asia, stealing resources and enslaving people as they went. In 1521, the Spanish defeated the Aztec empire and followed that up by destroying the Incans in 1532. The first European landed in Australia in 1606 and in 1620, the pilgrims set sail from Plymouth to escape religious persecution in England. The British colonialization of Australia began in 1788 bringing all of the Americas, Africa, most of Asia and Oceania into the European sphere (146).

Migrations haven't ended there. The Great Famine hit Ireland between 1846 and 1852. At least a million Irish starved to death and more than two million people emigrated between 1845-1855, as the British government withheld vital crops that could have mitigated the crisis (147). Further migrations into America have occurred from Italy, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, while many African people were forcibly enslaved and shipped to Europe and the Americas by Europeans and their descendants. The same fate was experienced by many Indians. The Japanese migrated into the Ainu land of Hokkaido and destroyed their culture while the Chinese crossed into Taiwan to escape communist rule.

The reasons for migration are often different but these migrations continue apace. With the advent of globalisation and free market economics, free flow of capital should have resulted in the free flow of human resources, but this has only been true of the European Union. Today, roughly 244 million people migrate globally. The majority of these people are known as economic migrants as they are on the move looking for work. People displaced internally is at a record high of 40 million with an additional 22 million refugees (148).

A number of crises including the civil war in Syria, ongoing violence in Iraq and Afghanistan saw Europe struggle to deal with an influx of more than a 1.3 million people in 2015. More than 476,000 applied for asylum in Germany but German authorities estimated that more than a million had been counted.

292,540 asylum applications were approved in Europe in 2015 with Germany accepting 140,910, Sweden 32,215, Italy 29,615, France 20,630, Holland 16,450 and the UK 13,905. These are the lucky ones. 3,770 perished on the long dangerous journey north in the same year. More than 1,200 people drowned in the Mediterranean in April of that year alone.

While the sudden migration shocked Europe and caused widespread debate over the responsibility to accept refugees, the majority of refugees do not head for Europe at all. 4.8 million Syrian refugees travelled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Turkey took the greatest number in with 2.7 million refugees, Lebanon around 1 million, Jordan more than 655,000, Egypt 115,204, and incredibly, Iraq, where 3.1 million Iraqi civilians were internally displaced is temporary home to 228,894 Syrians (149). The Syrian crisis was exacerbated by climate change as a mismanaged drought helped to displace more than two million Syrians. The displacement increased the level of social unrest that led to the civil war, and scientists expect the changing climate to affect regions elsewhere in the coming years (150).

Migration at the Southern border of the United States averages around half a million people per year, while the number up to June, 2019, has risen to 676,315 (151). It's hard to say how many of these people are economic migrants moving for the chance of a better life, or how many are escaping the impacts of a warming world. What we do know is that in 2019, they were being kept in squalid cages with many so cramped that it was impossible for people to lie down, sometimes for a week at a time. Officials from the government's Homeland Security department visited five detention centres along the border and reported that the conditions there should shame any country. Children and babies who were removed from their parents were kept on concrete floors in cages with no access to water or soap. Although the maximum children can be kept in these conditions is 72 hours, some of these kids had been kept like this for nearly a month (152). America celebrated its creation on its founding principle of human dignity on July 4th as children were kept in what the Salt Lake Tribune recently declared as "concentration camps for children" (153).

It seems that President Trump was modelling the southern border migrant situation on the system that successive Australian Prime Ministers have been running down under. In a country that, like America, was stolen by white people from brown people, brown people trying to enter the country by boat to seek asylum are towed by the navy to islands in Papua New Guinea and Nauru where they are kept in tents behind barbed wire fences, in some cases for years. The United Nations and human rights groups have condemned this situation and believe they contravene various human rights charters. Reports of safety concerns, suspicious deaths, assault and sexual abuse have been made, and in some instances, people even decide to return to their home country where they face huge risks, rather than stay any longer in these camps (154).

These are just some of the ways in which refugees around the world today are treated when seeking refuge. While countries like those in Europe, the USA and Australia do accept refugees who can handle the initial time spent in concentration camps, many other countries who have become rich by burning fossil fuels admit only a tiny few. Between 2007 – mid 2016, South Korea accepted just 4,838 refugees. Portugal only registered 5,610 over the same period and Japan, with a population of 120 million and the world's 3rd largest economy accepted just 24,038. Two countries that have actually gotten rich by selling fossil fuels are Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. They allowed only 872 and 4,832 respectively (155).

Bangladesh, home to 163 million, 28% of whom live along the coast, is at the front line of the climate crisis. Already, rural areas are being abandoned due to rising seas and extreme weather, but by 2050, one in seven Bangladeshis is expected to become a climate refugee. Around eighteen million people will be looking for a safe haven. The obvious place to head will be to India, whose territory included Bangladesh until independence from Britain (219). To counter this migration, India has built the longest border wall on the planet. The wall, made from double-fence barbed wire, stretches 4,023 km and requires a police force of 70,000 to guard it (219).

Over the coming decades, the number of people on the move, including those heading to Europe and the United States, is going to increase dramatically. The

wealthy nations who have benefitted from burning fossil fuels and cutting down rainforests are already struggling to cope with people heading north. How are they going to react to many tens of millions knocking on their doors?

The World Bank estimates that by 2050, more than 140 million people from just 3 regions will need to move because of the climate crisis. Tens of millions of people in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America will be forced to move due to water scarcity, crop failure, sea-level rise or storm surges. These 'climate migrants' will be in addition to the millions of economic or political migrants already on the move (156).

Many cities in South and Central America will be at very high risk of climate hazards in the coming decades. Droughts, extreme temperatures and heavy rains will be the major impacts seen across the region, and as we've seen with the Venezuelan crisis, borders cannot contain people when they travel in numbers (157).

Scientists at the U.S. Department of Defence-funded Strauss Center state that the warming climate has changed the weather in Africa and the Middle East with more frequent droughts and flooding occurring. Land is being desertified and heat waves are killing crops and farm animals. As the planet warms, farmers, fishermen and herders will need to move away from affected areas. Already, North Africans and people from the Sahel region just south of the Sahara are beginning to move due to the effects of climate change. Due to the killing of Libyan leader Muhamad Gaddafi, Libya has become a hotspot for people smugglers, and people are being bought and sold in slave markets throughout the country (150) (158). In early July 2019, a migrant centre in the capital Tripoli was bombed and more than forty men, women and children were killed. At least eighty migrants were injured in the strike which hit the compound that houses around 616 migrants and refugees. Many of these people had been returned to Libya while trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. More than 6,000 migrants from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia, as well as other nations, are being kept in detention centres across Libya, and many of these centres are run by local militias who are accused of rape and torture (159).

Stephen Cheney, retired US military corps brigadier general, cautioned:

“If Europe thinks they have a problem with migration today ... wait 20 years. See what happens when climate change drives people out of Africa – the Sahel [sub-Saharan area] especially – and we’re talking not just one or two million, but 10 or 20 [million]. They are not going to South Africa; they are going across the Mediterranean” (160).

Should emissions continue to rise, the only certainty we will be faced with is that the number of climate refugees will rise too. People in the rich countries, most responsible for the warming, are faced with the following dilemma: carry on as normal and be witness to migrations never witnessed by any human beings in the history of mankind, or make changes now, and give the poorest on our planet a chance.



"110304 Fleeing death in Libya 03 | Fuir la mort en Libye" by Magharebia is licensed with CC BY 2.0.

Dear Indy,

Growing up as what the Japanese call a halfu kid, with one Japanese parent and one British, you understand something of what it is like to be different.

Fortunately, your dad happens to be the right colour, speaks the right language, and has the right passport.

If I had been born a slightly darker complexion, spoken a different language, and had a different passport, things might not have been as easy as they have.

Since I arrived in Asia in 2000, I have been welcomed with open arms, first in the Philippines, then in Taiwan, Vietnam and Japan. I've been invited into people's houses and supplied with beer in the middle of the mountains of Cebu Island. I've found myself at parties by the river in Maolin, Taiwan, gotten a job at a shipping company in Ho Chi Minh City and run my own bar in the snowy north of Japan.

All of these things have happened because I was lucky enough to be born at 52.1307° N, 3.7837° W and with the right skin colour. If I had been born at 17.6078° N, 8.0817° E and happened to have darker skin, the opportunities I've had in life would most likely have been denied me.

People don't want to admit it, but we live in a kind of apartheid system where those of us born into relative wealth get given opportunities that are routinely denied to those who are simply born at the wrong coordinates.

With the climate crisis, this system is about to get even harsher for those of us born at the wrong latitude and longitude. Already, we are seeing millions internally displaced by climatic change or natural disasters. At the moment these millions are being helped by those within their own arbitrary borders, but as the situation gets worse, where will they go? Who will accept them? As food becomes scarce, as scientists are predicting, how are those of us who look and sound different, going to be treated?