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**Transformations over Time or Sudden Change:
Historical Perspectives on Mass Migrations and Human Lives**

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Newspapers and TV often suggest that a "wave" of refugees and other undesirable migrants washes over the developed world – like, in our languages, wars "erupt" spewing destruction volcano-like. Equating migration with floods and, in addition, with criminality is as conscious a design as the "wars erupt"-image is a convention perpetuated by venerable and allegedly neutral institutions like the Oxford English and Webster's New American dictionary. As scholars we need to be careful about our language and our data: interest and knowledge are intricately related, language is a tool of ideologies and hidden special interests.

Both migrations and the images of them have deep historical roots. To pronounce the present migrations and the actual crisis as "new without historical precedent" merely refuses to understand the impact of history on the present – this does save a lot of research time. Not migrants are "uprooted," as some would have it, but historical memory is consciously being uprooted.

-- I will, first, address problems of present-day debates about globalization and mass migration by historicizing them.

-- I will, second, discuss and criticize conceptual tools as reflected in catchwordy concepts like "transnationality" and "victimization" and suggest an interdisciplinary Transcultural Societal Studies approach.

-- Third, I will briefly point to patterns of migrant agency in the context of (1) global inequalities, the economic aspect, (2) anti-immigrantism, the national-cultural discourse aspect, and (3) exclusionary and regulatory issues, the aspect of stateside policy-making.

I.

Most historians of worldwide developments and interrelations agree that "globalization", perceived by pundits as an unprecedented, emerged with Europeans' capability to cross first the Atlantic, next the Indian, and finally the Pacific Ocean. At that time the Indian Ocean and the East Asian Seas had been travelled for two millennia. Before the 16th-century worldwide trade and colonization, the still separate Asian-African-European and North-Central-South American worlds had been connected by a web of caravan and migration routes, had achieved a transcontinentalization.

At the time of Portugal's reach toward West Africa and its labour resources, in the 1440s, the superior technology of Chinese craftsmen and sailors, epitomized in the voyages of Cheng He as far as East Africa with fleets carrying 30.000, was not further employed in large-scale voyaging. The coincidence of tiny Portugal's *armed* transoceanic expansion and the Chinese Empire's retraction from the oceans would determine global trading and power relations for the next five centuries. This era may be reaching its end as the BRIC countries

emerge, again coincidentally, at a time when parts – perhaps criminal parts – of the Western capitalist banking sector precipitated an economic collapse that reached wide sections of the globe. "Globalization" came to the forefront of attention in "the West" when it began to "hit home."

While the Portuguese elites combined the power of the state with the expertise and interests of merchants and expanded globally by brute force, those Chinese merchants who defied the Empire's ban on sea-trading created the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia with neither arms nor stateside support. Thus, one worldwide *trading empire* emerged, the first of the gunpowder empires based on plunder – to use Kenneth Andrews words – and one expertise- and connectivity-based macro-regional *trading community*. The elite of the empire had its sailor-warrior agents destroy the traditional protocols of trade. In their place, they established a military-commercial complex.

Let us cast a glance at the globalized economic activities and sectors in the past:

-- From about 1600, Europe's demand resulted, first, in a hemispheric fur trading belt stretching from Siberia via Scandinavia and northern North America to Alaska, involving numerous migrations; and, second, in a subtropical and tropical plantation belt circling the world and involving forced mass migrations. The financial centres, economic control, and political decision-making institutions were located in Amsterdam, Paris, London and perhaps elsewhere – the central places of that period's big powers.

-- Other examples include the bullion transfer, gold along the transsaharan West Africa-to-Egypt-and-to-Europe routes and silver via the transpacific Spanish Peru-to-China trade; and the world-circling Portuguese-, later Dutch-controlled spice trade which severely hurt the Arab and Gujarati trading circuits; all European-controlled zones relied on production regimes involving forced migrations of men and women of colours of skin other than white. The trading companies and state institutions for the global "Indies", the several *East India* companies and the *Casa y Audiencia de Indias* for the West Indies, were the equivalents of modern globally active conglomerates and their power-based and terms of trade-buttressed profit strategies. Some family firms, searching for new commercial opportunities by discovery of as yet unconnected societies, were indeed innovative and risk-taking – this was expressed in the term "merchant adventurers". (Travel and trade demanded production of knowledge and contributed to it: early area studies emerged -- as in the case of John Tradescant (1570s-1638) and after his death, his wife, from whose collections of curiosities Oxford's and other university's scholars profited.) Interests and knowledges are inextricably braided or entwined.

Globalization was and is the expansion of economic and other exchanges, at first within a protocol that keeps transaction costs low, but over time in terms (1) of power of arms, (2) of power to impose the terms of trade, and (3) of power, wielded by intellectual elites, to set the frame of reference, of terminologies, and of master narratives: Is the story one of exploration and civilizing mission or one of rapacity and brutality? Do map-makers show European routes "of exploration" only or do they include the intricate web of routes of the peoples of the Indian Ocean's littoral? Under trade protocols merchants assumed risk and cost, under stateside power imposition taxpayers bore the burden of disbursements for armament, warring, and gatekeeper remuneration.

This early globalization had consequences lasting to the present:

Within Europe, the rise of the Atlantic seaboard states and economies involved a macro-regional shift relegating the once predominant Italian city states and economies to the margins. One Columbus, underemployed in Genoa, migrated to the expanding job markets for mariners in the new Iberian-Atlantic realm. It seems, by the way, that other mariners, perhaps even African ones, already knew about a land mass west of the ocean – but Columbus developed the apparatus to tell the story. Our bad luck is that we are still stuck with his misunderstanding of a "the Indies", which have been divided into East and west Indies – naming does matter in meanings of language.

Across the world, the heavily armed many-cultured merchant-warriors from Europe, established systems of forced migration and slave labour regimes to supply European consumers at low cost and high profits. Whole societies were relegated to standards of living lower than before contact; others were depleted by mass abduction and sale of its men- and womenpower. Thus the division of the globe into a wealthy North Atlantic core and a "poorer" rest of the world was intentionally institutionalized – a rest of the world that was and is "being impoverished" to keep agency in the phrasing. This division was and remains colour-coded by pigmentation of skin. Today's migrations emerge from this early globalization and from colonization, imperialism, and decolonization, globalization's subsequent historical stages.

Incorporating this long-durée perspective into our narrative is of relevance for policy-making in the present and for critical scholars it opens the possibility to develop narratives that incorporate all actors, the powerful and those with little power – almost never the "powerless" given the exploited's resilience and resistance – narratives that include the perpetrators and the victimized, the strategies of rule and the strategies of subverting rule.

Awareness of regional and local narratives across the globalized world in the past is the very basis for freeing the self-proclaimed knowledge-based North Atlantic World from its many blindfolds.

To understand present-day antagonisms, we also need to remember the history taught in today's migrants' countries of childhood socialization. They arrive with knowledges – for example:

-- that Christian Vasco da Gama terrorized the Indian Ocean's Muslim trading worlds by capturing a ship with high-ranking pilgrim families returning from the hajj and, after confining all passengers to the hold, burning the ship in sight of Calicut, the major trading port on the Malibar Coast;

-- that the British government, "white" by color-of-skin, transformed itself into the largest and most heavily armed drug trading cartel in the mid-19th century world and, through the opium wars and subsequent drug trade, destroyed sizeable parts of Chinese society, "yellow," with this produce of peasants and migrant labourers in India, "brown."

These processes of the past are incorporated into historical memory outside of the confines of the "Western" or in terms of colour-coding "White" master narrative.

These memory aspects of the relationship between "Europeans" – a problematic but widely used aggregate – and two societies that are now part the BRIC group indicate that migrants who perhaps follow the attraction of standards of social security and consumer options in Britain, continental Europe, and North America, are descendants of generations of women and men victimized by the colonizer states. They carry a memory that they, in contrast to the descendants of the perpetrators – who are their neighbours after arrival in Britain, France, the Netherlands, or the United States – cannot afford to forget.

The small numbers of colonizer-Europeans migrated heavily armed not only by firepower but also by an unshakable certainty in their superiority and that of their white God, whose image had emerged in West Asia among Semitic peoples and had thus required "whitening" by generations of European-Christian painters to become a master narrative fitting for the pale-faced European believers. In the 19th century, Europeans' outbound moves became mass migrations. Once the Congress of Vienna had re-established Europe's reactionary regimes, about 55 million European men and women, whites, departed for regions emptied of their earlier inhabitants or over whom rule was being established. The proposition, propounded by elites, that the newcomers were "naturally" superior hides the fact that the mass migrants fled autocratic governments and governance, left economically backward or but slowly developing regions, or escaped religious conflicts – a Christian fundamentalism which, as late

as mid-17th century, had annihilated one third of Central Europe populations. Common people left societies in which they could not lead sustainable lives, could not feed families, could not pursue life-projects and they arrived in spaces where their colour-of-skin was a badge of superiority.

The similarity with present-day migrants out of Africa's, Asia's and other social spaces characterized by problems of governance and economic development, to put it neutrally, is striking – but their colour-of-skin still is read as a badge of inferiority. A similarity is also noticeable as regards refugees from warfare, generated by what we have named "dukes" and "bishops" in European history but "warlords" in the present-day African states. (This comparison simplifies, but we do need to escape the straightjacket of Western words, languages, and master narratives and the duplicity of multiple terminologies for similar processes.)

Another possible similarity concerns the relationship between economic crises. When reduction of job options intervened at the intended destination, "free" migrants, i.e. those leaving under extreme economic constraints, would postpone departure. Any downswing in the 19th-century U.S. economy was followed by a decline of in-migrant arrivals within a year. The data indicate that this is happening in the present, too, though parallels may be less clear given the knowledge and images of the wealth of the northern "hemisphere" in the southern *two thirds* of the globe.

"Globalization" and migration, which have been with us for long, moved to headlines when it appeared to Western white observers, whether rightly or wrongly, that the consequences reached their part of the globe rather than remain restricted to the colonized and coloured. When Marshall McLuhan in the early 1960s (allegedly) created the term "global village" it became as much of a catchword as globalization now – the communications technology he discussed with "ours" – he never implied that people of colour would live in and be part of our section of the village.

2.

After this brief survey of globalization and of migration over five centuries, let me turn to the concept of "transnationalism" to understand migrants' lives in a globalized world. When introducing the concept in the early 1990s, anthropologists Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton studied U.S.-bound refugees from dictatorships in Latin America supported by conservative U.S. governments. The state-side generated refugees moved to another nation-state – in *trans-national* or *trans-state* crossings of borders. This distinction is important

since "nation" is a cultural category and "state" one of political institutions. State and nation are, in a majority of cases, not congruent. Nation-states privilege cultural majorities over cultural minorities – the latter term a 19th-century invention of gatekeepers of the nation. Privilege for one group undercuts democracy's principle of equality before the law. Nation-states are a contradiction in terms.

Any generalization of the transnationalism-concept beyond the original cases poses major problems. Migrants in past and present move between localities and regions rather than whole states and societies. Around 1900, 94 % of the U.S.-bound migrants from Europe's many regional cultures headed for kin and friends as did southern Chinese migrants moving to the Southeast Asian diaspora or do African rural-urban migrants in the present. They come from a particular location in a specific regional economy and arrive where trusted acquaintances know that jobs (or earlier: arable lands) are available. They did not migrate to the United States (or Canada) with a particular institutional setup in mind or to an Anglo-American or a British-Canadian nation which, in any case, did not admit dark East or olive-skinned South Europeans into their ranks. (Not all Europeans were white – as long as West Europeans and Anglo-Americans had the power to frame the discourse.)

The local-to-local connections in regional contexts characterized the linguistically and culturally diversified men and women in all migrations over time. The old-style term "immigrants" for all Europeans arriving in the U.S. – Chinese were "sojourners" in that frame of parlance – hides the fact that around 1900 one third returned to Europe, they were interregional temporary migrants or, to use the catchword, "transnational."

Again a historicization is called for: the concept of transnationalism had actually been used since the 1910s, as Nancy Foner, renowned historian of migration from Caribbean societies to New York, has pointed out under the somewhat exasperated title: "what's new about transnationalism?" Steven Vertovec has commented on the term's "conceptual muddling". However, because of narrative historians' disdain for analytical categories they have been slow in availing themselves of the concepts' analytical potential. A sophisticated version has been explicated by social scientists like Thomas Faist and Canadian scholars Lloyd Wong and Victor Roudometof.

Empirically and analytically social scientists, historians included, study translocal and transregional movements in the context of nation-state legal frames, which, however, were established only from the end of the 19th century by states in the contexts of national

discourses. Such discourses are often no more than gatekeeper-produced stories – but with a deep impact on acceptance or rejection of migrants and their cultural expressiveness. "Barbarians", we need to remind ourselves, were those of another language. Interaction in the streets, on shopfloors, and at other meeting places between resident (national) and in-migrant (non-national) men or women could reinforce or challenge national tales and resulting ex- or inclusionary practices. I suggest that to combine the empirically sound translocal and transregional with the – when appropriate –transnational, we use the term "transcultural" to designate the range of options provided by different levels of social spaces.

A "Transcultural Societal Studies"-approach combines empirical data with interpretive theorizations. If culture is a complex system that includes tools, spoken and body language, arts and beliefs, created by humans beings – in gendered versions – who must provide for their material, emotional, and intellectual needs in order to survive and is acquired in the process of childhood socialization, then transculturalism denotes the competence to live in two or more cultures and create border-crossing transcultural spaces. Strategic transcultural competence involves conceptualizations of life projects in more than one society and choice between options. Transculturation is the process of individuals and societies to change themselves in contact zones by negotiating diverse lifeways into a dynamic plural new whole. Subsequent interactions and new migrants' input will again change this transitory culture. People act out their life-projects or, at a minimum, react on a day-to-day basis to circumstances, within the limits of the capabilities acquired through their socialization in family, local community, regional society and economy – in more than one location. Such cultural spaces are located within structures and institutions of a *polity* – the fixed aspect, but, when crossing an international border, people move into another *society* and its norms, discourses, and practices – the dynamic aspect. In cases of problems – fundamentalist impositions, use of human bombs or planes as bombs, or skewed job-markets and explosive racism – both the hitches in the process of transculturation and the structural fault-lines need to be addressed. Any imposition of borders by exclusion, labelling, confining make interaction and acculturation more difficult. Politicking creates problems that policy-making might avoid.

Scholarly analysis requires attention to both whole lives and complex cultural and institutional settings. Thus Transcultural Societal Studies integrate the study of society and its patterns and institutions ("social sciences"), all types of representations of it ("discursive sciences"), and the actual practices ("lifeway or habitus sciences") in the context of legal, religious, and ethical norms ("normative sciences"), the somatic-psychic-emotional-spiritual-

intellectual characteristics of individual men and women ("life sciences") and the physical-geographic context ("environmental sciences"). They analyze "becoming", the historical dimension, with "being" in the present, and aspirations, the projects for the future – and thus include not only a gendered but also an intergenerational approach.

This approach to migrant agency and decision-making avoids the victimization paradigms which ascribe passivity to those designated as victims. Of course, African societies and individuals became victims of the imposition of power and in the present, women in particular but also men become the victims of an exploitative service economy and, occasionally, of human trafficking. But within power structures, some are actively involved in producing victims and the victimized men and women, rather than remaining passive, struggled and struggle to survive and to defend or regain at least some agency. If all enslaved African men and women were victims without agency, the 19th-century white narrative of "negroes" with no capabilities could be, partially, correct. But how did the Afro-Brazilian culture emerge, how the flight of U.S. slaves? If all Filipina domestics and caregivers are victims of a service economy imposed by rich societies, how could they create a social space of their own in Hong Kong or Rome? Since people have only one life to live, the crisis of enslavement or the rupture of leaving children behind to support them from afar, is lived individually. Individual actions and strategies often include developing a migration habitus and supportive translocal networks. The global financial crisis has exacerbated the constraints imposed on life-plans massively – and the new bonuses do not go to those who have managed to survive.

3.

In a global perspective, supra-state macro-regions determine life-chances, whether they are low-wage segments of the world's global economic sphere, or cultural-economic remnants of the historic British, French, or Spanish empires, or the modern zones of mass-media hegemony like those of CNN, BBC, or Al-Djazira. In many migrant-receiving societies – and, again take note of connotations: these are migrant-needing societies – discourses of fear of the Other are being developed. The decades-long opponent of the "Free West", the communist bloc, is gone. Thus, a new "clash of civilizations" was needed. Samuel Huntington obliged and is now adding the politics of identity – "who are we"? Is Western identity so brittle, so vague, so undefinable that a devilish Other is needed to define it, to force it together? Is an outer wall rather than internal achievement the glue (or the straight-jacket)?

Examples of crises in the past are legion and some patterns of interpreting them are discernable: When the Black Death killed one third or more of Europe's populations and when survivors needed to migrate to re-establish viable population centres, the cause was evident: "THE Jews." Expel them and the world will be better. In the present, anti-Semitism has been replaced by an anti-immigrantism: build visa-walls and our world will be better – a way of thinking shared by some West African ruling groups, in some regions of India, and elsewhere. Of the immigrants, headline-mongering has it, the most dangerous are Muslims. Anti-immigrantism has changed from anti-Semitism to anti-Islamism. To avoid thought-inducing complexity, the Christian fundamentalists, who proselytize aggressively or who murder doctors of abortion clinics in the U.S., or Jewish fundamentalists, who expel Palestinian families from apartments in East Jerusalem or land in the West Bank, are hidden behind a wall of gatekeeper-imposed silence. Muslim terrorists have indeed killed thousands and counting – far more Muslims co-religionists than Christian ones. The derivative bankers, pursuing a fundamentalist neo-liberalist creed, sent an estimated 90 million into poverty or, if already impoverished, into starvation. The daily deaths by hunger, especially of children, is legion – the suicide bombers' comparative impact is small and the derivative bankers' strategies help recruiting new ones.

A comprehensive transcultural, historically informed analysis looks at root causes of migration. In 1995 the richest 20 percent of the world population were almost 60 times as wealthy as the poorest 20 percent – a gap that doubled since 1960, a breach that continues to expand. The post-colonial world has become one of "global apartheid" as Canadian sociologist Anthony Richmond (1994) argued a decade-and-a-half ago. Thus the color barrier, abolished in North American admission procedures and reduced in Europe by colonial reverse migrations, has reemerged through a new globalization based on racialization strategies of who gets what income and what access to specific societies' resources as well as to global ones. In consequence two million men and women – sometimes with their children – migrate annually to countries with more perceived options. They do so worldwide, whether to Nigeria or South Africa, to Japan or the Euro-North American World.

The crisis to be addressed is the historical development and actual form of global inequalities. This requires massive changes of top-level policies and political economies – though two of the BRIC countries, Russia and China, seem to prefer to join the exploitative group of economic powers. On the level of human lives – which should not be called the "bottom" level – men and women have had to cope with major crises through the centuries

and have navigated them or have lost. Case studies have again and again shown that flexible possibilities to migrate and equally flexible opportunities to insert themselves increase their chances to maximize returns on their human capital and thereby increase the benefits receiving societies gain from their presence. As scholars we may reveal obstacles to their participation, as politically active citizens we may increase their access to societal resources, as beneficiaries of global inequalities – I argue – we have a mandate to do so.

Bibliographic Note

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