

History 3029 Transnational History: A New Perspective on the Past

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### **Book Review: Human Movement**

Patrick Manning's *Migration in World History*

From the beginning of human existence, humans have always pushed at our boundaries. First we migrated out of Africa and spread across the Eurasian landmass. Then, we managed to settle the Americas and small islands around the world. After we ran out of uninhabited land to settle, we began to push at our societal boundaries, leaving one tribe to marry into another and leaving one country to settle in another. Through waves of conquest, merchant voyages, religious missions and forced migration, humans have continued to move connecting our world in ways previously thought impossible. In his work, *Migration in World History*, Patrick Manning explores humanity's shared history of migration. Manning's work transcends national boundaries, showing the movements that have defined the human experience. Manning uncovers the major trends in migration, revealing it as a force that unites humanity both geographically and temporally. Through a skillful use of a diverse array of evidence, from linguistics to archeology, Manning makes a persuasive case. This allows him to succeed in not only proving that migration has been fundamental to the human experience, but also the notion that it is incredibly difficult to understand history without a thorough examination of migration's role. His work is a proper world history, one in which themes are explored without rendering another nation as an 'other' or paying heed to national boundaries. It provides truly enlightening examples of world history, including notable chapters on slavery and the settling of the Americas. While the work is not perfect, it is a shining illustration of world history and should be used as a model for historians. Furthermore, its approach to migration can inform a professional historian, regardless of her speciality. To gain a thorough understanding of *Migrations in World History*, this review will begin with a summary of the work. Then, Manning's goals in writing this work will be discussed in order to analyze the message of the book along with its content. Next, the work's place in the field of world history will be scrutinized, with special attention paid to the work's chapter on urbanization. Finally, there will be a discussion on the quality of the work and its greatest accomplishments and weaknesses. Throughout this process, it will become clear that Patrick Manning, in his work *Migration*

*in World History*, not only provides an enlightening history, but also demonstrates the importance of world history as a field of study.

Manning's work begins with early hominids in eastern Africa. After hundreds of thousands of years these human-like creatures began to expand to Europe and Asia. Almost immediately after the evolution of Homo-Sapiens, however, they began to outcompete all other hominids on all tropical lands which had been settled. Soon after this, around 40 000 years ago, humans gained the ability to occupy colder and more diverse terrain by creating the tools necessary for cold weather and long journeys. Manning traces the migration of early Homo-Sapiens from Africa across the whole old world and eventually to the northern reaches of the globe and to the Americas. It is at this point in history, about 15 000 years ago, that Manning feels that genetic variation between peoples on different landmasses occur, creating different, albeit superficially different, races of human beings.<sup>1</sup>

After humans had reached every landmass on the globe, a new pattern of migration took hold following the invention of agriculture. Africa ceased to contain the majority of the human population. Ideas and crops began to migrate between different peoples. Nonetheless, areas which held high concentrations of people before agriculture remained significant, often becoming centers of agriculture. About 3 000 years ago civilizations began to form in agricultural heartlands and overtook non-agricultural societies. Individual humans became more reluctant to migrate as it meant leaving their farms and land. Wealth began to accumulate and with it traders began to carve a niche. They exchanged both luxuries and ideas between disparate societies. Moreover, civilizations found themselves surrounded by other civilizations, rather than emptiness. Instead of migrating meaning the movement into unoccupied land, it began to mean clashes between settlers and indigenous peoples. Humans became connected to an extent thought impossible beforehand.<sup>2</sup>

It was from this point onwards that most migrations began to occur on well-trodden paths. Be it Muslims making the pilgrimage to Mecca or Mongols rampaging through the plains of Eurasia, migration began to become familiar and intergenerational. Around 1400 CE, maritime technology made it possible for individual humans to cross large expanses of the globe. This had the familiar effect of connecting previously distant peoples. Religious sects could proselytize around the globe, creating missions which became centres for intercultural transfusion. Nations which previously did not share borders could easily go to war as if they were neighbours, signifi-

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 16-58.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-92.

cantly affecting the balance of power in this new world. People gained the ability to migrate to under-occupied lands as if they were unoccupied in patterns not seen since agriculture took hold across the globe. These new relationships, however, began to lead to a new form of thinking. People identified as races and nations, creating complex, socially constructed hierarchies with the pure-blooded at the top and the uncivilized races at the bottom. Forced migration, typically of slave labour, caused the number of people moved against their will to skyrocket to unbelievable levels. European nations, which industrialized first, took hold of most of the world's population and landmass.<sup>3</sup>

By the 1900s CE, however, most of the slaves were freed. Modern technology, following the well-trodden paths of boats and horses, brought far-off people even closer together. Diasporic cultures mixed in urban metropolises with the dominant culture, making large cities around the world ever more similar. People moved in mass migrations looking for better lives from farmland to urban centers. The proportion of the earth's population which lived in urban areas grew. Despite this, people continue to migrate, from city to city and nation to nation. However, the definition of communities, particularly linguistic communities, has grown to include such vast numbers of people that even defining migration has become more difficult. Today's migration is simply a part of a long pattern of movement around the globe. Clearly, Manning's work truly provides a comprehensive summary of migration in world history.<sup>4</sup>

In writing a long account of humanity's migratory history, Manning has the twin goals of providing a concise history of global migration and presenting a comprehensive theoretical framework of migration in world history. While he achieves the first goal simply by tracing the movement of linguistic communities throughout history, attaining the second requires showing that as a species, humans have a habit of moving between communities and have done so in consistent patterns. To understand Manning's work as a migration theory, it is best to view his work in three parts. The first provides a history of humanity's colonization of the world and the theoretical basis for migration, showing that there are four types of migration:<sup>5</sup> Home-Community migration (broadening the gene pool by breeding between households within a community), Colonization (extending the range of a species by moving some members to new lands on the fringe of civilization), Whole-Community Migration (moving to a new setting by uprooting a whole population) and Cross-Community Migration (a uniquely human form of migration which involves

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-135.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-190.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

members of different communities sharing technology and experience). This provides a theoretical basis from which Manning can analyze various migratory movements. For instance, it allows a framework to compare the migration of Europeans to the Americas after 1492 with the migration of early humans to the northern reaches of the globe, both forms of colonization. The second part of Manning's work focuses on the significance of Cross-Community Migration from the development of agriculture until the discovery of the New World. The final section of Manning's work puts modern migration into the context of the framework discussed in the first part of his work. He shows that all of our modern migrations fall into these old patterns. By viewing migration in this broad context, Manning is able to ask important questions about migration, such as *what starts migration, what sustains migration and what are the costs of migration*.<sup>6</sup> However, as his context is so broad, he does not provide clear answers to these questions, rather a series of clues. Nonetheless, Manning leaves us with an imperative mission at the end of his work. While he, along with other brilliant researchers, have begun the work on the theory of migration, it is clear that much more work needs to occur to fully understand this social phenomenon. When fully understood, migration theory can act as an aid to world historians attempting to understand themes as diverse as family and disease. Therefore, to Manning, it is necessary that this work continues. In his work, Manning successfully places migration in the context of world history, imparting upon the reader the importance of the continued study of migration.

By embarking on a study of migration, however, a world historian must be careful. Migrants generally move from one nation or group to another. It is easy to fall into a pattern of explaining migration in terms of the poor conditions of migrant nations and the better conditions of immigrant nations. Patrick Manning cautiously avoids this. *Migration in World History* is not simply a title. To understand his work's commitment to world history one needs to go no further than reading the following passage from the end of chapter five:

It was not only Eurasia under the Mongols that experienced closer regional interconnections and exchange of ideas in this period. Even in the distant Americas communications among regions expanded, through Aztec conquest of highland Mexico and Arawak invasion of the Caribbean islands, but also of the great mounds at Cahokia near the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. Migrations in every region of Africa reaffirmed old links and established new ones. In Oceania while the longest voyages were discontinued, connections in the

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

western Pacific were constantly reinforced by mariners. In Europe, Italian merchants in the south and German merchants in the north deepened their networks. No region was entirely isolated.<sup>7</sup>

Here Manning is attempting to show how migration in the pre-Colombian era brought far apart peoples into contact with one another. After painstakingly detailing a wide array of these new connections he provides the summary above. It is nearly unimaginable for an author to provide a more global and less nationalistic description of these events. While he recognizes nation states as an important unit of observation, Manning does not rely on them; rather, he focuses on the most important connections between people, whether they are wars between nation states or encounters between merchants. The wide-ranging effects of migration caused by wars and commerce extended across the globe bringing people together and allowing ideas to converge. However, world history is as difficult as it is useful. Manning cannot simply read the histories of a single region or rely on a small array of evidence; rather, he required a wide array of varying sources and points of view. In his work, Manning masterfully combines historical records with archeological data and linguistic records with biological evidence. In doing so, he not only provides a well-supported argument, but he also allows the reader to understand how world history functions. If world history is the study of the human experience as a whole, Manning practices it with great expertise.

One of Manning's most successful portrayals of world history is easily discernible in his discussion, in the final chapter of the work, of urbanization.<sup>8</sup> To Manning, it is foolish to discuss urbanization in terms of American urbanization or Chinese urbanization; rather, one must discuss global urbanization (in Manning's case in the context of migration). Urbanization, according to Manning, must be seen through a transnational lens to be properly understood. First one must analyze the effects of diasporic communities on their host nations and their own scattered communities. For example the spread of European languages occurred as small groups of Europeans moved around the globe, and the global spread of the bagel occurred after it was created in a diasporic Jewish community in New York. This spread of ideas is intrinsic to urbanization as it is only in a cosmopolitan environment that ideas and knowledge will easily transfuse between cultures. Second, in order to understand why cities have grown, one must understand the long term effects of the movement of people around the globe. Be it global merchant movements, expulsions and voluntary migrations, all of them have allowed for the development of large multicul-

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-190.

tural urban areas. Finally, according to Manning, in order to analyze modern cities, one must understand their similarities. First, almost all major urban centers are on the water (a habit humans have had since they first began settling) allowing for similar development patterns and industry. Second, all have similar institutions (like universities) which contribute to the international network of knowledge present in the city. Finally, most major cities have similar patterns of immigration in which the immigrants are able to disproportionately contribute to the economy and culture of the area. This chapter is a prime example of World History as it is not reliant on a single nation's narrative; rather, it is a transnational one that provides true understanding of migration's role in global urbanization.

Manning's most impressive feat, however, is his ability to expertly use evidence from experts from diverse fields of study. By using linguistics, he tracks the movement of early humans. Through biology, he tracks early agriculture and cultural diffusion. Through archeology, he uncovers the trade routes that connected nations. Through genetics, he finds commonality among human ancestors. While he is able to use all of these factors successfully as proof of human migratory movement, sometimes Manning relies too extensively on linguistics. He often uses linguistics as a proxy for culture, and while it is true that linguistics can help track cultural groups, it obscures the differences within these groups. For instance, today America and Singapore share a language. Though there are many similarities between these cultures, they are not substitutes for one another. That said, Manning's use of evidence from multiple fields is not only remarkable, but it also provides the reader with an example of the difficult and diverse education needed to practice world history.

Despite this technical evidence, Manning's work is written in an easy to follow manner. First, everything in the work is in chronological order. He starts with the first proto-humans and makes his way through to modern times. While this means there is some bouncing around between geographic locations, Manning does attempt to keep the book geographically coherent by focusing on a single specific area of the world (or in the case of certain migrations, areas which are inherently connected such as cities along merchant routes or linguistically uniform regions) in each subsection of a chapter. Each chapter begins with a short message, explaining the major theme of the chapter and the way in which this theme will be explored. This preview is vital, as without it, the reader would be lost in the vastness of Manning's work. Beyond the organizational structure, Manning makes sure to write in simple prose, allowing the reader to easily digest the wide array of facts thrown at her. Moreover, by alternating between theory and factual history, Manning allows the reader time to fully comprehend each of his ideas. In the conclusion of each

chapter, Manning skillfully ties together all of the new information, allowing the reader to digest his theories and decide whether they have merit. Manning's easy to read style, and constant reminder of his major points, allows the reader to digest Manning's work and come away with a comprehensive knowledge of migration in world history.

While Manning's work is praiseworthy, its attempt to tackle such ambitious goals leaves its argument incomplete. Not only is Manning unable to spend time explaining previous work on migration theory, but he also leaves the reader without full confidence in some of his convictions as they seem to be weakly supported. After reading Manning's book, the reader understands Manning's theory of four different types of migration and Manning's reasons for why and how people migrate. However, the reader does not necessarily understand how other academics' theories of migration work within Manning's context. While Manning does mention some alternative theories as to why and how people move in the appendix, he does not put them in context. This leaves the reader with a clear gap in her knowledge of the subject, unable to fully comprehend migration on the abstract level. To Manning's credit, however, by describing other migration theories in the appendix, he allows the reader to be informed about her ignorance, granting the reader the ability to learn more on her own. This same problem occurs in the much of the historical information that Manning presents. As the work is only meant to be an overview of migration, it glosses over many interesting details, which would otherwise help Manning's arguments be stronger. For instance, Manning only devotes two paragraphs to the Spanish Inquisition (an example of Whole-Community Migration) and one to the totality of Muslim missionary work in China (an example of Cross-Community Migration). This lack of detail, however, does not make the reader doubt Manning's scholarship, as his writing is clearly nuanced; rather, it prevents the reader from being fully convinced of Manning's arguments. While it is clear that Manning's work is not perfect, his ability to synthesize facts on such a large scale, makes his lack of specification understandable as this may have made the work less focused and coherent.

*Migration in World History* is a must read book for any serious historian. Manning makes an extremely persuasive case for the importance of migration in any work of history. Not only does he provide a broad understanding of history through the lens of migration, but he also demonstrates that any history which does not take into account migration's role is inherently flawed. As a work in the field of world history, *Migration in World History* does not disappoint. Manning skilfully provides a transnational view of migration and does not get caught up in many of our modern thoughts about immigration. As a summary of migration's role in history, the work provides an accessible background for any scholar. Despite the difficulties of attempting to con-

solidate so much knowledge from so many diverse sources, Manning creates an easy to follow work. Patrick Manning's *Migration in World History* is a delightful book, not only impressive in its scope, but also in its methodology.

### **Bibliography**

Manning, Patrick. *Migration in World History*. New York: Routledge, 2013.