

General Introduction

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In 2018 – a year when fewer than 4 percent of the world’s inhabitants lived outside their own countries of birth – it may have shocked some readers to learn from a Gallup poll that fully 15 percent of adults, worldwide, were eager to move to another country.¹ But was the higher number surprising? Biologists sometimes declare *homo sapiens* to be a mobile species, but humanists, along with the general public, are less certain. Social scientists have critiqued both a popular “sedentary bias” (which assumes people prefer to remain in place unless forced away) and the “mobility bias” of studies on migration that ignore how normative sedentary life is across cultures.² Distinguishing sharply between the dramatic consequences of international migration and the far more numerous shorter movements leaves the paradox unresolved, in part because domestic mobility – whether the African-American Great Migration or the recent cityward exodus of China’s rural populations – also has profound social and cultural consequences.

Readers already have access to migration histories reviewing 60,000 years of human movement, sociological surveys of recent global migrations, and immigration histories for individual countries. Collectively, they have established the ubiquity of large-scale migrations. This *Cambridge History of Global Migrations (CHGM)* documents the numerical preponderance of short moves – so important for understanding urbanization, for example – while

- 1 Neli Esipova, Anita Pugliese, and Julie Ray, “More Than 750 Million Worldwide Would Migrate If They Could,” *Gallup News*, December 10, 2018, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/245255/750-million-worldwide-migrate.aspx>, accessed June 21, 2021.
- 2 Peter de Knijff, “Population Genetics and the Migration of Modern Humans (*Homo Sapiens*),” in *Migration History in World History: Multidisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen, and Patrick Manning (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 39; Hein de Haas, “Turning the Tide? Why Development Will Not Stop Migration,” *Development and Change* 38, 5 (2007), 819–841. See also Kerilyn Schewel, “Understanding Immobility: Moving beyond the Mobility Bias in Migration Studies,” *International Migration Review* 54, 2 (2020), 328–355.

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building on earlier studies of longer-distance moves. Presenting case studies of unique regions, times, and types of mobility over seven centuries, *CHGM* establishes that increasing numbers of human societies since 1400 have celebrated sedentarism while simultaneously depending on mobility for their own prosperity and survival. Conceding the absence of any widely accepted scholarly or popular definition of migration, it opts for a broad, inclusive understanding of migration and argues that mobility, not sedentarism, drives social, economic, and cultural change and innovation.

To write a global history, highly specialized researchers joined our five-person editorial team to develop two volumes organized in a loosely chronological sequence. Knitting its many chapters together are this general introduction (which identifies conceptual challenges and sketches some changes and continuities over time) and separate introductions to each volume that identify chronologically distinctive themes and transformations. Dirk Hoerder also offers a chapter that opens Volume 2 with a discussion of the complex choices facing historians of migration; these include periodization (centuries or millennia?), spatial units (oceanic, continental, national, or global?), and analytical scale (human- or migrant-centered? regional networks or global systems?).

The editors of *CHGM* want specialists' scholarly work to reach diverse readers. Both volumes encourage general readers to develop new ways of thinking about migrations, past and present. Teachers will gain access to high-quality research on themes and regions already central to world and global history courses. Specialized scholars will find resources for the development of comparative perspectives on their own interests and essential readings in new research fields.

This introduction first discusses the promise and limits of scholarly collaborations global enough to grasp the complexity of a topic as broad as ours. It introduces general readers to a scholarly tool called the "mobility lens." It calls attention to the terminologies and typologies of migration that have shaped scholarship, governance, communication, and even public discourse about human movement. Finally, it points toward some of the most important changes and continuities in migration between 1400 and the present. As a collective work, *CHGM* describes how – in the already mobile world of 1400, built by merchants, trade, imperial militaries, and missionaries – new land- and sea-empires consolidated sufficient power to forcefully direct or block human movement on a global scale. It shows how, beginning in the eighteenth century, new settler societies expanded their territories and built nations and industrial economies by selectively – and also briefly – tolerating long-distance mass migrations while simultaneously eliminating, expelling,

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or interning the indigenous and nomadic peoples who had once outnumbered them. As twentieth-century anti-colonial movements fueled a new round of nation-building worldwide, states increasingly worked together to construct a restrictive global regime that now leaves millions unable to move about as so many apparently wish to do.

Globalization and the Production of Knowledge

In 2017, Cambridge University Press editors wrote to me about their desire to develop a “comprehensive and very global history of migration.”³ That goal had presumably emerged with the completion of the Press’s nine-volume *Cambridge World History (CWH)* series, published in 2015. The first volumes of *CWH* described the fragmented world of small-scale foraging (sometimes called hunter-gather) societies and the expanding but still only partially interconnected world of nomadic pastoralists and the new agrarian civilizations of peasants, city- and empire-builders, religious elites and converts, and merchants. With Volume 6 (and the year 1400), *CWH* began to offer global perspectives on world history. *CHGM* was designed to query the relationship of migration and globalization since 1400. Since few migrations (even today) are global in their dimensions, *CHGM* delivers global perspectives on migrations developing within and across world regions rather than focusing exclusively on the most extensive migrations. The approach reflects an editorial assumption that short-distance migrations, too, can have large impacts, as histories of urbanization confirm.

Cambridge University Press requested a history of migration developed by a globally inclusive and diverse team. I first recruited four multilingual co-editors (born in Africa, Latin America, and North America). Collectively they possessed expertise in Asia, the Atlantic and Pacific, Europe, North America, and Latin America. Three of *CHGM*’s five editors identified as female. To complement the work of historians, the editors also sought anthropologists, geographers, legal experts, and sociologists. *CHGM* includes work of senior and newer scholars; men slightly outnumber women authors.

We made the *CHGM* collaboration as inclusive as global inequalities allow. Since 1970, scholars have become a particularly mobile group, but the distribution of scholarly resources remains uneven on a global scale. Three of the five editors and well over a third of *CHGM*’s contributors are themselves migrants, living outside the countries of their birth; most of the others have

³ Personal email correspondence dated July 3, 2017.

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migrant parents. All have traveled internationally to study, teach, or research. All brought to their scholarship diverse lived experiences with mobility. Nevertheless, most contributors – including those born in the global South – are currently employed at universities in the global North. Many work and live in a small cluster of countries (the United States, the Netherlands, France, Australia, and the United Kingdom) that have invested heavily to develop scholarly expertise on migration. Global North scholars work comfortably within the conventions and practices of English-language publication; they possess time and resources unavailable elsewhere. Good intentions cannot erase global inequalities.

Globalization affected *CHGM* in a less predictable way, too. Beginning in early 2020, the Covid-19 virus completely demobilized contributors. They could not travel to libraries and archives or visit their university offices. Most had to teach and write from home, often while supervising children. The pandemic forced contributors writing on a global scale to depend more heavily on digital sources than they may have preferred. Unsurprisingly, the attrition rate among *CHGM* authors was also higher than anticipated: the editors recruited new participants but had to accept gaps emerging in their Table of Contents. Submission of the manuscript was delayed.

To take full advantage of contributors' diversity and to work within the limitations imposed by a global pandemic, the editors offered authors considerable flexibility in their choice of methodologies, periodizations, analytical scales, and preferred scholarly genres. *CHGM* includes historiographical surveys, new research reports, theoretical explorations, and both reflexive and empirical analysis. Some authors preferred to dig deep into primary sources, while others offered sweeping syntheses. The editors did not recruit authors to write separate chapters on gender, race, or class but instead engaged in dialogue with authors to encourage the integration of these important perspectives into all chapters. To our surprise, quite a few authors wanted to offer global-scale analyses. Fortunately, too, most authors easily adopted a mobility lens, even when they expressed reservations about use of terms such as migration or immigration.

While the editors decided at the onset to mirror the periodization of the *CWH*, to begin in 1400, and to use the conventional date of 1800 as a convenient divider between *CHGM*'s two volumes, they gave authors the opportunity to critique or even reject that rough periodization. Many authors in both volumes chose to write chapters that straddle the year 1800. Volume 1 authors writing about indigenous mobility, religiously motivated migrations, and the continent of Africa often chose also to begin their inquiries well

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before 1400. So many *CHGM* authors rejected the labeling of distinct Early Modern and Modern Eras that the editors decided to respect their objections when choosing *CHGM*'s volume titles.

Migration History and the Mobility Lens

Until quite recently, historians' preoccupation with national economies, societies, and cultures encouraged the writing of immigration and emigration histories that closely reflected the point of view and concerns of individual nation-states. As they confronted theories of capitalist world systems, globalization, and transnationalism after 1970, more historians sought alternatives to methodological nationalism.⁴ World historians proved particularly eager to expand definitions of migration to include not only permanent, voluntary, and long-distance relocations of settlers but also nomadism, circulatory, repeated, and forced or coerced movements. Some *CHGM* authors preferred to write even more broadly about mobility rather than migration.

CHGM introduces historians to a new tool: the mobility lens. Beginning around 2000, sociologists and geographers invented Mobility Studies in order to analyze "culturally meaningful" moves that might include not only migration (which they understood, still, as a permanent relocation from one place to another) but also residential moves, commuting and shopping trips, transport systems, and tourism. They were the first to advocate for the use of a "mobility lens."⁵ *CHGM* authors have adopted the use of their mobility lens, but most follow world historians in defining migration broadly and prioritizing studies of transcultural migrations that cross (or sometimes create) linguistic, religious, social, political, and economic borders.

The editors believe a mobility lens can assist readers in viewing familiar historical themes in new ways. Empires can expand only through constant (if diverse) human movements. Lurking within commonly used words such as "grow," "spread," and "expand" are opportunities to analyze and understand human migration: explorers explore; soldiers campaign or march; enslavers ship their captives far away only to confine them as workers who are then

4 Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology," *International Migration Review* 37 (2003), 576–610.

5 Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 21; Dennis Conway, "Migration," in *Encyclopedia of Geography*, ed. Barney Warf (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2010), 1891; Mimi Sheller and John Urry, "The New Mobilities Paradigm," *Environment and Planning* 38 (2006), 207–226; Euan Hague and Michael C. Armstrong, "Mobility," in *Encyclopedia of Geography, 1922–1923*.

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prone to run away; merchants seek far-off goods or purchasers. All of these key historical actors are mobile people. As a consequence of human mobility, cities grow; markets, religions, philosophies, literary forms, and political ideas spread; frontiers are conquered and their earlier inhabitants are killed, confined, or expelled. Recognizing the many verbs and nouns that label human movement reveals mobility as common, even ubiquitous. Through a mobility lens, one sees movement as a necessary facilitator of many if not all of the transformations explored in global and world history. Most chapters in *CHGM* analyze one or more of those transformations.

A mobility lens also highlights the relationship of movement, human agency, and power. It is no linguistic accident that English-speakers use the same words – movement, mobilization – for both human migrations and for groups advocating social and political change. Key to the exercise of power has been the capacity of self-interested states, religious institutions, merchants, investors, and corporations or other employers to drive, coerce, and force, or, alternatively, to limit and constrain the mobility and the choices of less powerful people. For the less powerful majority, migration can at times become a strategy for pursuing their own modest goals, whether by acquiescing to or resisting the dictates of the powerful. A mobility lens allows humanists to assess with fresh eyes the too-oft-assumed dangers or costs of migration against the equally too-oft-assumed comforts and benefits of sedentary, stable familiarity. It reveals that migration sometimes defines freedom (with immobility, in turn, defining its absence) while at other times revealing the limited autonomy of people who are forcibly removed, relocated, or expelled by the more powerful.

What a mobility lens cannot do is settle debates about the desirability of the economic, social, cultural, religious, and ideological changes accompanying migration. At most, a mobility lens allows readers to see better who benefits or suffers from change. A mobility lens can thus not resolve the great political and moral issues raised by today's migrations. What it can do is show how past and current controversies may be connected.

Easily applied across regions and time periods, a mobility lens is a powerful tool for those writing temporally and spatially capacious global and world histories. It enhances communication among specialists by fostering awareness of how scholars' dependence on diverse terminologies and typologies can isolate or marginalize their work. Studies of emigrants, immigrants, labor migrants, nomads, settlers, soldiers, or refugees will usefully highlight differing dimensions of movement and historical change without obscuring how mobility unites them all. Conversely, a mobility lens can reveal how one

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individual may belong simultaneously to many of these categories without experiencing any sense of fragmentation. Finally, a mobility lens can bring into focus how both mobile and immobile persons experience the changes, disruptions, and benefits that are so often associated with migration.

Terminologies of Mobility

Words describing people on the move can be called “terminologies of mobility.”⁶ Terminologies differ across time, regions, and languages; their meaning also changes over time, and as they travel from language to language, as they sometimes do. It is almost never the case that a single word – even a very general one like migration or mobility – subsumes all other terms. In fact, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, terminologies constitute a system of specialized words that exist in relationship to each other. Terminologies proliferate as societies and governments use words to differentiate among less or more desirable migrants, often by stigmatizing or celebrating the motives, lives, and existence of only a few of them.

Because terminologies of mobility typically make value-laden distinctions among mobile people, many *CHGM* authors signaled dissatisfaction with commonly used terms. As writers, they encircled dozens of terminologies in single or double quotes, presumably indicating disapproval of terms they viewed as either politicized or disparaging. In some cases, authors were instead aware that today’s commonly used terms cannot capture the meaning of terms used in primary sources. Authors working with non-English-language sources from earlier centuries faced the latter issue most directly. Writing a history of terminologies of mobility was never a goal of *CHGM*, but readers will gain some appreciation of how moral and political judgments drive changes in terminology.

One example will have to suffice here. According to the *OED*, modern English terminologies of mobility emerged after the invasion of Britain by French-speaking Normans in 1066. Normans introduced Latin-origin terminologies that replaced Old English ones. Terms such as foreigner, barbarian, and stranger became the most commonly used terms for migrants entering Britain. All carried negative associations; all had originated with Romans’ celebration of their civilization as sedentary (which, of course, it was not) and

6 Donna Gabaccia, “Historical Migration Studies: Time, Temporality and Theory,” in *Migration Theory: Talking across Disciplines*, eds. Caroline Brettell and James Hollifield, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2023), 45–78.

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their view of their nomadic pastoralist, hunting, fishing, foraging, or seafaring neighbors as dangerous threats. Around 1600, as English-speakers looked outward toward the Americas, they repurposed other Latin-origin terms to label their own mobility. They wrote, for example, of planters who, after receiving royal land grants, planted settlers on plantations, first in Ireland and then in North America. As planters and plantations became associated with enslavement and the growing of sugar, new terms – migration and emigration – came into common usage in the 1640s and 1650s to distinguish the movement of European settlers to America. Within a century, new nouns – migrants (1752), emigrants (1754) – celebrated England’s empire-building travelers. By the early nineteenth century, emigrant was the most widely used English-language term for settler colonizers everywhere within the British Empire.

After 1850, nation-building strategies in postcolonial settler states pushed the evolution of English-language terminologies in new directions. The *OED* dates the first use of the term immigrants to North America in 1805; initially it differentiated the desirable emigrants from stigmatized and impoverished paupers arriving at Atlantic seaports from Ireland. Thereafter, wage-earners from Asia and from Europe’s periphery were routinely labeled as immigrants, especially when they worked in factories or lived in cities. American demands to exclude or restrict immigration grew with use of the new, stigmatizing term. Only in the 1960s, after decades of restriction, did reformers succeed in stripping away their negative associations to declare European immigrants the builders of an American Nation of Immigrants.⁷

Because North and South Americans (and eventually also the French) viewed immigrants, like emigrants, as having permanently and voluntarily relocated with the expectation of acquiring citizenship, one finds few mobile people labeled as immigrants in Europe, Africa, or Asia. There, migrants became contract laborers, indentured workers, foreign workers, seasonal workers, guestworkers, or simply foreigners and strangers: they were expected to leave after completing the work they had been hired to do. In recent decades even the paradigmatic nation of immigrants, the United States, has adopted systems of temporary visas and work and residence permits to differentiate migrants and aliens from desirable nation-building immigrants. Aware of how terminologies of mobility change, readers of *CHGM* will gain new insight into today’s fierce debates over terms such as undocumented, alien, migrant, refugee, illegal immigrant, expat, parachute child, clandestine, road warrior, and asylum seeker.⁸

⁷ Donna Gabaccia, “Nations of Immigrants: Do Words Matter?,” *The Pluralist* 5, 3 (2010), 5–31.

⁸ Camila Ruz, “The Battle over the Words Used to Describe Migrants,” *BBC News Magazine*, August 28, 2015, www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34061097, accessed November 17, 2021.

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Finally, even scholars struggle to find appropriate terms that can explain to general readers how migration develops and works. Many commonly used terms and metaphors rob mobile people of their agency, rationality, and humanity. Evoking the laws of physics to describe humans as “pushed” and “pulled” transforms people into iron filings helplessly trapped between the opposing magnetic poles of two countries. Similarly, human beings appear to move mindlessly like water molecules when described as moving in threatening waves, floods, or streams. The botanical metaphor of planters and plantations has also survived in descriptions of American immigrants as plants either violently uprooted (creating alienation) or gently transplanted (into supportive cultural communities).⁹ *CHGM* cannot resolve disagreements over such commonly used metaphors, but it certainly documents language’s power to shape debate.

Migration Typologies for Historians

Typologies are closely related to existing relationships among terminologies. The editors of both *CHGM* volumes enjoyed full autonomy in devising their own typologies while recruiting authors and sensibly grouping their chapters. Still, a fairly consistent array of vectors – time, distance, transport technologies, motivation, autonomy, and subjectivity – created a rough typology of movement that was shared across both volumes.

Any typology of migration must begin with the distinction between mobile and immobile persons. Unfortunately, the pandemic upended the editors’ intentions to include a chapter on that topic. But references to immobility throughout *CHGM* are suggestive. No author has identified a generic term for an immobile person that is comparable to the generic term migrant. Instead, the opposite of the term migrant refers to an insider or someone believed to “belong” to a particular place. Belonging does not require immobility: few insiders are sedentary; most move freely within a bounded territory. Among highly mobile pastoralists and foragers, by contrast, human identities and communal bonds require no connection to a single, fixed place.

Many chapters in *CHGM* strongly suggest that mobility and immobility are not binary opposites. Outside a few extreme medical conditions, absolute human immobility is rare. *CHGM*’s historic cases of extreme immobility

⁹ Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951); John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985).

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include prisoners, cloistered women, and conquered, captured, enslaved or indentured and indebted peoples who are confined to prisons, camps, reservations, plantations, or intensively supervised work sites. In all, a high degree of coercion is required to immobilize humans. Historically, concepts such as race, ethnicity, citizenship, and gender, or ideological, religious, or political philosophies have justified both coerced mobility and coerced immobility by differentiating insiders who belong and can move about freely from outsiders whose mobility must be controlled when they are not completely excluded. Both those forced to move and those prevented from moving can be deemed unworthy of the autonomy required to determine how they move their bodies. *CHGM* case studies also document how frequently forced mobilizations – of the enslaved, the captured, the marriageable female, and the indigenous – preceded coerced immobilizations and confinement.

Sadly, pandemic challenges frustrated the editors' efforts to include multiple chapters on the distinctive mobility and cultures of indigenous, foraging, and nomadic pastoralist societies. Many scholars hesitate to describe the seasonal, cyclical movements of entire groups as migrations. For foragers, hunters, seafarers, and pastoralists, mobility was a routine way of life and – perhaps more importantly – a way of being in a social world where notions of the relation of self and society differs from those of agrarian societies. Belonging itself involved movement, albeit without attachment to a single location. On this point, it is important to remember that in 1400, more than half of the world's 370–390 million inhabitants still lived in highly mobile, stateless societies. When written, a full history of their mobility will likely upend conventional periodizations of migration.

Most of the authors of *CHGM* rejected other typologies built around binary opposites and preferred to explore variations, for example, in distances traveled (longer to shorter), temporality (seasonal and temporary, circular, more or less permanent), motivations (almost always mixed), and power. On a continuum between forced and free migrations, for example, enslavement, displacement, climate refugees, convicts, deportees, soldiers, sailors, and indentured or contract workers fall more toward the coerced end, while settlers, imperial and corporate bureaucrats, and administrators, merchants, businessmen, and even job seekers within unregulated labor markets fall toward the more voluntary end. Motivations varied enormously among the more voluntary migrants, with aspirations for religious and political expression, dignity, adventure, security, family solidarity, and economic self-interest often overlapping in any one individual.