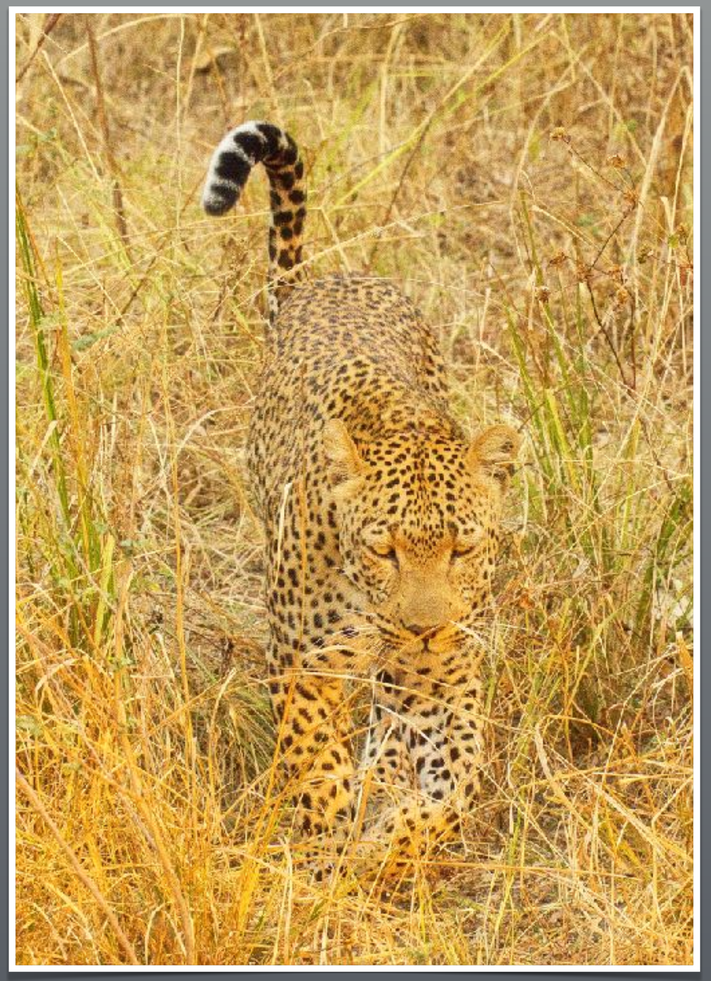
Migration is much more than small boat crossings



Tim Ewbank

Autumn 2026



Recap from Week One

Outlined why it is such a contentious subject

Defined categories of migrants

Introduced the *migration dilemma*

Overview of the current EU & UK situations

Questions from last week

What proportion of asylum seekers' applications are approved in the UK?

Grant can be refugee status, humanitarian protection or "other leave"

38% applications approved on first decision (42,394)

About 15% succeed on appeal, taking overall acceptance rate to over 50%

Current rate is close to decade average; high point was 77% in 2022

Highest acceptance from Sudan 92%, Eritrea 84%.

Unaccompanied minors 57%

Lowest Syria & Bangladesh

Source: Home Office, AsylumStats

Data 12months to June 2026

Migration in the news 1

12th October

Reform pledges to suspend asylum system for up to five years
All new asylum applications would be rejected
Existing applications voided
All claimants marked for deportation.
No grants of humanitarian protection or refugee status
Legal refugee routes and resettlement schemes would end
Scrap asylum tribunal system
Deport 90,000 asylum seekers in appeals backlog

Migration in the news 2

15th October

Shabana Mahmood threatened to ban all Eritreans from entering the UK if country's government does not accept more returns of small boat migrants and foreign national offenders.

Eritreans were the most common nationality among small boats migrants in the 12 months to June - accounting for 18% of arrivals

, external

,.

Patterns of Migrations

Drivers of migration

Forced migrations

Major historic migrations

Colonisation & Decolonisation

Case studies

	Historic	Contemporary (Post WWII)
Global	✓	
Regional/ international	✓	✓
National	✓	✓
Local		✓

Immigration and emigration



Carole King

“So Far Away”

Why does no-one stay in one place anymore?

…. truth is, we never did

Nor are we the only migratory species



Wildebeest on the Maasai Mara

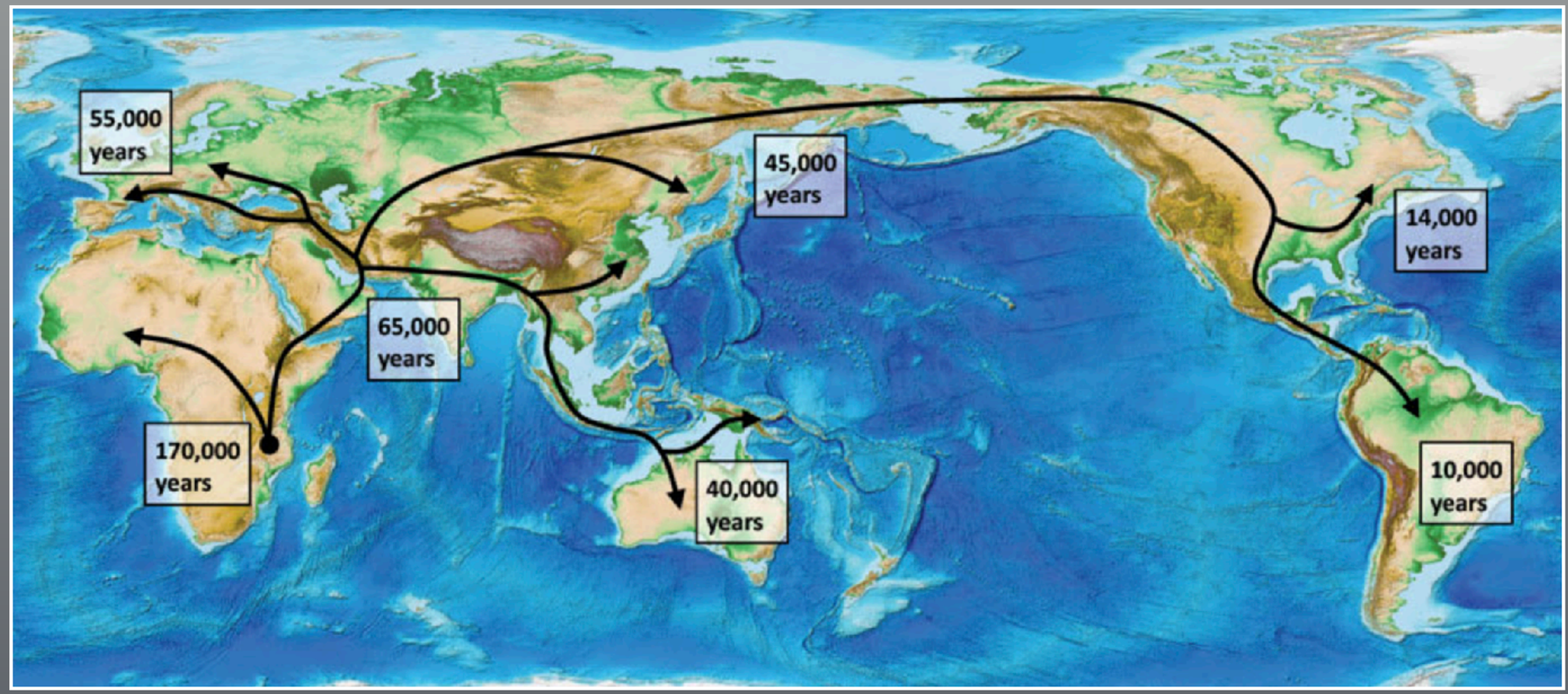


Swans at Welney



Monarch Butterfly

Global spread of *Homo sapiens* 170,000 - 15,000 BCE



Source: University of Cambridge

Drivers of migration
Common “push factors”

Poverty & lack of opportunity

High levels of youth unemployment

Lack of social infrastructure

Examples: Sub-Saharan Africans; Afghanistans

Conflict and persecution

War, political repression, ethnic or religious persecution

Syrians after 2011; Ukrainians; Afghans after Taliban takeover

Environmental stress

Drought or floods; crop failure or sea level rise

Rural to urban migration in Horn of Africa; flood displacement in Pakistan

Drivers of migration
Common “pull factors”

Employment opportunities

Jobs, higher wages. Financial ability to send remittances. Government promotions

Education and skills

Move for educational qualifications & to learn new skill, not available locally

Colonial or family connection

Easier on account of common language, education systems, known culture

Having family in the host country facilitates movement,; accommodation, contacts

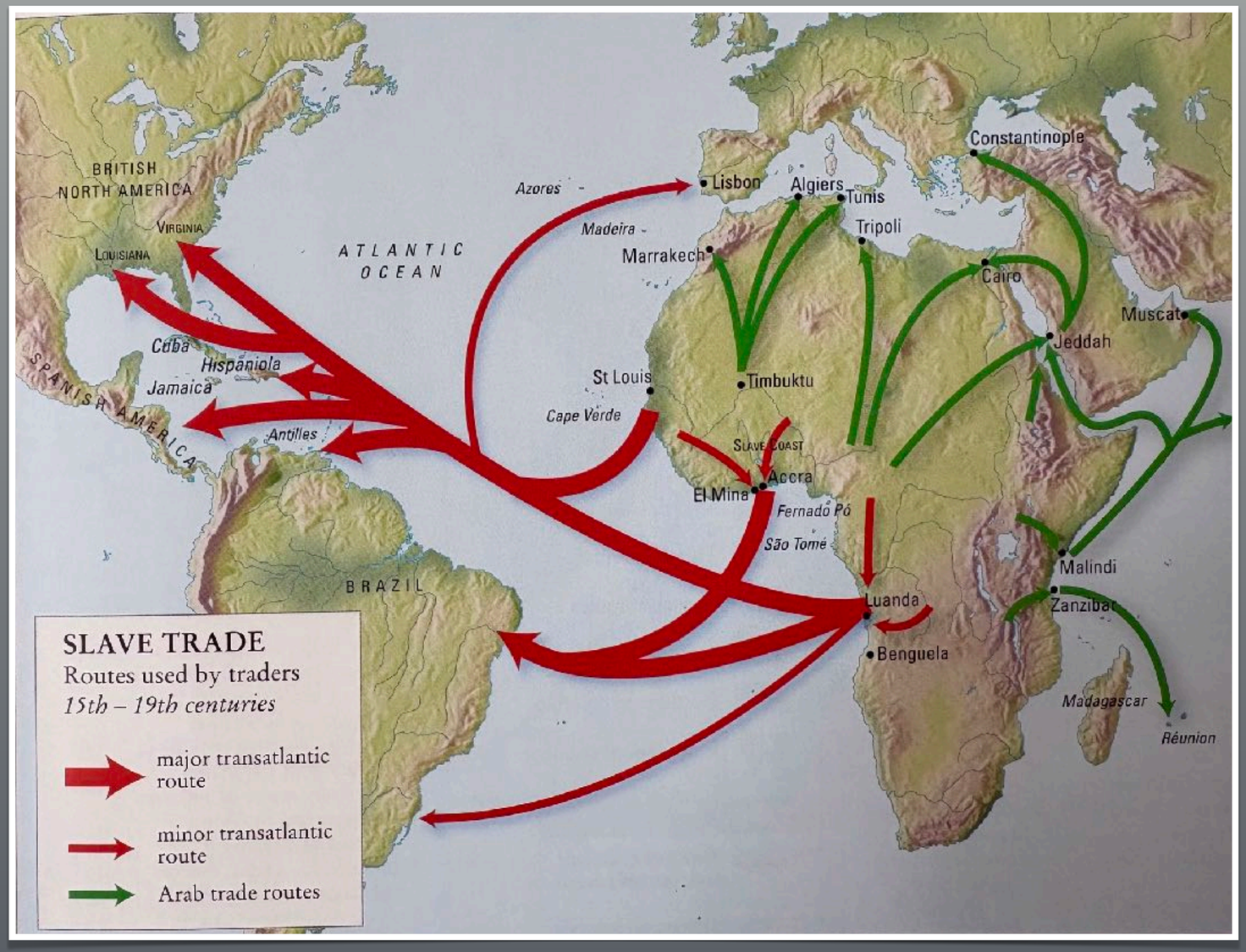
Aspiration of a better life

Belief in attainable life improvement in host countries.

Impression fostered by facilitators on social media

Seldom a single push or pull factor

African Slave Trade



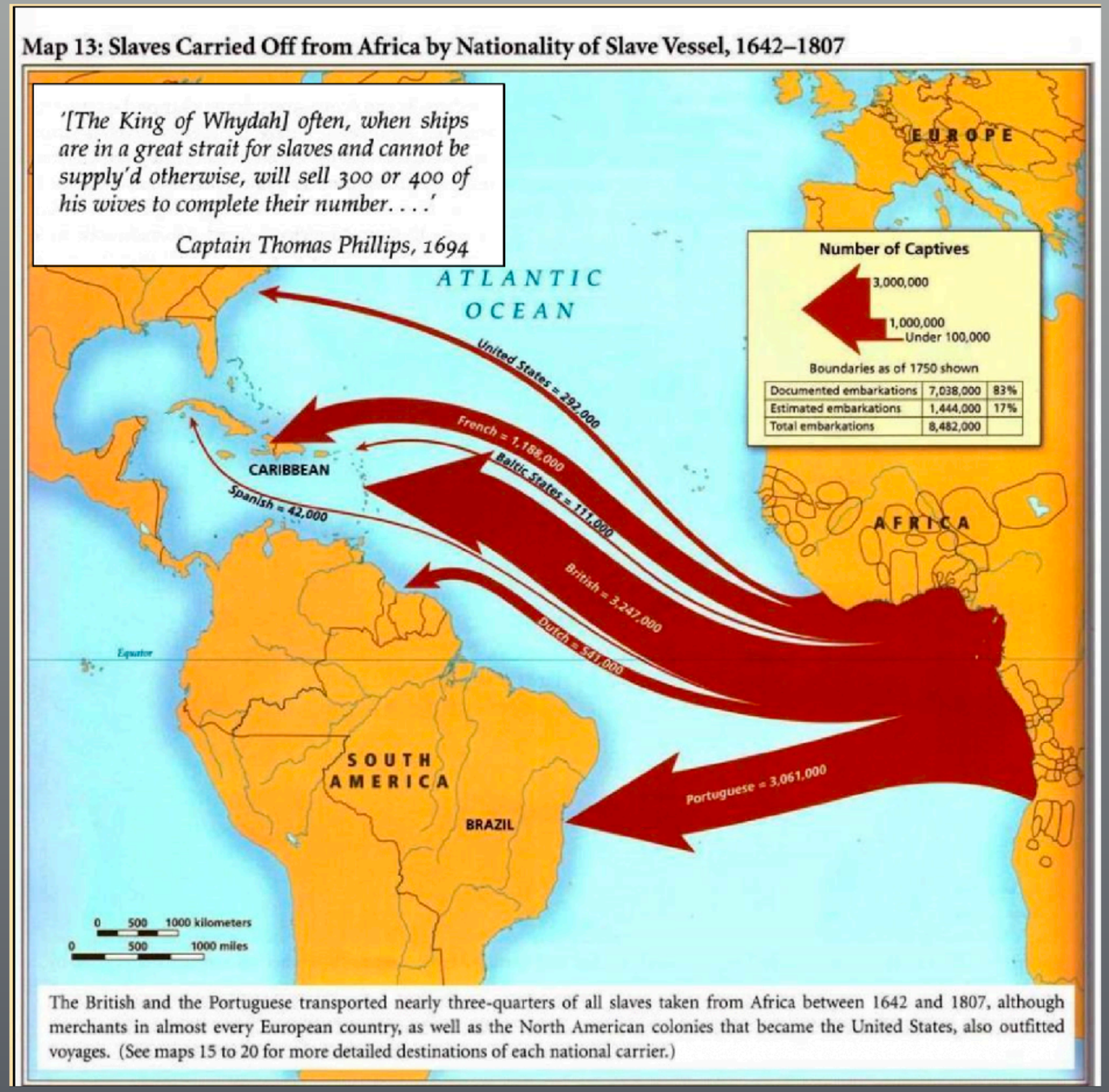


Two principal routes:

1. Transatlantic
2. Arabian & European



Source: R King (2010) *Atlas of Human Migration*



The Atlantic Slave Trade by Nationality of Slave Vessel

British & Portuguese were numerically largest

British slaves to Caribbean & America

Portuguese slaves to Brazil

Source: ***The Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade***
David Eltis and David Richardson, 2010

Enforced Child Migration to Canada & Australia

	Australia	Canada
Dates	c.1912/13 to 1967; last party arrived by air in 1967. Peak years 1947 and 1950–55.	1869 to the 1930s; stopped by Canada in 1933, some sent to 1938; British Columbia to 1948.
Numbers of children	About 7,000 (estimates 5,000–10,000); around 4,000 after the Second World War.	About 90,000–100,000+, the largest group of all.
Who were the children	Mostly British, a few hundred Maltese; some as young as three. Only about a third were orphans; many were told their parents were dead. Catholic agencies found evidence of parental consent in only about 20% of cases.	Poor children from workhouses, charity homes and struggling families, aged from infancy to 18. One estimate suggests only about 2% were true orphans. Barnardo's "Canada Clause" allowed emigration without further parental consent.

Enforced Child Migration to Canada & Australia

	Australia	Canada
Where were they placed	Residential institutions rather than foster care or adoption; run by Fairbridge, Barnardo's, Catholic and other church agencies.	Mainly with rural families, via receiving homes. After 1924 only to the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School, British Columbia (329 children).
What training and work did they do	Pre-war aim: farming or domestic skills; post-war aim: "Empire settlement". Many educated only for farm work or put to work as farm labourers; widespread abuse.	Indentured farm labourers and domestic servants, "mainly as cheap labour". Over 10,000 fought for Canada in the First World War.
Government response	Senate inquiry Lost Innocents (2001). Formal national apology by PM Kevin Rudd, 16 November 2009. Funding for family tracing, counselling and oral history.	No national inquiry. Apology refused by Minister Jason Kenney, 2009. 2010 Year of the British Home Child. House of Commons apology motion, February 2017. British Home Child Day (28 September) from 2018. Formal government apology refused again in 2024.

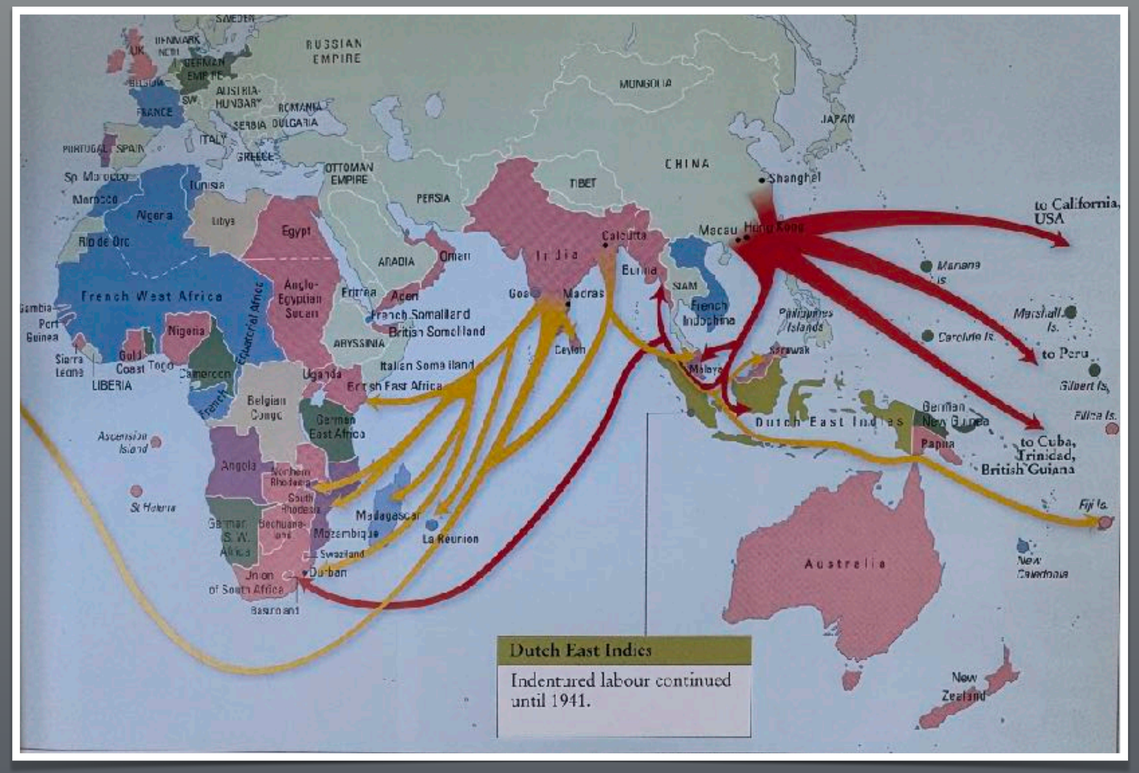
Indentured labourers

Replaced slavery in the colonies

Mainly Asian & Chinese contracted labour from 1830s (estimates 60+million)

Approx 100million Indians were indentured 1830 - 1930

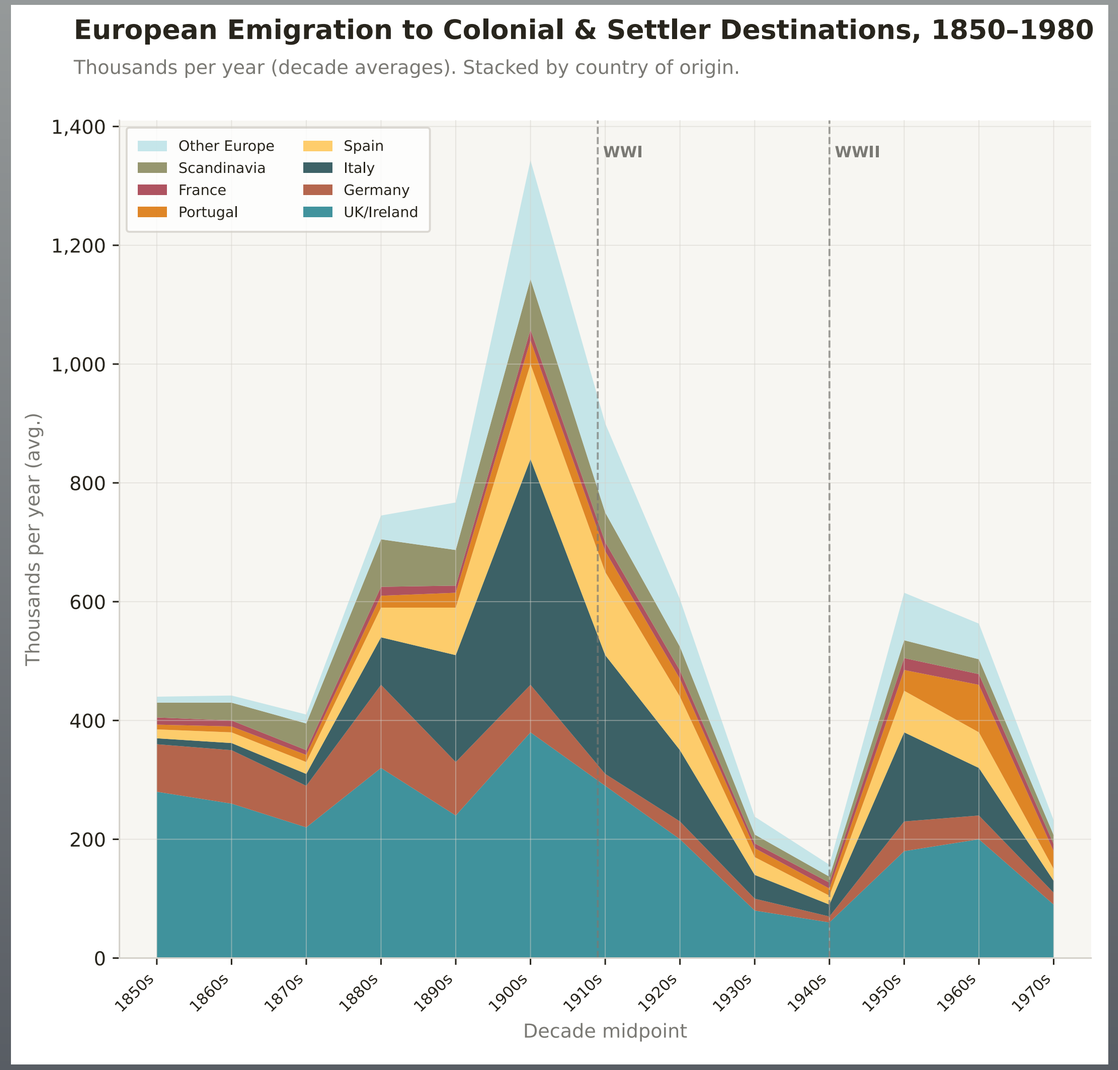
High proportion returned on completion of contract (approx. 75%)

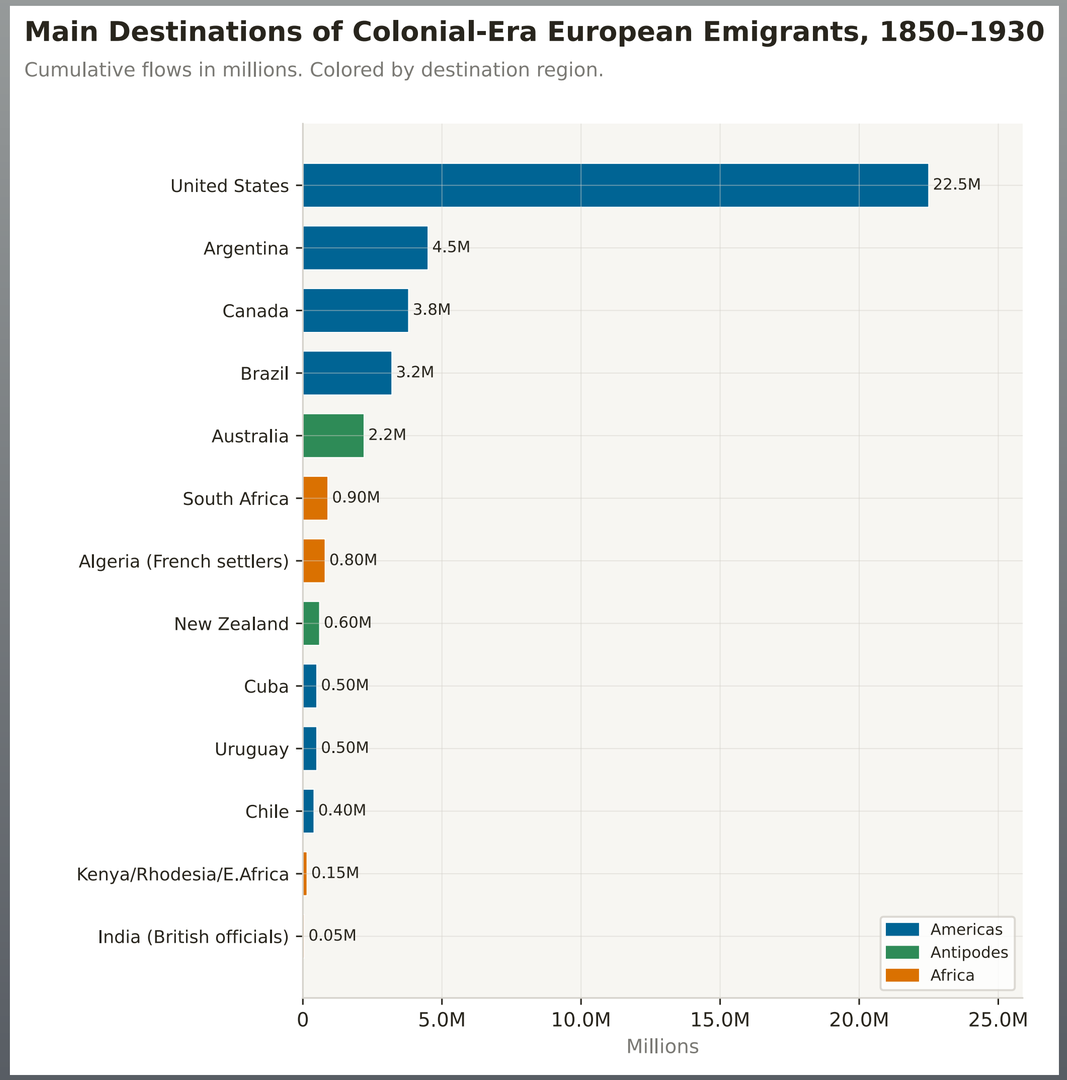


Source: R King (2010)

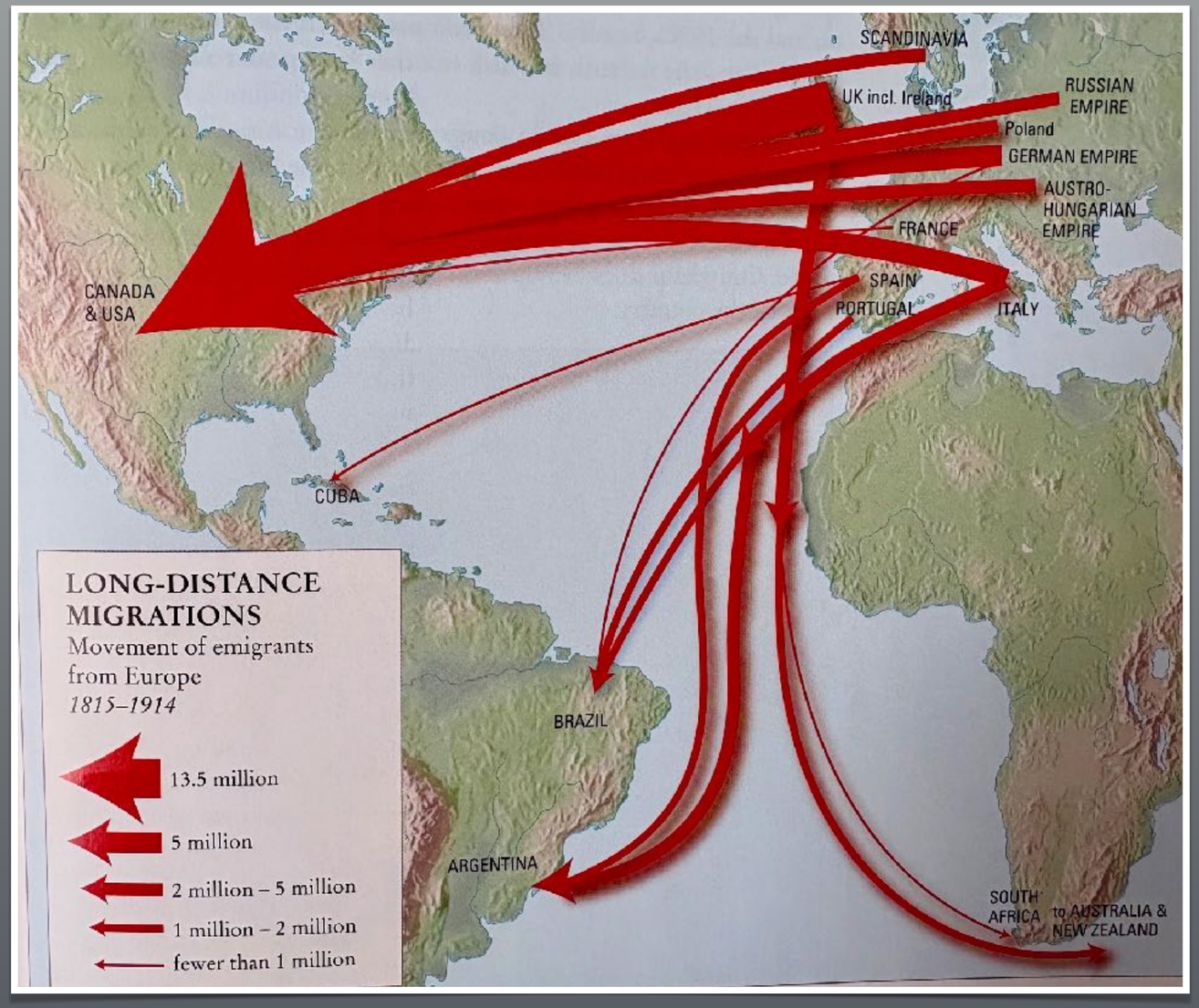
Atlas of Human Migration

European Emigration 1850 - 1930





European Emigration



America principal destination

Main source countries to Americas1815 - 1930:

- Britain & Ireland (12-15million)
- Italy (10 - 12 million)
- Germany (5 - 7 million)
- Russian Empire, Spain & Austro-Hungary (4 - 6 million each)

British & Portuguese colonial migration flows

Not all emigration was permanent

Source: R King (2010) Atlas of Human Migration



Emigration case study: Ireland 1830 - 1930

Background

Poor, rural economy, based on small holdings, increasing population pressure

Consolidation of land holdings, eviction, destitution

The Great Famine (1845-1852) was the social an economic nadir.

Triggering event

No single event, long trajectory of emigration until 1920s

Remittances and positive family emigration experiences encouraged followers

Emigration case study: Ireland 1830 - 1930

Migration

7-8 million emigrated 1830-1930 (approx 2 million emigrants during The Hunger)

4.5 million to US. (81% all immigrants in 1850s were Irish)

UK received apporx 20%, but many were seasonal workers.

Australia & New Zealand actively promoted immigration of domestic servants, miners & settlers

Consequences

Ireland's population fell by 45% from about 6.53 million in 1841 under 2.97 million in 1926.

Population of Republic still below pre-famine levels (5.5 million 2025)

Modern Ireland promotes immigration & encouraged US tech companies

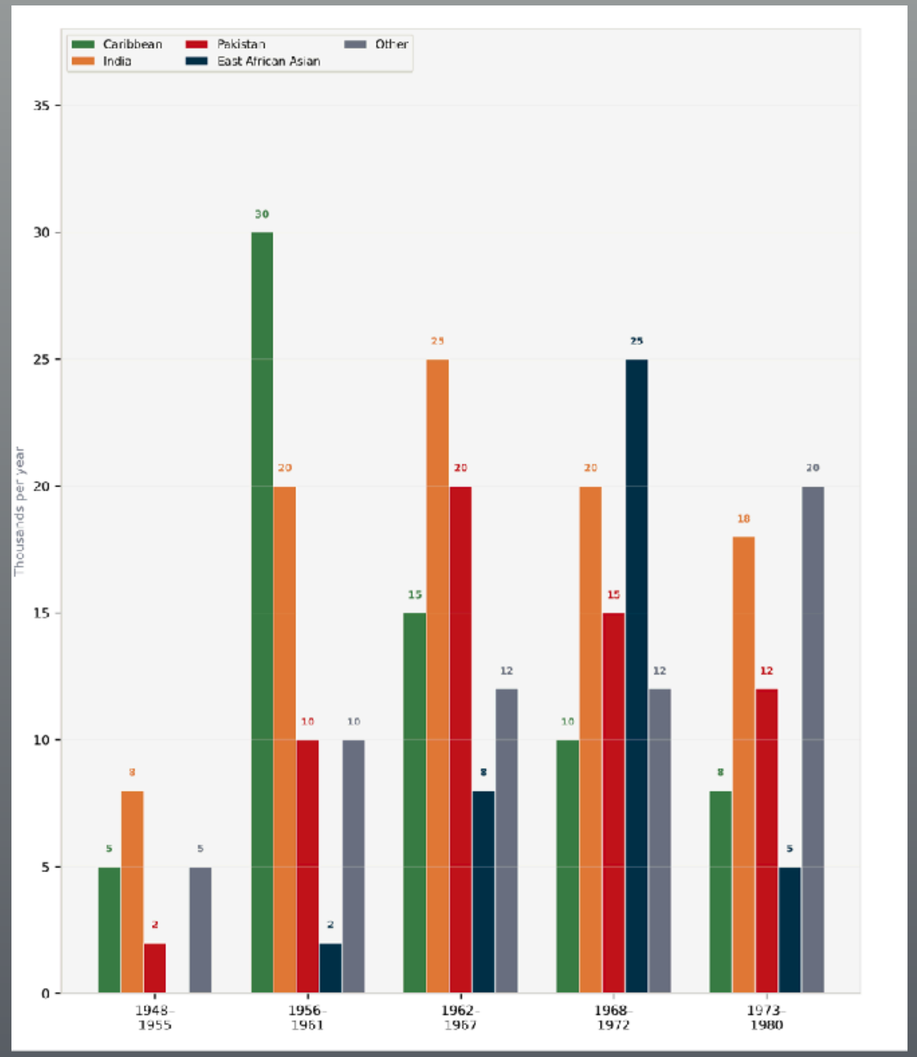
Large Irish communities of east coast of US

Remittances amounted to 3.5% GDP in 1920s

Strong family links in US and colonies, periodic "Gatherings"

Commonwealth Immigration to Britain 1848-1980

1000s/year



Visible spikes:

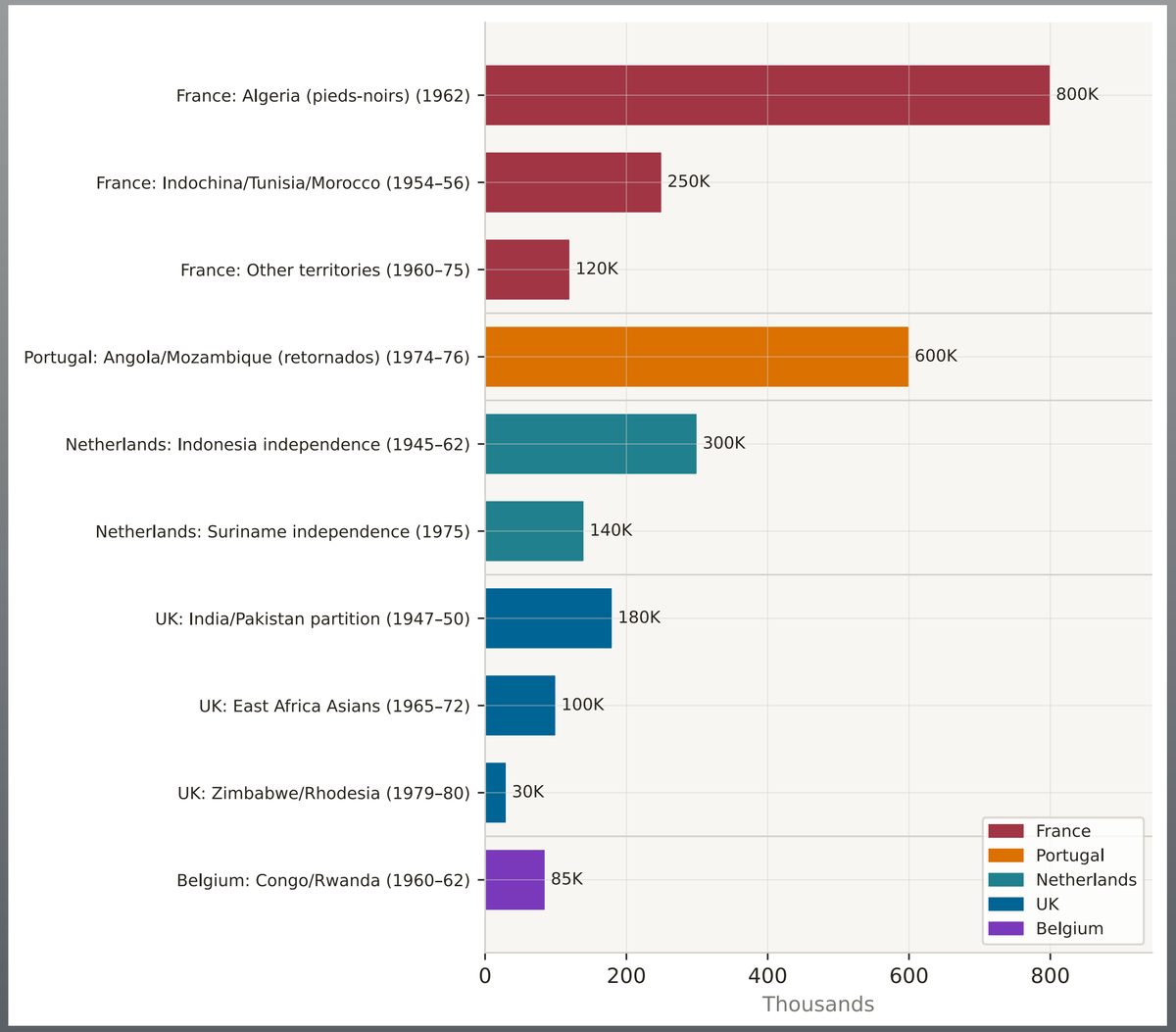
Windrush Generation

Indians & Pakistanis after Partition

East-African Asians

Mix of immigrants is highly variable

Post-colonial return migration to Europe 1945 - 1980



Decolonisation case study 1: Partition of British India 1947

Background

Local political pressure for independence grew after WWII

Two main political factions divided on religious lines



Triggering event

British decision to withdraw and grant independence

Creation of East & West Pakistan out of British Raj

Partition accepted by both political parties as “the least unacceptable” option

Decolonisation case study 1: Partition of British India 1947

Migration

Partition triggered one of largest migrations of C20th (14 -15 million)

Two way migration to and from both West and East* Pakistan

Hindus moving out of West & East Pakistan & Muslims moving in

Muslims migrating to West Pakistan over shorter period (1947- 48)

Migration driven by communal violence, fear, and hope of religious safety

Consequences

Wide spread religious violence on both sides

Mass expulsions, flight, train massacres and convoy attacks

More concentrated on West Pakistan transits

East Pakistan scale smaller but lasted longer, recurrent waves

Hardening of borders & deep communal memory



* Modern day Bangladesh

Decolonisation case study 2: Algeria



Background

France colonised Algeria in 1830s

Algeria defined as part of metropolitan France (3 *department)*

Approx one million people of French descent (aka *pieds-noirs)* living in Algeria in 1962

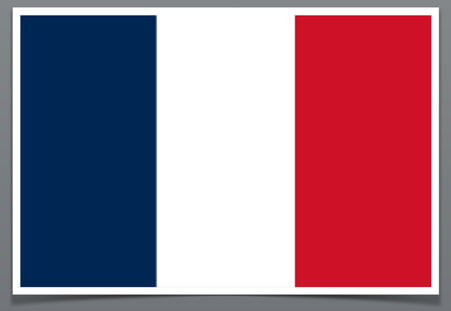
Triggering event

Long, brutal civil war

Algeria granted independence from France in 1962

Majority of people of French descent & their supporters wanted to migrate

Decolonisation case study 2: Algeria



Migration

French government initially discouraged return

Massively under-estimated number of returnees (60-7000)

Reality was approx. 800,000 over several years (2% national population)

Provided emergency reception assistance with housing, employment placement & welfare

Difficult for *Harkis* to migrate or settle in France, limited support on arrival

Consequences

Migrants settled predominantly in Mediterranean provinces, not throughout country

Created local accommodation and employment pressure

Rise of right-wing politicians eg Jean-Marie Le Penn

Limited ecomic prospects. High levels of deprivation & poverty

Decolonisation case study 3: Portugal in Africa

Background

Portuguese had colonies in Africa since C16th

Seven colonies of which Angola & Mozambique are largest

514,000 of Portuguese descent in colonies in 1974



Triggering event

Bloodless coup in Lisbon (25 April 1974) *aka* Carnation Revolution

Colonies were abandoned. Military & administrative staff recalled

No organised handover to local indigenous governments

Decolonisation case study 3: Portugal in Africa

Migration

Approximately half a million ‘r*etornados’* arrived in Portugal in 1974-75

Mainly from two largest colonies, Angola and Mozambique

Portuguese citizens had automaic right to return; some other groups too

Immigrants amounted to 5.4% national population in 1974

Consequences

Government attitude to *retornadoes* was more positive than French

Provided formal reception and reintegration system, mergency reception, accommodation, income support, and employment assistance.

Internal displacement case study: “Dust Bowl” migration in US

Migration

Approx 2.3 million people left “Dust Bowl” states during Great Depression 1930s

Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico

Began around 1935 and was peaked around 1936–38.

All moved west to burgening agricultural industry in California

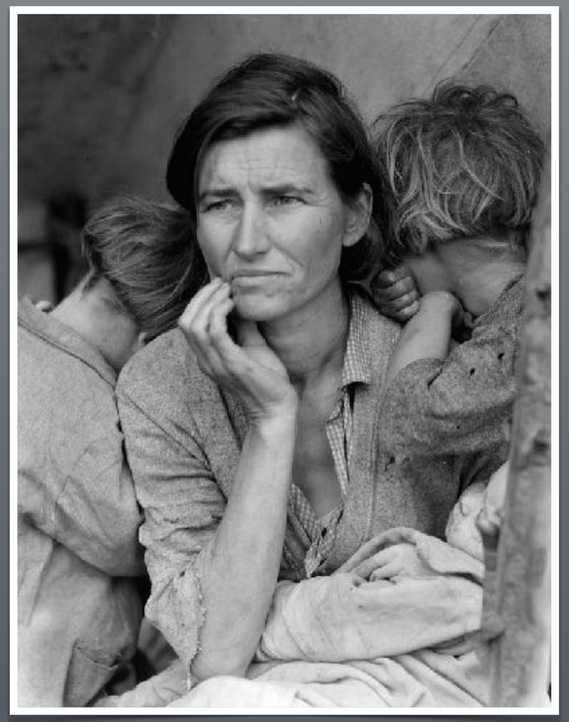
Consequences

Fewer seasonal, precarious jobs available which created local social crisis

Popularisd by Doretha Lange’s photos & John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*

Characterized as first climate change migrants

Reality more complex, environmental crisis, economic depression, agricultural change and westward mobility



Recent Humanitarian Migrations to UK

Jewish children from Germany (1938-40) *Kindertransport*

East Africa Asians (1960-70)

Ugandan Asians (1970s)

Ukraine (2022)



Some public hostility to African Asians,
lead to more restrictive immigration policy

Conclusions from historic migrations

People have always moved, at every scale from local to global.

Most migrations are drivern by a combination of push & pull factors: war, empire, labour demand, poverty, family networks and state policy

Forced and coerced migrations were central to modern history, especially slavery, indenture and imperial expansion.

Decolonisation triggered some of the largest and most sudden movements of the twentieth century.

Outcomes depended not just on who moved, but on how host states received and supported them.

Historical context is relevant to contemporary debate on migration

Next week



The impact of migration

Sources of asylum seekers

Where they are ‘hosted”

Immigrant experience

Effects of emigration