

International Migration: a Disaster Coming Soon... *to a Neighbourhood Near You*

by John Meyer

Constant Motion

Humans have been migrating across the face of the planet since we began to stand upright. Humanoid footprints made 800,000 years ago have been discovered along the coast of England. In the 200,000 years or so when humanoids could be classified as modern humans, close to 80 billion of us have walked and sailed Earth's surface. Driven by a shifting climate and fluctuating resources, we have crossed and re-crossed continents and had populated most corners of the globe almost 400 generations ago.

People migrate only under extreme duress when the circumstances in their native land turn so dire they are willing to abandon their culture, their friends, family and social capital to undertake an often perilous journey to an unknown land. Migration has always been the last desperate choice in the face of intolerable conditions.

For hunter gatherers, this was a normal part of seasonal life. In the era of settlements and agriculture, the drive to migrate stems from the desperation that accompanies social turmoil, war and starvation, along with the fear that conditions will continue to get worse rather than better.

How desperate does one have to be to migrate? Look around the world at conditions in the current war and famine zones or back in time at the 22-year life expectancy of a labourer in early industrial England. That level of desperation is what drove people to risk the 50% annual mortality rate in the early years of the Virginia

colony. In the 21st century, people are willing to pass through a gauntlet of crime and social turmoil and risk getting into flimsy and overloaded watercraft to attempt ocean voyages of hundreds of kilometers.

Grow, Deplete, Collapse, Repeat

Inevitably the root cause of a steep decline in homeland prospects is the decrease in per capita resources necessary to sustain life. Historically, this simply came down to having enough food to eat. In the current era, it includes energy as well. If the supply of these critical commodities becomes too scarce or unaffordable, civil disruption is certain to occur and transborder war becomes likely.

Societal collapse and migration have been an integral part of the human story. The symptoms of societal collapse get the headlines but the cause of there being too many people drawing on too few resources should always be front and centre in our understanding. Whether the population has grown too large or the resource base has been degraded by over-use or climate fluctuation, the result is critical resource scarcity followed by the inevitable reactions of conflict and flight. Governments topple when the basics fall beyond the reach of a sizable portion of the population.

French peasants stormed the Bastille on July 14, 1789, the day when grain prices reached an all-time high in Paris. The enduring chaos of the

Arab Spring followed high rates of both food and fuel inflation.

How long does it take for a population to outstrip its resources? If a small group encountered a virgin territory and grew at a rate of 3% a year, their numbers would double every 25 years. If the original number of migrants was say, 100, in a matter of 250 years they would have grown to 100,000 and in 400 years to 3.2 million. Growth rates generally decline as resource limits are tested and such techniques as later marriage, infanticide and low-level war were

used to maintain populations at a sustainable level. But clearly, it does not take long for humans to degrade their environment and start looking for new lands.

Since 400 BCE, Egypt has experienced six major population declines and 250 to 400 years seems to be the range of time it takes for population cycles to play out. These cycles often pump pulses of migrants out of the homeland and generate a near continuous bloom of diasporas as the effects of climate change, population growth and resource decline collide in different parts of the world.

Syria: A Classic Societal Collapse as History Unfolds before our Eyes

The very well-documented Syrian tragedy provides a template of disintegration played out over the past two decades. Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed details the dynamics of societal collapse in his book *Failing States, Collapsing Systems – Biophysical Triggers of Political Violence*.

Once self-sufficient in wheat, Syria has become increasingly dependent on increasingly more costly

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grain imports which rose by 1 million tons in 2011 – 2012, then rose again by nearly 30% to 4 million tons in 2012 – 2013. The drought ravaged Syria's farmland and led to several crop failures which drove hundreds of thousands of people predominantly from Sunni rural areas into coastal cities traditionally dominated by the Alawite minority.

Ahmed documents the following developments:

- From 1950 to 2010, the Syrian population quadrupled from 5 million to 20 million.
- Oil production peaked in 1996 at 610,000 barrels per day, and had fallen to 385,000 bpd in 2010.

- In 2008, the government stopped fuel subsidies and prices tripled overnight.
- Between 2002 and 2008, water resources dropped by 50%.
- The 2007 to 2010 drought was the worst in modern history and caused a widespread migration of farm families to the cities.
- Severe droughts reduced harvests and pushed hundreds of thousands of ethnic majority Sunnis into the cities occupied by the ruling Alawite.
- Egypt, Syria and Yemen had all experienced peak oil and reduced oil revenues over a decade before the Arab Spring. In addition, they all had high rates of population growth, resulting in their becoming net importers of energy and food.

If events in Syria are too close, the tremendously detailed analysis of the many global crises of the 1600s in Geoffrey Parker's book *Global Crisis* might offer more settled reading. The time, places and names change but the mechanics are chillingly similar.

Migration as the Solution

Although successful migration may solve the immediate problems of the migrants, it doesn't solve the basic problems which caused the migration. And migration rarely benefits the population in the receiving countries – narrow elites excluded.

But did the problems which generated the migration of Europeans to the new worlds go away? On the surface, the answer has to be yes:

- European migration to the New World relieved about 1/3 of the population pressure in Europe.
- The introduction of highly productive crops—potatoes, corn, tomatoes—to Europe supported another 1/3 of the population.
- Shipping grain and foodstuffs from the New World to Europe supported the remaining third of the demand generated by the pressure of population growth.
- In time, although the population of Europe continued to grow, it has now stabilized and the need to push their demographic crisis onto other nations has ceased. (Dependency on external resources is another topic.)

So migration was a great success! But then the other half of the truth must be mentioned.

- Migration was a disaster for the native Amerindians on the receiving end. Between 40 million and 90 million people in the new World – representing 95+% of the population – died between 1500 and 1750 as Europeans spread through the continents.
- Death came from disease, displacement, starvation, slavery and outright genocide.
- It should be noted that 25% of Europeans were

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morally opposed to the colonizing of the New World as they felt they had no right to invade these “new” yet heavily populated lands.

Can migration solve any of the problems roiling world affairs today as it did for Europeans 400 years ago?

Good for a Few, Bad for the Planet

The sustainable limits of the im-

mense environmental and resource assets of the New World, which once seemed inexhaustible (Canada was “a treasure trove of infinite natural resources”) are rapidly receding in the rearview mirror. Although migration does indeed represent salvation for many migrants, it exacerbates existing problems in the receiving nations and, on a planetary basis, is the literal equivalent of throwing gasoline on the fire of environmental decline.

From climate change to species extinction to ecosystem decline, Earth is suffering severe human-induced stress. As the populations of developing countries expand and their resource bases decline, pressure to migrate from chaos to stability and from shortages to (for now) relative abundance is increasing.

People migrate from:

- low consumption societies to higher consumption societies,
- low greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to high GHG emissions,
- small environmental footprint countries to large footprint countries.

The GHG multiplier for the Canadian immigrant stream is 4.2. That is to say, the emissions rate of newcomers in Canada is on average 4.2 times what it was in their country of origin.

Those are the mechanics of migration but then there is the scale. Africa's population is forecast to quadruple to 4 billion this century, adding 3 billion people to a continent already awash in troubled regions and flows of the uprooted. The Middle East still posts very high birth rates, despite increasing droughts and loss of farmland. Scientists around the world predict that the climate is likely to become progressively less favourable.

The scale of migration is now unprecedented and is not a one-time event but a growing trend.

The Finger of Blame

Affixing blame constitutes a huge portion of our current public policy conversations and it has relegated fact and reason to distant also-rans in media coverage. But in terms of migration and planetary decline, there is indeed plenty of blame to point out and here is some of it:

- Many third world nations are not moving aggressively enough to stabilize or reduce their populations.
- There is aspiration in most less developed nations to consume at the same level as the most developed nations.
- The most developed nations have done little to reduce their consumption and most have simple growth and higher consumption as their overarching economic mandate.
- A handful of countries like Canada are still actually promoting population growth.
- The most developed nations have gone to great lengths to mould less developed nations into their own pattern of consumption and market growth.
- The most developed nations have exploited the resource base of the less developed nations for their own exclusive benefit.

The abundance of well-founded blame will assure there will be vociferous opposition to any aggressive and

effective policy that both reduces consumption and stabilizes population.

Failure to recognize the root causes of the migration crisis has resulted in completely counter-productive reactions as much of the resulting conflict is blamed on the symptom of religious fanaticism. Extremism in many forms is a given during social decline and declaring war on it is like invading the wrong country to eliminate a threat that doesn't exist. Witness the invasion of Iraq and the regime change wars the west has launched or triggered.

Seeing problems simply as adversarial guarantees endless conflict. There is a progression in the descent into chaos:

- Resource shortfalls
- The young sinking below their parents' standard of living into poverty
- Poor prospects
- Marginalized
- Activist
- Desperate/hopeless/angry
- Radical
- Terrorist/freedom fighter.

What does stability look like? It is unlikely that a population-stable nation, in which each family has 100 hectares of fertile land and 100 hectares of hardwood bush, would ever be a source of migration or aggressive military expansion. It would lack the key ingredients of large numbers of desperate people plus angry and hopeless young men concentrated in urban areas necessary for social upheaval and support of extremist leaders.

The concept of "a nation of immigrants" has no relevance on a planet whose every nation for the past 50,000 years has been created by migration.

Both Halves of the Truth are Needed for a Whole

Migration is glorified in much of the Western press as having built a New World and offering the way to a better life for millions of suffering people willing to take risks and work hard. There is truth in that but it is a half-truth. Little is said of the millions of Amerindians who perished in the first two centuries of the colonization.

The concept of “a nation of immigrants” has no relevance on a planet whose every nation for the past 50,000 years has been created by migration. Newly settled lands very rapidly mature to self-sufficient ones whose environmental limits have been reached and for whom migration is now a threat rather than a source of renewal.

The world has essentially been “full” for the past 10,000 years and any migration was probably seen by the destination regions’ occupants as invasion.

These are some of the impacts of migration on the receiving nation in the modern era:

Environmental

- Loss of farmland
- Increased GHG emissions
- Increased stress on natural systems

Economic

- Suppression of wage rates
- Low productivity
- Lower resource availability per capita
- Higher per capita energy and resource costs
- Congestion

Fiscal

- Lower tax revenue
- Higher social services costs
- Higher infrastructure costs
- Structural deficits

Social

- Increased inequality
- Increased debt
- Increased housing costs
- Lower quality jobs
- Increased social instability

In Canada’s case a few of the numbers are:

- Immigration constitutes 80% of Canadian population growth and its impacts are broad and large.
- Some 95,000 hectares of farmland are lost annually – 80% due to immigration.
- Mass immigration has contributed to almost double the increase in carbon emissions of the oil sands over the period 1990 to 2012 and is the largest driver of our emissions growth of 25% over our Kyoto target.
- The proportion of minimum wage jobs increased by a factor of five in Ontario from 1997 to 2014.
- Canada had the second lowest level of inequality in the world in the early 1960s but had fallen to a mid-20s ranking by 2016.
- Immigrants are now tax negative to the tune of \$30 billion annually (i.e., they cost the government \$30 billion more in services than they pay in taxes).
- In the past 40 years, personal debt has quintupled in constant dollars.
- There have been huge increases in housing costs.
- In large urban areas, immigration drives 100% of the demand for additional housing units as there is a net outflow of resident Canadians.
- Nationwide, immigration constitutes 80% of the demand for additional housing units.

Famine is a basic driving factor in migration and reacting to it by paving over the best farmland in the world is lunacy.

Promoting the Morality of Migration for Fun and Profit

Support for migration in Canada is held out by the interests who profit from it as being the moral high ground.

- The rich helping the poor.
- The advantaged lifting up the disadvantaged.
- The fairness of a nation founded by immigrants continuing to accept immigrants.

In no case are these mantras ultimately true. In

Canada's case specifically, there is no moral basis for claiming that Canada is saving the world through our policy of mass immigration or that we are a nation of immigrants. The current structure of Canada was created by initial pulses of European colonists. These groups of colonists in, to them, virgin lands experienced a very high birth rate and quickly populated the best lands. In fact, so high was our birth rate, that, for the most of the 1800s and the first half of the 1900s, Canada was a net exporter of people, a country of emigration.

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For instance, Quebec was initially settled by 15,000 French colonists of whom 5,000 returned to France after several years. Birth rates in Quebec were very high and the population grew to 5 million by 1960. In addition, Quebec émigrés flowed into New England and down the Mississippi.

It was only during an exceptional period around 1910 when a surge of desperate immigrants from Eastern Europe arrived that Canada was a net people importer. These desperate Europeans were used to settle areas of the prairies to which Canadians could not be induced to move. So harsh were conditions there that the United States, Australia and South Africa were preferable to native-born Canadians. The oil era, which began 10 year later, would have allowed Canadians to more heavily populate the prairies, in effect replacing the need for an immigrant stream.

In the period of nation-building, immigration was used for strategic objectives such as populating the prairies to prevent American expansion. For the past 50 years, nation-building has been abandoned and immigration is now used to build the size of the commercial market, rather than improve the welfare of Canadians or

the health of the nation. Migration is critical to the wealth accumulation of the very narrow interest of developers, debt mongers, media corporations and cheap labour employers, but it has never been the driving force behind this country's progress. We've traded the welfare of society and the health of the nation for a growing commercial marketplace.

In short, Canada is a nation founded by several pulses of colonists but it did not depend on a continuous stream of immigrants for its

development. Canada was built by successive and ever larger generations of the native born.

Cry into the Camera and Stuff the Cash into Your Pocket

In terms of genuinely saving the world, Canada's rate of foreign aid to GDP is about one-fifth that of Sweden and has actually dropped by 4% under the Liberal government to \$5 billion in 2016. Why this very weak performance despite the rhetoric? The most powerful interests in Canada do not profit from foreign aid, they profit from growth in the domestic commercial economy and asset inflation.

Many people feel morally compelled to act in the face of human suffering. Currently our policies would seem to be based on compassion but if the problems are to be dealt with, policies must be based on effectively dealing with the causes. Faux progressives pushing a short-sighted and ultimately disastrous course of mass migration are being used to further the interests of ultra-right wing groups who profit from simple growth rather than real wealth creation or social progress.

The Futility of Migration

“Growth will be pursued until all environmental systems have recovered.” Or “The beatings will continue until morale improves.”

Roy Beck’s YouTube video, “Immigration, World Poverty and Gumballs” brilliantly lays out the numbers to show how completely futile the encouragement of mass migration is. It is easily found online.

As you watch the video (which I hope you do), keep in mind that Canada’s rate of immigration is roughly three times that of the USA.

Not only can the USA and Canada make no dent in the world’s population problems, neither can all of the “developed” world put together. In fact, aside from possibly Russia and Canada, all of the receiving nations are net resource

negative, that is, they are net importers of most of their critical food, energy and raw materials. The situation will become even more acute once the move to renewable energy begins in earnest.

No country has a strategy that will accommodate current levels, never mind projected levels of migration, while successfully reducing their resource footprint and GHG emissions.

Taking the example of futility to the extreme, if by 2100, three billion Africans, 700 million Indians and 300 million people from the Middle East moved to Canada and other western nations, the environmental footprint of humanity would vastly increase. At the current rate of consumption, this would increase the pressure on Earth’s biosystems by a factor of 4 or 5 times. In other words, we would need 6 to 8 planet Earths to support ourselves instead of *only* needing 1.6 Earths now.

Looking Past Accommodating the Symptoms to Treating the Disease

Just as intense international pressure has been brought to bear against North Korea to halt its nuclear weapons program, similar pressure has to be put on nations with rapidly growing populations and ever increasing consumption. A nation with an endlessly growing population or lust for higher consumption is just another war waiting to happen. A nation consuming above its sustainable limit must be seen to be as much of a threat as a nuclear weapons development program.

The framework to address the issue is already there both in the Paris Climate Treaty and The

1994 United Nations International Conference on Population and Development which stated:

...the formulation and implementation of population policies is the

responsibility of each country and should take into account the economic, social, and environmental diversity of conditions in each country...

The solution to migration lies not in accommodating it but eliminating the reasons for it. It is necessary to address the root causes of migration by drastically reducing consumption levels in more developed countries via very strong conservation measures and lifestyle changes and by providing the high population growth nations with the tools they need to rapidly stabilize their populations. This can well be seen as painful and extremely politically difficult but the alternatives are vastly more destructive. Migration, if allowed to continue and grow, will assure the disintegration of social stability for an increasing number of countries.

So far, the international community spends far more money on accommodating migrants than on solving the problems which create the migrant stream. Whether this is due to the hubris of as-

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suming we can accommodate any problem, the unshakable faith that growth will cure all ills, or the belief that technology will ride over the hill in the nick of time, humanity must see past the symptoms to the causes.

International Pain for Global Gain

Virtually every country on the planet is in environmental decline. People in severely degraded regions may look at other nations as being oases of natural resources but, in reality, these nations are merely in a less advanced stage of decline than their own. Adding more people will only push receiving nations further down the slope more rapidly.

The history of humanity is composed of slash and burn development accompanied by rapid population growth, followed by collapse of the resource base and the society based on it. Population decline and migration become inevitable. We have to break this pattern and become proactive in both recognizing and dealing with the basic drivers of decline and consequent migration.

Growth and migration must become dirty words. Conservation and stabilization must

become the new mantras of social and environmental progressives. The solutions will involve everyone just as the consequences of failure eventually will.

In order to save themselves from the chaos of growing and endless migration, developed countries are going to have to make it their business to establish better living conditions and sustainability in the poorest areas of the world that are the least stable and the least sustainable. An international initiative to apply the principles of the Paris Climate Accord to national and global sustainability is critical to avoid the worst consequences of unhinged growth and social decline.

It is time to close our welcoming arms and instead offer a helping hand where it will do the most good.

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