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## Global Migration: The Next Phase

### Contribution to GTI Forum [The Population Debate Revisited](#)

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I greatly appreciate GTI's decision to organize a debate on the issue of world population and its relationship to the environment. I would like to emphasize a central issue that is directly linked to the question of world population: the question of migration. It seems to me that we are in a period of bifurcation in the long history of migrations.

The History of Migrations is inseparable from the History of Humanity. This history began in Africa with the migrations of Neanderthals and Homo Sapiens. Migrants are not intruders; they are part of the history of each society. Migrations mark the imagination of our world: let us quote, among others, nomadism, sedentarization with the mastery of agriculture, exile, colonizations, diasporas, and rural exodus.

Migration, along with industrialization and urbanization, is a key issue in population discourse. The fear of a demographic explosion has marked the last fifty years, and the Club of Rome report in 1970 heightened awareness of ecological limits.

In the history of capitalism, the deep traces of slavery and colonization still remain. Today, with capitalist globalization in its neoliberal phase, three important forms of migration can be defined. Economic migrations characterized by the immense differences of wealth between countries are a byproduct of imperialism and neo-colonialism. As Alfred Sauvy expressed it very well in 1950, "if the richness is in the North and the people are in the South, the people will go where the richness is and you will be unable to do anything to stop them."<sup>1</sup> Political migrations are the result of wars and conflicts and result in the displacement of refugees. The environmental migrations that are beginning will upset the balance of the world population.

We are living in a period of profound rupture marked by a succession of crises. The financial crisis that began with the subprime lending crisis in 2008 marked the beginning of the exhaustion of neoliberalism. Austerity policies, backed by authoritarianism, have undermined freedoms without providing economic stability. The ideologies of identity and security respond to the emergence of social movements embracing new radicalisms—whether feminism; anti-racism and revolts against discrimination; or support for the first peoples, migrants, and diasporas. The awareness of the ecological crisis is deepening, combined with the crisis of the pandemic. Kyle Harper reminds us that the fall of the Roman Empire was facilitated by a pandemic, a rabies outbreak, and the climate (an episode of glaciation).<sup>2</sup> This fusion of public health and environmental crisis accompanies crises of civilization.

In the field of migration, there have been considerable ruptures. Take, for example, the contradiction between nomads and sedentary people that has accompanied human history since the invention of agriculture in Mesopotamia. Today we are living through the transition of agricultural populations in practically all countries from the majority of the population to around 5% of the total population. This development will change the situation and the very image of migrants.

The same applies to the notion of borders. In the long history of migration, an important change took place between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the transition from the empire-state to the nation-state. Nation-states have not always existed and are not an eternal form. National identity is a recent invention. As Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau so well put it, each individual has multiple identities; it is reductive and wrong to want to reduce them to a single identity, that of the nation.<sup>3</sup> Freedom of movement and citizenship of residence are among the emerging rights that will be strengthened in the future.

Migrants are already actors in the transformation of societies and the world. The financial flows of migrants and diasporas to their countries of origin represented \$630 billion in 2021, while public “aid” reached a ceiling of \$179 billion.

Let us accept the hypothesis of two Canadian demographers, Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson, who analyze the shock of global demographic decline in their book *The Empty Planet*.<sup>4</sup> They

question the United Nations's predictions that the world population will rise from 7 to 11 billion by the end of the century before stabilizing. They estimate that the peak will be 9 billion between 2040 and 2060. And that the population will be decreasing in about thirty countries in 2050 (compared to about twenty today). Fertility rates are not astronomical in developing countries. Many are at or below replacement level. The reason for this is women's emancipation, which explains why the reproduction rate is stabilizing at 1.7 children per woman. Social aging is becoming a key issue. The countries that would fare best are those that, like Canada with 20% of its population born outside the country, would be culturally inclusive of diversity and migrants.

## Endnotes

1. Alfred Sauvy, *Théorie générale de la population* (Paris: University Press of France, 1952).
2. Kyle Harper, *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).
3. Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau, *L'introuvable beauté du monde* (Paris: Galaade, 2009).
4. Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson, *Empty Planet: The Shock of Global Population Decline* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2019).

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## About the Author



Gustave Massiah is an engineer, economist, and former professor at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris la Villette. He was a founding member of CEDETIM (Centre d'études et d'initiatives de solidarité internationale), a global solidarity organization, and Secretary General of the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples. He has been a prominent voice in the alter-globalization movement, serving as the president of CRID (Centre de recherche et d'information sur le développement) from 2000 to 2008 and vice president of ATTAC from 2001 to 2006. He is a founding member of the IPAM network (Initiatives for Another World) and is on the International Council of the World Social Forum. In 2011, he published *Une stratégie altermondialiste*.

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