

CHAPTER 1

Putting Migration into History

The young men of Pradelles knew from an early age that they would leave home. The thin soil and long winters in their village—nestled high on the south slope of France’s central highlands—could not support even its 220 souls year-round. After planting, many of the men from about age 16 upwards traveled to the Mediterranean plain to labor in the vineyards and fields while the women and elders of the village took on their labors. When upland harvests began, the men returned with a gold piece or two toward their family’s tax debts, their sisters’ dowries, or a plot of land. They knew about the dangers of the road—especially terrifying when the village men were in possession of their pay or had to travel alone. One of the older migrants from Pradelles had perished by the road from hunger and exposure on his way home. A more fortunate single man had come into property with richer soil and a better climate when he married the daughter of a lowlands peasant who had no sons. So it was with mixed emotions that the families of Pradelles sent their men on this grueling annual adventure.¹

The men of Pradelles do not fit a common understanding of the eighteenth-century peasant life, because they left home. Yet leaving home was as much a part of life in this village as were the fields of home. Some peasants in this region expected to quit their area for a season in the 1730s, others were certain to leave home for good. A surprisingly large proportion left the village of their birth. Our image of a sedentary Europe, then, is seriously flawed. People were on the move; and where and why they traveled tells us a good bit about the past and about the pressures and processes that produced the world with which we are familiar. Human movement is connected to every level of life in western Europe—from the intimacy of family decisions about how cash will be earned to the global scale, where it reflects Europe’s place in the world economy. Migration, in short, connects the changes in European history with the lives of men and women in the past.

Our understanding of history alters dramatically with the realization that its actors were not sedentary. Village life is more lively when we realize that the rural community was constantly renewed by new people from the region who bought land, rented farms, married, and hired on as farmhands. Simultaneously, villagers of all ages, but especially young men and women, were likely to depart for a season or for a lifetime. Our view of the building and growth of the cities of Europe and of the rise of the modern state takes on a new cast when we realize that country folk and people from small towns built the expanding cities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some went home when their job was completed, but others returned annually for more work in the construction trades, and still others took up long-term residence in the city. As the modern state grew, bureaucracy expanded, employing great numbers of office workers, postal clerks, schoolteachers, railroad workers, and municipal laborers. In the nineteenth century, these people rarely followed in the footsteps of their parents; rather, the sons and daughters of rural and small-town workers sought jobs that were more secure than those of their parents. This view is neither as Whiggish nor as benign as it may seem, for not everyone who left home was a success. Moreover, poverty, insecurity, and misfortune themselves sent people on the road. Stability was a privilege.

Three centuries ago, western Europe was a sparsely populated rural society in which the vast majority of men and women inhabited small villages and hamlets. In order to produce sufficient food, most folk had to be engaged in agricultural production of one kind or another. The distribution of people over the landscape has changed fundamentally since the seventeenth century; namely, Europe is now more heavily populated and its people are spaced less evenly than in early modern times. The population is concentrated in large cities and in conurbations such as the Paris region, greater London, and the urban centers that run from the Ruhr through the Netherlands. A relatively small fraction of the people of Europe currently provides food for the rest.

This book analyzes the migrations of western Europeans during these three centuries of change; it does so in terms of four periods that fit in a general way with economic change. The first of these extends from c. 1650 to c. 1750, which I will call the “preindustrial” period; this falls between the devastations of the Thirty Years’ War in Germany and the beginning of the intense population increase and proliferation of rural industry that was to mark the eighteenth century. Peasant

ownership was an important pattern of landholding, population growth was generally insignificant, most rural production was for local consumption, and there was relatively little capital outside the great cities. Yet movement was a normal part of rural routines as young people sought work in agriculture, harvest teams moved across the countryside, and people moved to marry or acquire land; cities could not maintain their numbers without the intrepid newcomers who streamed through their gates.

To describe the migration itineraries in this period, I focus especially on the rural English midlands, Artois in northern France, Tuscany, and parishes just south of Stockholm. I draw on the German cities of western and central Europe, London, and Amsterdam and sketch the migration systems linking German Westphalia to the western Netherlands. (See [Map 1:1.](#))



[Map 1:1 Regions and Cities Emphasized in Text](#)

The intensification of rural industrial production and the increase in population introduce the second period, c. 1750 to c. 1815. Rural industry is the focus of this period, concentrating in the eighteenth century. A prolonged population increase particularly characterized regions where rural industry employed adult males and their families. Dependence on wage work and population expansion together increased the proportion of landless workers in the countryside, so the rural proletariat grew more than the peasantry. The countryside was alive with movement as men and women found work in booming industrial villages and small towns that could retain and support increased numbers; however, those countrysides that lacked manufacturing simply could not support so many villagers, so they put many people on the road. As a result, workers in seasonal and temporary migration systems, like the men of Pradelles, expanded their numbers.²

The analysis of this period's migration routines emphasizes rural industrial villages in Normandy, the English midlands,

today's Belgium, and the Vienna highlands. Bordeaux in southwestern France and the industrial towns of Norman Rouen and Belgian Verviers provide the focus for urban areas. In addition, I portray a migration system that connected the men of the French highlands with the realm of Spain.

The third age is the premier age of urbanization, characterized by new and larger cities and coinciding with the period c. 1815 to c. 1914, roughly the nineteenth century. Migration shifted with the growth of machine production that centralized industry and the accompanying increase in commerce and urban services. Although the machine age has drawn attention to the city where capital and the demand for labor concentrated, patterns of rural production are a key to the shift in nineteenth-century migration patterns. Rural areas deindustrialized, collapsing in the face of competition from less expensive machine-produced goods. At the same time, the continuing population boom and expansion of capitalist agriculture created a larger rural proletariat and made agricultural work more seasonal with short-term tasks.³ This combination was devastating to rural livelihoods. These changes in nineteenth-century demography and labor demands created an urbanized labor force and the urban world that is familiar to us today. However, the transition from rural population growth and economic decline on one hand to increased urban labor demands on the other was not a smooth one. Insecurity kept people on the road and many European workers vacillated between countryside and city. In addition, crises at home brought Europeans into the global labor market in greater numbers than in any time in history. Portuguese, Scandinavians, British, Italians, Poles, and Germans, especially, found work in North and South America.⁴

When describing the migration changes in this period, I focus especially on the deindustrializing countrysides of Normandy and Languedoc as well as the prosperous agrarian areas of Prussia and northern France. I emphasize the growing cities of French Roubaix, German Duisburg, and Cologne. In addition, I single out the links between Polish territories in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and eastern Prussia and western Germany and the United States.

The fourth period in migration patterns began when the outbreak of World War I abruptly stopped international migrations. The final period, c. 1914 to the present, began with a "thirty years' war" that depressed human movements, a period of economic and demographic stagnation during which state policy discouraged migration across national borders. With the war of 1914, countries had little desire for men of other nations on their soil and needed their own citizens at hand to serve as soldiers. Ten years later, migration from Europe to the western hemisphere was severely restricted as the United States adopted restrictive migration quotas. On the other hand, wars and forced displacements caused more movement on the Continent between 1919 and 1949 in absolute numbers than any other time in history.

In the postwar age, a string of conurbations came to dominate the cities in western Europe and urbanism pervaded the Continent. The countryside became less agricultural and more the site of leisure activities than before; like many cities, it now emphasized its service and touristic functions at the expense of its productive ones. Demographic stagnation and economic expansion made the Continent hungry for workers in the boom years of the 1960s and 1970s. There was still an impulse to leave a fast-growing rural population for work in the European city, but the new urbanites were not from the European countryside, where birthrates are low, but from the less developed areas of the Mediterranean basin and from former European colonies. The history of migration in Europe will help explain the nature of recent migration between places like Turkey and Germany, or Portugal and France; it will also clarify differences between past experience and the present.

In describing the international migrations of the twentieth century, I emphasize the movement of foreign nationals into France and Germany. In the case of France, first Belgians and Italians, then Portuguese and North Africans are important. In the case of Germany, first the Poles, then wartime-forced laborers, and then postwar Turks and Eastern Europeans are emphasized.

This plethora of migrations raises a series of questions about the relocation of people throughout history. Who was likely to move? When people moved in past centuries, where did they go? Why did they move? What impact did their movements have on society? How has the frequency, range, and permanence of movement been altered over the years? Aside from the *patterns* of movement, what can we know about the *process* of movement in the past? How did people decide to leave home and where to go? What bearing did their familial and social relationships have on migrations?

In the past decade, it has become clear that people have long moved in a variety of ways. Harvest workers have gathered crops at the culmination of the agricultural cycle; others have moved to countryside or city to earn cash for a period of a few years. Some rural people have always moved to the city, just as city dwellers have moved to other urban areas. Europeans long have departed their continent for other parts of the globe and more recently have attracted African and Asian neighbors. In short, there have always existed seasonal, temporary, rural-rural, rural-urban, and urban-urban migration, alongside emigration from and immigration to Europe. Migrations are not a signal of the modern age but rather "continuous phenomena which are embedded in the social and economic framework of human organization," and as a consequence, they are part and parcel of the history of Europe.⁵ But the movement of people has varied extensively over the centuries, and the balance among kinds of migration has changed over time. This book seeks to explain why European migrations have changed, and how.

Change in European migration patterns has been both geographically uneven and temporally discontinuous. The large-scale changes in rural work, land ownership, and urbanization, for example, affected Britain and the low countries long before they came to the eastern territories of Germany or central France. Moreover, great port cities and their hinterland were in the forefront of the economic and social changes that reshaped migration itineraries. The differences in development that moved from west to east and distinguished port city from provincial capital produced a variety of

migration patterns at any given time. Temporally, continuity and change in migration patterns interplayed to produce changes in mobility patterns, on one hand, simultaneous with enduring migration traditions, on the other. As a consequence, alongside new patterns of movement to new destinations, there existed familiar, long-standing migration itineraries.

EXPLAINING MIGRATION PATTERNS

To investigate such a sweeping issue as migration over a period of three centuries requires analysis at several levels, for only a multilayered perspective can get at the economic, demographic, and social aspects of change in human mobility. In general, I view the evolution of migration in terms of the fundamental structures of European economic life: landholding, employment, demographic patterns, and the deployment of capital. I also consider individual traits that affected the likelihood of moving, such as life cycle, class, and gender. Because mobility has significant social aspects, the context of family, village, and migration system is important as well. On the most general level, European mobility exists in a world-system in which Europe exploited human and natural resources beginning in the sixteenth century, acted as an exporter of labor to a world labor market in the nineteenth century, and then imported labor in the twentieth century.

The global and local levels of this study are complementary. Within large-scale economic frameworks that circumscribed the limits of the possible, European men and women chose to move, or not to move, in the context of their own village, family, and belief systems. If we focus on the macroeconomic level alone, we lose the actors who are essential to this drama, dismissing their agendas and denying the factor of human agency. If we focus on the personal alone, we miss the opportunity to connect migration with historical change. But when we see both the broader economy and the personal context of migration, our understanding of the process is profoundly enhanced.

In this volume, I argue that changes in migration patterns since the seventeenth century originate in large-scale changes in landholding patterns, employment demands, demographic patterns, and the location of capital. In a model of historical change, these structural variables are the scaffolding of migration patterns. I begin with the countryside, where the vast majority of Europeans resided in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Among the structural factors that immediately affected the ability of rural people to survive was land ownership.

Land ownership bound free peasants to their property. Ironically, the ownership of land periodically expelled some rural people (like the peasants of Pradelles) to earn cash to buy more parcels of land and, increasingly, to pay taxes on their possessions. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many peasants became rural proletarians by losing their landholdings. For some this was a quick transition brought on by selling out to a large landowner and renting a cottage; for others, becoming a proletarian was a long and gradual loss of acreage. By either route, those who became proletarians lost an essential tie with the land; these men and women were those most likely to be part of the mobile masses of modern Europe.⁶ Proletarian status is often associated with urban, industrial settings, but it is also a key to the history of rural life and mobility. As Charles Tilly observed, “over the whole history of capitalism, indeed, agriculture and rural industry have provided the main sites for proletarianization.”⁷

The amount and type of work available in the countryside also shaped people’s ability to support themselves at home. In the seventeenth century, rural areas largely produced their own clothing and tools; the production of these goods supported village artisans and kept villagers spinning, weaving, carving wooden shoes, and producing tools in winter months. Then from the close of this century and increasingly through the next, rural industry expanded dramatically; in some regions production for distant markets far outstripped production of goods to meet local needs. Consequently, many more rural folk could earn cash at home than before. Where rural industry blossomed, a greater population—an increasingly proletarian one—could be supported at home. However, the market for rural handcrafted products collapsed when massive factory production arose in the nineteenth century; its demise foreclosed the livelihoods of many rural people.

Third, rural population patterns determined just how crowded the countryside was. In the seventeenth century, the European marriage pattern held: marriage was late and far from universal, limiting fertility.⁸ High mortality, exacerbated by periodic crises of disease and famine, helped to create a sparsely populated continent. But in the eighteenth century, the disappearance of the Black Plague and reduction in famines lessened mortality. In addition, as rural industry expanded in the countryside, villages swelled with in-migrants in some regions; large families increased because people were more likely to marry and to do so at a younger age, and fewer children died. In this way, rural population patterns acted in concert with rural employment to create a full countryside by 1850.

Rural landholding patterns, employment, and demographic trends all reflect the distribution of capital. In the seventeenth century, European capital was relatively scarce and diffused, outside of the important world trade centers such as Amsterdam and London. With the growth of rural industry, capital flowed to the European countryside where it was distributed in the form of raw materials and paid to village workers, penny by penny. With the rise of trade and factory production between 1790 and 1940, European capital shifted from a dispersed and agriculturally based mode to a concentrated and urban pattern. It is the shift and focus of capital that had the power, in the end, to arrest the vacillation of rural people between agriculture and urban work, pulling them into full-time, year-round jobs in mines, mills, offices, and workshops.

What role do cities play in this story? On the face of it, the city is the long-term gainer, ultimately housing the lion’s

share of the European population. The starring role of urban areas is based on their growing demand for labor. They became increasingly the locus of innovation for capital—the site of commercial undertakings, node for rural production, site of burgeoning textile mills, then locus of the iron and steel mills that dominated heavy industry by the late nineteenth century. Capital cities like London, Amsterdam, and Paris long required the bureaucrats, functionaries, and services that came to be needed only in the nineteenth century in more remote administrative locations.

Ironically, the role of migration in city growth declined by the time of the triumph of urbanization in the twentieth century. In the early modern period, cities had very high death rates and too few births; as a consequence, only by attracting migrants could cities grow. Crowds of young people who came to the city maintained urban populations by their sheer numbers—because many young men and women neither married nor bore children, but departed the city or died without having done so. Although many newcomers married and bore children in the city, this was not the rule.⁹ But gradually, cities became healthier places, less dependent on newcomers to maintain or increase their populations. As sanitary water and sewage systems were installed in the later nineteenth century, urban areas became healthy even for infants and children.

REGION, STATE, AND CITY

This book focuses on the commonalities of migration patterns in western Europe. The general rhythms and patterns of migration responded similarly to the economic and social forces that have transformed city and countryside since 1650: the growth of capital cities, proliferation of rural industry, long-term population growth, creation of factory industry and the industrial town, and the burgeoning of the service conurbation. Yet trends and patterns of mobility clearly varied considerably from region to region; for example, local, circular migration characterized some seventeenth-century regions, while long-distance chain migrations systems joined other regions to distant locations—and each was affected differently by the impulse of rural industry and the population increases of the eighteenth century. Allowing for such differences, this book will emphasize the factors that produced changes in the dominant patterns of human movement since 1650. It will focus on western Europe, because, since the seventeenth century, most of the people of western Europe have been free to move. By contrast, the rural people of central Europe were bound more tightly to their lord's domain by the "second serfdom" of the sixteenth century and were less free to relocate until the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Consequently, I concentrate on territories west of the Elbe River to the north and the Adriatic sea to the south, emphasizing first France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and England, then Italy, Scandinavia, and Iberia. In addition, I include migration systems from eastern Europe and the Mediterranean basin that entered western Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The region constitutes the primary unit of discussion. It is best suited to the study of migration because the vast majority of human movement occurred within regions, and regions varied enormously one from the other. Most important, the region is the best level at which to discern economic and demographic change. For example, it was areas in the Rhineland, Flanders, Saxony, and Normandy that developed a great need for cottage workers in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not the whole of France or the German states. It was the Rhine-Ruhr zone that created a need for urban industrial, service, and construction workers at the end of the nineteenth century, drawing people from other regions where employment was on the wane. A regional perspective enables us to see shifts in migration systems that supplied these growing cities. Until the recent past, regions were distinct in demographic as well as in economic terms.¹¹

The European state, in its multiple forms, played fundamental roles in migration.¹² States have long articulated policies toward moving peoples, rejecting some and welcoming others; early examples include the *reconquista* of Spain that expelled Jews and Moors in the late fifteenth century and the Dutch policies that provided relief from taxes and citizenship fees as incentives to French Protestants in the seventeenth century.¹³ Migration policies have been most important in the twentieth century: movement from southern and eastern Europe was stifled when the United States curtailed migration in 1924; on the Continent, states have excluded or controlled ethnic groups like the Poles in German states before World War I or the Germans in Poland after World War II. The postwar policies of the Western European countries toward workers from Italy, Spain, Portugal, North Africa, Greece, and Turkey have shaped migration systems—albeit without controlling them. The opening of borders among European Economic Community countries effectively creates a single European labor force. The recent opening of Eastern Europe released a flood of migrants into the west whose movements had been repressed since the end of World War II.

Internal state politics also influenced migration patterns early on by shaping agrarian regimes and, as a consequence, patterns of mobility as well. In England, powerful landowners consolidated holdings at the expense of small peasant proprietors without constraint from the crown beginning in the seventeenth century.¹⁴ Here, early capital investment in the countryside increased agricultural productivity at the expense of peasant smallholders, producing a larger proportion of rural proletarians than on the Continent. Consequently, the English were exempt from both the subsistence crises that continued to plague the Continent and from the constraints on property ownership placed on marriage and childbearing. The English population increased more than any other in the eighteenth century; its villages and towns came to rely on emigration to the new worlds and migration to the cities and towns. By contrast, the strategy of the French absolutist state was to extract maximum tax revenues from the peasantry; this inhibited the consolidation of landholdings and thereby prolonged the existence of smallholders. As a consequence, the landowning rural classes were relatively robust in eighteenth- and

nineteenth-century France, and probably more geographically stable than the English (although given to temporary migration to earn money). This landholding peasant population had an incentive to control births and, with a relatively small population increase, was less likely to emigrate to the Americas than other Europeans.¹⁵

Resource-hungry states set off movements as they sought to extract money and cannon fodder from their people. For centuries, landholders sought work away from their home villages in order to pay their taxes and dues; this was particularly true in France, where a centralized national state demanded heavy tax revenues. In the nineteenth century, many Europeans claimed to have sought a home in the Americas especially because they could avoid high taxes; after all, taxation of colonies was a primary issue in the American War of Independence. Army service moved large contingents of young men from their home, sometimes to distant shores. Before 1700 these were most likely to have been mercenaries like the famous Swiss warriors down from mountain villages. Subsequently, conscription and pay increasingly drew young nationals to their state armies. The conscripted were legion: some 600,000 men in Napoleon's multinational Grand Army entered Russia in 1812, and by 1900, over 6 percent of French and German men aged 20 to 44 were serving in their armed forces.¹⁶ Likewise, dodging conscription inspired many a departure for a few months or for the dangerous years of their twenties. For young men coming of age during the Napoleonic wars or around 1848 in the German states, conscription was an important inspiration to decamp.¹⁷ Strategically timed migrations should be added to the "weapons of the weak."¹⁸

State colonial and mercantile policies affected migration in each period of this study. Early on, the Spanish empire fueled the European economy with its specie and drew workers to the wealthy cities of Antwerp in the Spanish Netherlands and Seville in Spain. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the countries of western Europe emerged as a dominant core in a world system, "for the first time the world began to be one migratory network dominated by a single group of technologically advanced and culturally similar states."¹⁹ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Dutch and British empires drew off thousands of people through their ports, creating a far-reaching demand for labor in their capital cities. Abroad, Europeans set off labor movements of native peoples in Asia and the Americas and engendered an enormous forced movement of enslaved Africans.²⁰ In the short period between 1876 and 1915, as a half-dozen states "distributed or redistributed" about a quarter of the world's land surfaces, the colonial holdings of Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands expanded to unprecedented degrees.²¹ These colonies literally came home to roost, particularly in the largest imperial power of Britain, as colonials of European and native descent moved into Western Europe in the decades after World War II.

Migrations permeate the wars, political oppression, and religious persecutions of the European past. The emigration of Puritans from England, the Thirty Years' War, and Louis XIV's persecution of Protestants all produced massive movements of men and women who sought safe havens during the seventeenth century. The French Revolution and Napoleonic wars may have moved fewer people than the events of the seventeenth century, but these conflicts irrevocably disrupted existing patterns of movement. In the late nineteenth century, Czarist pogroms reversed the movements of Jews to the east that had come in the wake of the postplague persecutions of the Middle Ages, and Jews fled to western Europe and North America. In the twentieth century, the tenets of the Versailles treaty and the repercussions of World War II caused unprecedented population movements.

This study will put these dislocations in the context of a broader history of migration. It will emphasize the systems of mobility that existed in times of peace, the relatively quotidian and invisible movements, rather than the forced movement of peoples dislocated by war and persecution; the persecuted have been studied masterfully by others.²² I nonetheless recognize that state power is intimately linked with human movement, for "what we in blithe retrospect call 'state formation' included the setting of ruthless tax farmers against poor peasants and artisans . . . the loosing of brutal soldiers on a hapless civilian population, the conscription of young men who were their parents' main hope for comfort in old age . . . and the imposition of religious conformity in the name of public order and morality."²³

More benign, but extremely important to the mobility of Europe's men, was state expenditure on public works. The princely tradition of construction recruited workers for Versailles and Leningrad in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example. Infrastructure construction accelerated in Britain, then on the continent, in the nineteenth century. Armies of foreign and native-born navvies crossed the countrysides and dug into cities to provide canals, roads, railroad systems, new public buildings, piped water, and sewage systems. The improved transportation infrastructure in turn facilitated the movement of women and children over great distances.

The role of migration in the history of the European city provides an important subplot to this work. In the seventeenth century, the growth of cities was substantial—particularly the large capital and commercial cities. After 1750, rural populations expanded, and while many rural people took to the road and ultimately lived in cities, burgeoning rural industries provided a living for unprecedented numbers of people in the countryside. With the nineteenth century came massive urbanization and the growth, once again, of the great old cities and of the highly visible new industrial towns. This resulted in the cities of our day and our thoroughly urbanized world, one in which the rural population pressure that pushes people away from home and into the city is no longer that of northwestern Europe, but the population growth of North Africa, southern Europe, and the eastern Mediterranean.

The victory of the city is neither complete nor simple. Although it seems to have pulled masses of people from the countryside to permanent urban lives, the history of labor demands, urban geography, and demography all indicate that migration to the city was complex, entailing far more than a one-time rural-urban move for most people. There was a great

volume of seasonal movement between city and countryside caused by the power of agricultural work to draw urban dwellers out to harvest and by the seasonal nature of many urban jobs, from construction work to early textile mill employment. Rural and small-town people worked in cities for a few years as, for example, domestic servants, water carriers, or construction workers. Temporary movement is vastly underrated.²⁴ Moreover, for the multitudes of historical actors who moved—often routinely—between country and city, the rural-urban dichotomy is more a statistical chimera than a reality. Others, even once settled in the city, continued to grow their own vegetables and take food, family gatherings, and leisure in rural homeplaces.

As cities outgrew their old boundaries, which were in many cases defined by medieval walls, *extra muros* sprawls appeared that were both rural and urban in nature. These areas, which were not statistically or administratively part of most towns, grew even faster than the core city. They contained great numbers of people who, like those within the city walls, could work in town and trade in urban markets; but, like country folk, they could also cultivate gardens, avoid city taxes, and live closer to the open air. These settlements outside city walls, gradually incorporated into cities, tell us a great deal about urban work and people's accommodation to it. Demographically, they are part of the city, but a neglected part; this neglect helps to explain why rural and urban environments have been mistaken for separate worlds.²⁵

In the sections of this history that focus on cities, I will emphasize urban areas that exemplify urbanization of their times. For the early modern period, I will focus on London and Amsterdam, great capital and trading cities. In the next chapter, eighteenth-century Rouen will be featured for its symbiotic relationship with its rural industrial hinterland. Duisberg and Roubaix—a steel town and a textile manufacture that burst with industrial might—are key examples in the urban sections of the chapter on nineteenth-century industrialization.

INDIVIDUALS, SOCIAL RELATIONS, AND MIGRATION SYSTEMS

Changes in rural landholding, employment, demographics, and capital holdings acted together over the long run to crowd the countryside, then to disperse rural populations to cities and towns. These structural factors explain the most general kinds of migration patterns. They do not, however, explain what made some people move while others stayed in place—for these explanations we must turn to individual Europeans and their social networks. Migration is a selective process. The young, single, and childless historically have been most likely to take to the road. These include young men ready for apprenticeships, terms as farmhands, or simply trying their luck in the city; they include young women who worked in the kitchen of the farm or urban middle-class family—or, later, the factory, and then the office or schoolroom. The children of landless laborers in early modern Europe knew from a very early age that they would have to find a living outside their parents' home. Likewise, prolific peasant families could rarely support all their children. In either case, moving was part of coming to maturity in many rural families.²⁶ Moreover, migration was embedded in familial patterns of work, authority, and money-earning, for families designated who should depart. It was family strategies that moved some children and retained others at home, deciding individual destinies in the interests of the group.²⁷ For example, which men of Pradelles would join the local team of migrants in the spring was decided by their family. Families with the least money and property could not retain their children and the poorest among them disbanded altogether.²⁸

Occupation and social status linked migrants with particular contacts and attracted them to distinct destinations. Most rural laborers like the men of Pradelles traveled to other rural areas and worked within agricultural itineraries. The men of Pradelles knew agricultural work, because they were tied into the information available from the people of their village. Had Pradelles been near coalfields, they might have worked in the mines before spring planting began. The elite of the region—nobles, officials, and wealthy landowners who moved in loftier circles—were likely to move longer distances and to have distinct destinations. They may have traveled to the lowlands, but they might visit the sovereign court of the city, not the fields that surrounded it. Like the bureaucrats of a later day, they would be more likely to see Berlin, London, or Paris. The poor were the bulk of migrants on the roads of Europe, for their livelihoods were least secure.

Of all individual characteristics that influence the migration experience, gender is perhaps the most fundamental but least systematically explored.²⁹ Studies of female migrants appeared in the 1980s and are especially well established among studies of today's migrants to North America and Europe.³⁰ However, gender has rarely been seriously analyzed among historical migrants.³¹ This study will investigate explicitly the migrations of both men and women, because just as most other activities in historical Europe were gendered, women's movements were different from men's. At the same time, men's and women's mobility is inextricably linked.³² Their productive and reproductive roles shaped the migration of European women.

The labor force long has assigned different tasks to men and women; as a consequence, the chances for men and women to earn their bread sometimes led them down different roads. While the men from the village of Pradelles left for the lowlands in harvest teams, most wives stayed at home, shouldering extraordinary responsibilities for livestock, farm management, and community administration. If young women left the village, it would be to work in another family, to marry, or to join a convent.³³ As rural economies changed, men and women sometimes left a given area at different times because the earnings for men declined at a different time than for women. For example, the collapse of rural industries in

the nineteenth century affected female spinners earlier than it affected male weavers.³⁴ Coalmining towns rarely offered the single village woman the chance to earn her way, although they may have promised a good living to her brother. While her brother went into the mines, the village girl was more likely to strike out for a more bourgeois town that would offer her a place as domestic servant. This process created coalmining towns that were predominantly male and administrative towns that were predominantly female. Single migrant women responded to the demand for urban domestic servants, especially when they moved without their families.³⁵ Those who traveled in the company of their families—and who therefore did not need the housing that domestic service provided—were more likely to be factory workers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The work of married migrant women, from the wives of metalworkers in the Ruhr valley to southern Italian women in the United States, responded to the demand for female domestic labor, whether or not they also worked for cash.³⁶

Women's capacity for reproduction distinguishes their migration in ways that have not yet been fully researched. In rural societies, women moved at marriage, whether to join their husband's family or to found a new household. Unwanted pregnancies that could not result in marriage provided an impetus for departure from home for some women. Single women usually moved under the protection and supervision of family members or lived in familial situations; among them are the urban live-in domestic servants and the mill workers who lived in rural dormitories supervised by nuns. Men, by contrast, lived in commercial lodgings or slept outdoors; although they often traveled and worked with compatriots, young men did not live and work in such supervised surroundings. Protective arrangements reflect in part efforts to protect women from pregnancy. For single migrant women, childbirth was a vivid manifestation of their social vulnerability.³⁷ For both the people at home and at destination, including state policymakers, women's capacities for reproduction signaled that when they joined a migration system, male migrants were more likely to stay at destination and form an immigrant community through chain migration. For this reason, nations of the Americas and Europe restricted with special care the entry of women and families whom they wanted to exclude as permanent immigrants. For example, the entry of Polish workers in the eastern provinces of nineteenth-century Germany was regulated to prevent family settlement.

Demographic characteristics such as age, marital status, and gender help us to understand why certain kinds of people left home in the past, but in order to explain why men and women left particular villages, and how they chose their specific destination, we must see migrants in their social context. Each migrant had a "personal information field"—a body of information about moving and destinations particular to each person.³⁸ Migration information was shared by kin, friends, and acquaintances who often chose the same destination and helped each other find work. These networks solve a central problem by explaining why migrants did not act like perfectly rational decision-making atoms, why they possessed incomplete knowledge about the options open to them, and why they concentrated on particular destinations and occupations. The idea of the personal information field moves *human relations* to the center stage of migration studies: historically, people have been the most effective conduits of information about migration possibilities. In a compelling case study of the role of social networks in the decision to emigrate from Europe, Sune Akerman emphasizes "the multiplier effects that were released as a consequence of interpersonal relations."³⁹ Information passed on about a particular location created migration streams between one's home area and destination.

Because they were generated by webs of relationships, migration streams constituted one building block of what we might call regional cultures. As kin and acquaintances moved from village to village, from market town to provincial center, they established contacts among people who spoke a similar language and shared such cultural habits as cuisine, religious practice, and fertility patterns. Migration linked villagers and townspeople who were part of the same "regional network of economic opportunities and constraints, a system of shared knowledge and ramifying kinship networks."⁴⁰ As a result, migration was far more than a purely economic phenomenon that merely reflected changes in the labor force. It was a manifestation of family systems, social connections, and regional solidarities.

This history adopts a *systemic* perspective. Migration itself is conceived as a socially constructed, self-perpetuating system that includes home and destination—a responsive system that expands, contracts, and changes according to circumstance.⁴¹ One such system is the seasonal practice of working lowland harvests shared by the men of the village of Pradelles. This migration system expanded women's village responsibilities and gave a particular annual rhythm to conceptions; as village population and lowland agriculture both expanded in the eighteenth century, more villagers depended on harvest work to get by. Local systems of migration animated rural dwellers within a valley or a region in seventeenth-century Europe, while large cities such as Amsterdam and London stimulated far-reaching systems of movement that included people in western Germany and northern England.

This study categorizes migration systems into four groups according to the distance of the move and the definitiveness of the break with home, following the historical scheme of Charles Tilly.⁴² The first of these was *local migration*, systems that moved people within their home market; this was a marriage market, a land or a labor market. It may have extended over a long distance, but it did not remove people from home contacts. Local migrants include peasants who purchased land and moved to a nearby village and women who married in a nearby parish. *Circular migration* returned people home after a specified interval within each particular system. The annual harvest work in the lowlands by the men of Pradelles was a system of circular migration. In the nineteenth century, Italians working the Argentine grain harvest were circular migrants who covered a considerably greater distance. Systems of *chain migration* involved social arrangements with people already at destination, who characteristically helped newcomers to find jobs and housing. These systems operated like a

transmission belt that brings newcomers from one area to a particular location. Chain migrants included urban domestics who came to the city to join a compatriot and then stayed on and construction workers who settled in the city after a few summers of urban work. Finally, systems of *career migration* were distinct because the needs and geography of the hiring institution rather than village contacts or family needs determined the timing and destination of moves. In early modern Europe, people who moved within such systems were likely to be church personnel, but with the bureaucratization of the state in the nineteenth century, the majority were white-collar functionaries. Both the mother superior and the schoolteacher, the cardinal and the judge, were career migrants.

Other kinds of migration are peripheral to this book. The *colonizing migrations* that settled much of Australia, the Americas, and eastern Russia do not play a large role here. The *coerced migrations* of refugees and displaced persons do not take center stage in this study until the twentieth century. The coolie trade is part of the history of the Americas, but less important to Europe. On the other hand, European interests in the production of sugar, coffee, and cotton in the Americas generated the trade in enslaved Africans that was a protracted and massive coerced migration. Relatively few Europeans were engaged in slaveholding enterprises, so that many more Africans than Europeans crossed the Atlantic between 1600 and 1840; only after 1840 did Europeans begin to consistently outnumber Africans.⁴³

The free migrations that dominate the history of European mobility before 1914 were local, circular, chain, and career movements. These kinds of migration overlap, and many individuals changed from one system to another over time. Systems rose and fell with the economic fortunes of the destination. In some cases, circular migration systems from countryside to city became chain migration systems that eventually depleted rural populations. We will see the migration systems from villages like Pradelles become systems of chain migration that sent an increasing proportion of young men and women to settle permanently in the lowlands. This typology of migration systems is especially useful for a longterm historical study, particularly because a shift in importance among types of migration systems has occurred over the past three centuries: the local migration systems and circular migration that dominated movement in seventeenth-century Europe gave way in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to chain migration systems and the proliferation of career migration.

DEFINITIONS AND DATA

Writing this history requires a pioneering spirit. There is neither a simple and universally accepted definition of migration nor a single body of data that measures it. Thus it is quite different from the much neater demographic processes—birth, marriage, and death—for which we have histories. Indeed, Jan de Vries showed considerable restraint when he observed that “unlike fertility, mortality, and marriages . . . migration is a more unruly phenomenon which no single historical or contemporary source records in a comprehensive fashion.”⁴⁴ Here I will give this “unruly phenomenon” wide berth, defining it as a change in residence beyond a municipal boundary, be it a village or town. For the purposes of this history, then, migration includes moves from one village to another as well as from one side of the Atlantic to another. Temporally, migrations include moves that last only a season as well as permanent relocations. The latitude of this definition is designed to capture the nuances of historical change.

Measurement and data offer more intractable problems. The systematic study of migration began a little over a century ago with Arthur Ravenstein’s analysis of the British census of 1881, which he expanded with an analysis of censuses from the low countries, Scandinavia, the German Empire, France, Iberia, central Europe, and the Balkans.⁴⁵ Subsequent studies of mobility have relied heavily on censuses, parish lists, birth and death records, registers of specific urban groups such as citizens (*Bürgerbücher*) and apprentices, and occasional government inquiries. The most famous inquiry surveyed temporary migration for the whole of the French Empire in 1811.⁴⁶ Such sources yield excellent information on some aspects of migration—that they often list occupation enables the researcher to understand the origins of various segments of the labor force; that they list birthplace enables the researcher to investigate the geographical draw of a village or town.

From these sources, migration researchers have formulated certain fundamental “rules” of migration: Migration is a function of distance—the longer the distance, the fewer the migrants; migrants move in stages—from village to town, from town to city; for each stream of migrants, there is a counterstream back to origin; people in urban areas are less likely to migrate than those in rural areas; women constitute the majority of short-distance migrants; and economic motives dominate the decision to migrate. Demographers, sociologists, economists, and historians have refined and refuted these observations, improving our understanding of the selectivity and volume of movement.⁴⁷

But parish lists, occupational lists, and census data are limiting. They force the scholar to infer movement from static data; thus, they yield little information about the actual volume of movement, return migration, or repeated moves. As a consequence, these sources give the impression that historical actors moved infrequently and that they stayed at their destination. Ravenstein initiated theories about migration streams and counterstreams, but until recently historians did not produce data that directly measure movement within migration chains and circulatory systems.

Historians now are exploring two kinds of sources that allow a direct measure of migration in Europe. The first source is migration statistics from Germany (*Meldewesen*), gathered annually at the local level from individual records of

in-migration and out-migration by gender and marital status. These data, reexplored and used to measure gross migration in the nineteenth century by American scholars James Jackson, Jr., and Steve Hochstadt, reveal massive movements into and out of German cities.⁴⁸

The second set of data originates in population registers, long maintained in Sweden and introduced to western European countries such as Belgium, Italy, and Holland after 1840. Population registers monitored individuals over time; as a consequence, they allow us to see migration in the context of the life cycle, to observe the frequency of individual moves, and to discern specific migrant streams and mobile subpopulations.⁴⁹ The registers of Belgium and of Italy have been analyzed by American scholars George Alter, Dennis Hogan, and David Kertzer to discern the movement of people into and out of the textile town of Verviers, Belgium, and the rural outpost of Bologna, Italy, called Casalecchio. Alter, Hogan, and Kertzer have used life-table methods to measure the likelihood of migration by gender and age. In both locations, migrants were not likely to stay long and (aside from the native-born women of Verviers) everyone was likely to move—primarily within a regional system.⁵⁰

These rich records of human mobility inform us about a limited period of time. The German migration statistics began with Napoleonic rule over the Rhineland at the opening of the nineteenth century; they were adopted by the Prussian district of Düsseldorf after the Napoleonic wars and were extended to Berlin in 1838. After 1866, it seems that statistics were gathered primarily for cities of over 50,000 alone. Most population registers are limited to a part of the nineteenth century, introduced in Belgium in the 1840s and in Italy in the 1860s. Three separate registers from Verviers cover the period from 1849 to 1880; the period of the Casalecchio study extends from 1861 to 1921.⁵¹

The population registers that have been most exploited for migration researchers can address changes in migration patterns only during the nineteenth century after 1840. As registers are investigated for the period after 1919, they may be able to tell us about shifts in migration after World War I, but such work has only begun.⁵² The population registers can enrich enormously our understanding of the migrations that occurred during an era that generated a great volume of movement and enormous contemporary concern—the era of urbanization and the growth of factory industry in the late nineteenth century. Just as important, the registers can induce migration researchers to ask better questions of the extant data about other periods. However, no single source can, alone, serve to support or deny a historical theory of migration over the long term.

Despite formidable source problems, researchers have managed to draw on extant sources—parish records, censuses, migration statistics, and population registers—to discern the volume, direction, and timing of movement. Four notable instances will serve here as exemplary cases. David Souden used data from family reconstitution projects for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English parishes to analyze local migration fields. Steve Hochstadt used a plethora of urban citizenship registers (*Bürgerbücher*) from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Germany to discern and calculate substantial rates of preindustrial mobility. Jan Lucassen has amassed a wide variety of sources to augment the French Imperial survey of temporary migration in order to trace the rise and demise of migration systems supplying labor to the Netherlands from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Finally, using a backward population projection technique, Myron Gutmann traced trends in human movement over a two-century period in and around Verviers, Belgium, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵³

Such excellent, nuanced case studies as these are a primary reason that an attempt can now be made to interpret migration patterns in Europe since the seventeenth century. A critical mass of exciting new work gives hint to the shape of migration trends. Also, Jan de Vries and Charles Tilly, in sketching out general approaches to the history of the European population, urban and proletarian respectively, have suggested the complex, but key, role that human migrations have played in producing an urban proletariat where there was once a peasantry.⁵⁴ Moreover, population reconstructions of preindustrial peoples, effected by Jan de Vries for the European city and by Myron Gutmann for the Verviers region, suggest a role for migration that is subtle, changeable, and important.⁵⁵ Finally, studies of industrialization and deindustrialization emphasize movements of capital and workers, replacing a long-standing emphasis on technological innovation. This shift has brought the history of industrialization closer to that of human mobility by clarifying a history of production that is geographically flexible as well as reversible: in many regions, industries have folded, leaving working men and women to scramble for declining resources or move to find employment.⁵⁶

These works suggest that a rethinking of human mobility is at the heart of the current writing of European history. Migration is a missing piece in the standard understanding not only of the preindustrial world but of the nature of historical change as well. By writing this history of migration, I hope to bring the patterns of mobility into our thinking about preindustrial life, rural industry, the industrial revolution, and urbanization. Migration is present in every level of historical study. It should enliven the historical study of the family, that most intimate of social groups. On the village and regional levels, migration constitutes a part of the “social glue” of subcultures and responds to economic and social change. State politics themselves both inspired and inhibited migration. Finally, European mobility responds not only to familial and local demands but also to those of the world economy.

This book interprets migration patterns and processes in historical Europe and the points of discontinuity in human mobility. It outlines the changes in rural employment, demographics, and landholding patterns and the shifts in capital deployment to reveal a countryside that filled, then expelled much of its population with the collapse of rural industry and long-lived agricultural systems. The central story is that of human movement, comprising primarily local and seasonal

migration in the seventeenth century that subsequently shifted, then dramatically expanded by the end of the nineteenth century. Migration brought a different experience to men and women, to the propertied and the proletariat, and those differences are themselves an important part of this history. I seek not only to interpret the history of migration but also to probe the substantial blank spots in our understanding of human mobility.

CHAPTER

2

Migration in Preindustrial Europe

Joseph Mayett left his parents' Buckingham cottage northwest of London in 1795 at age 12, when his father, a farm laborer, hired him out to be "in service." The young man ate, slept, and resided with his masters since service was paid in room, board, and a wage. Mayett departed the next September; local custom dictated that farm servants then present themselves at the Michaelmas fair to be hired out for the coming year's employment. Both Mayett and his parents tacitly expected him to be a farm servant, to be hired by the year, and to move annually. Neither party anticipated that he would again live at home, and he did not, except for one very short period when he was forced to take work as a farm laborer and find shelter with his parents. Mayett took 11 positions as a farmhand in eight years, sometimes returning to a former master, and never once living more than 23 kilometers from his parents' cottage. He followed a pattern established in Buckingham county since the sixteenth century. Mayett's departure from home, his annual moves, and his work as a farm servant all make him quite typical of men and women in early modern Europe—particularly typical among rural young people from families of modest means.¹

Leaving home as Joseph Mayett did was an integral part of European life in the seventeenth century. Studies of nearly every village, town, and city reveal that the face of Europe was bustling with movement long before the industrial revolution. Indeed, the image of a sedentary Europe may be most inaccurate for the preindustrial period. Jan de Vries's simulation of urban growth in early modern Europe suggests that there was more migration in the seventeenth century than there would be in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; he postulates that the important "net flows of rural-urban migration . . . were part of a larger, probably much larger, stream of gross rural-urban migration. This in turn was embedded in a yet more general migration phenomenon continually redistributing population among villages and market towns."² Similarly, "the most striking and fundamental finding" from Peter Clark's wide-ranging study of migration in southern England, 1660–1730, was that mobility was the norm. Seven thousand biographies of court witnesses show a pattern of ubiquitous movement: about 65 percent of men and women departed their home parish.³ (See [Table 2:1](#).)

Pervasive mobility flies in the face of stereotypes about premodern life and, more seriously, historians' assertions that the most populous of European nations, France, was fundamentally sedentary between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, anchored by its people's visceral attachment to the soil.⁴ This chapter describes and analyzes the wide range of migration experiences in preindustrial Europe, elaborating the factors that made some people more mobile than others.

I define preindustrial Europe as the age before people labored in large-scale production for outside markets in the countryside *or* in the city, before patterns of work and residence were altered by the proliferation of rural industry *or* the development of machine production.⁵ Migration in the period before large-scale rural industry is difficult to pin down because there are very few acute sources or studies that address mobility. One must make careful inferences from local and regional studies for this age that lacks migration statistics, population registers, or census data. However, local studies have the advantage of providing vivid portraits of migration patterns in particular settings. It is essential to comprehend migration *before* the proliferation of rural industry in order to understand the changes wrought by its spread. Since rural industry and its crucial urban components were expanding rapidly in Britain and parts of the Continent by 1660, and elsewhere during the eighteenth century, this chapter will focus on the 1650–1750 period, emphasizing the seventeenth century for some regions and the early eighteenth century for others.

This chapter opens with a brief portrait of the age and a sketch of its migrations that were compelled by war, empire, and intolerance. It then shifts to the more subtle movements of ordinary men and women in the preindustrial countryside and city. I include a sketch of what may have been the largest system of labor migration of the seventeenth century: the annual movement of Westphalian men to work in the fields of Holland. (See [Map 2:1](#).)