

THE NEXT GREAT MIGRATION

The Beauty and Terror of Life on the Move

By Sonia Shah

400 pp. Bloomsbury Publishing. 2020.

Sonia Shah's *The Next Great Migration: The Beauty and Terror of Life on the Move* is a genealogy of the nomad-as-stranger, according to the allied sciences of genetics, anthropology, botany, biology, and zoology. And like any family history, myths and legends of the stranger in a strange land appear. A species is native to a place (Carl Linnaeus). Aiding the needy will lead to unchecked population growth (Thomas Robert Malthus). Mayhem was foretold and xenophobic policies and practices were instituted, from restrictive immigration acts and eugenics conventions to, more recently, migrant children confined in cages. Shah honors the narrative truths of wiser elders. Traits are either dominant or recessive (Gregor Mendel). Our bodies adapt to the environment (Franz Boas). Species dispersed due to continental drift (theory of plate tectonics). Human beings are 99.9 percent the same (Human Genome Project). Shah asserts that migration is no aberration, although the reasons differ in the animal kingdom (biology and geography) from among humans (economics and politics); furthermore, migration has been "nearly continuous" (204) and its impulse is innate. We descended matrilineally from a common ancestor, a Mitochondrial Eve, "as recently as two hundred thousand years ago" (201), and when our ancient ancestors left Africa, they "moved into lands where other people already lived" (213). Shah likens the result to a braided tree with "branches sprouting from its trunk and then merging back together again" (215). And on every family tree, a relative still clamors to build a wall. May the hospitable Abrahams and Sarahs prevail. —Lisa Thaler, author of *Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin*, 20 July 2020