

Trellises not trees: Human populations have split, reformed and remixed over millennia

The ingrained notion – that there has only ever been one species of human being, *Homo sapiens* – is a latterday fiction born of our own self-important view of ourselves.

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Homo sapiens and Neanderthals had a common ancestor, about 500,000 years ago, before the former evolved as a separate species – in Africa – and the latter as a different species in Europe. Then around 70,000 years ago, when modern humans emerged from Africa, we encountered the Neanderthals, most probably in the Middle East. We briefly mixed and interbred with them before we continued our slow diaspora across the planet.

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But the initial separation of the two lines of ancient humans who gave rise to Neanderthals and to *Homo sapiens* – and then their subsequent intermingling – shows that remixing does occur. Indeed, [geneticist David] Reich believes it was commonplace and that the standard tree model of populations is basically wrong. Throughout our prehistory, populations have split, reformed, moved on, remixed and interbred and then moved on again.

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Instead of a tree, a better metaphor would be a trellis, branching and remixing far back into the past, says Reich, whose work indicates that the idea of race is a very fluid, ephemeral concept. However, he is adamant that it is a very real one and takes issue with those geneticists who argue that there are no substantial differences in traits between populations.

Read full, original post: [David Reich: 'Neanderthals were perhaps capable of many modern human behaviours'](#)