

Abstracts

Post-Disaster Migrations and Returns in Sicily: The 1908 Messina Earthquake and the 1968 Belice Valley Earthquake **Giacomo Parrinello**

This article explores the relationship between disasters and the population movements in two case studies: the 1908 Messina earthquake and the 1968 Belice Valley earthquake. While they happened in different areas and at different times, the earthquakes share two major characteristics. First, they caused the almost complete destruction of infrastructure over a large area. Second, they resulted in massive population movements away from the disaster areas. This paper aims to understand the connection between these phenomena, posing a number of questions: Were the population movements permanent or temporary? Were the disasters solely responsible for the movements? Did the demography of the stricken areas recover from the disaster or not? And why, or why not? To answer these questions, the article draws on historical analysis and comparison, following the population movements not only in the immediate aftermath but also over a longer period of time. This method helps in identifying the characteristics of the movements and in assessing whether they were temporary or permanent, where they were directed, and why. The comparison between the two cases, then, allows conclusions to be drawn about the factors that play a role in orienting the post-disaster population movements, and, in the final analysis, in deciding whether people would continue to live in the disaster area or not. As the article illustrates, while the city of Messina recovered from the post-disaster displacements and soon increased its population, the Belice Valley population remained much smaller than in the pre-disaster years. In order to explain that major difference, it is worthwhile to situate the disaster within a broader narrative, taking into account social, economic, and political factors, as well as overall historical processes. The results of this study, therefore, empirically validate analytical models that account for multiple drivers in post-disaster migration and refute any simplistic connection between disaster and population movements. However, the results can also enrich those models by demonstrating the importance of timescale, and the need to integrate it as a pivotal element in the analysis.

Environmental Migration as Planned Livelihood Among the Rebaris of Western Rajasthan, India

Vipul Singh

The Rebaris are a traditional pastoral community in the semi-arid zone of western Rajasthan. Historically, the Rebaris have adapted to local scarcity through migration. These “environmental migrants” cover hundreds and even thousands of miles each year to feed their sheep, goats, and camels. They migrate in large groups, with each camp consisting of adults, children, and hundreds of animals. Unlike other pastoral groups throughout the world who have gradually become more sedentary, the Rebaris continue to migrate with their flocks of sheep in order to adapt to harsh climatic conditions. Despite the arid conditions and unpredictable grazing resources in western Rajasthan, herd populations have increased. In recent years, the Rebaris have expanded their range, migrating to more distant regions such as Haryana, the Punjab, and even Andhra Pradesh, almost 1,000 miles from Rajasthan. On occasion they have remained away from their homes for the entire year. This paper argues that a broader view of environmental migration is needed in order to understand the relationship between increasing herd sizes and shrinking grazing resources. My research suggests that environmental migration in western Rajasthan, once viewed as a response to drought and famine, has also developed into a planned livelihood strategy.

Healthy Country, Unhealthy City: Population Growth, Migration, and Urban Sanitation in Lima and Manila

David Soll

This article explores the connection between the significant health improvements made in the developing world, particularly after World War II, and the goal of providing clean water and sanitation services to large urban centers in these countries. Using Manila and Lima as case studies, it argues that increases in life expectancy stemming from reduction in the incidence of infectious diseases led to significant rural population growth, spurring rapid migration to urban areas. This migration in turn created enormous public health challenges in cities. Migrants generally lived in unsanitary informal settlements. In some cases, particularly in the short term, moving to the city posed significant health risks to migrants. However, a combination of activism by migrants and increased managerial competence on the part of urban authorities is beginning to yield an urban health dividend, at least in most Latin American and Asian cities. Drawing on the theories of the demographic transition and the epidemiological transition, this analysis links urban health issues to larger-scale transformations in population and health trends.

Migration as a Failure to Adapt? How Andean People Cope with Environmental Restrictions and Climate Variability

Annelies Zoomers

This article analyzes how people in the Bolivian Andes cope with environmental stress. Specifically, it examines the role environmental migration plays in how people cope with climate change. In the Andes, the climate is highly variable, forcing people to cope with extreme weather conditions that range from extreme droughts and intensive rain and floods to rising temperatures and unexpected frosts. When mobility takes place in such a context, it is often portrayed as “environmental” migration (reflecting the failure of people to adapt to environmental pressures). Though migration in the Andes is in part an adaptive response to adverse climatic conditions, this article argues that environmental limitations do not play a decisive role. Instead, it shows how migration is a strategic mechanism to build up financial, productive, and social capital, opening opportunities to stay. We contend that migration – rather than being a flow of people “moving away” – should be perceived as people building webs of relationships to reduce their vulnerability. Migration allows them to engage in multi-local livelihoods, “catching” opportunities at various localities while remaining connected to their area of origin. The article concludes that migration is not a failure to adapt; rather, it is a choice that reflects agency of local actors to build new lifeways. Thanks to migration, people are capable of enduring in spite of increasing environmental stress.

The Desert and the Garden: Climate as Attractor and Obstacle in the Settlement History of the Western United States

Lawrence Culver

This article examines climate and perceptions of climate as factors in the migration and settlement history of the western United States. It focuses on two regions of great interest in the nineteenth century. One, the so-called Great American Desert, in the western Great Plains, seemed a potential obstacle to settlement. The other, the Mexican state of Alta California, which after 1848 became the US state of California, proved a definite attraction to settlers. By the late nineteenth century, both regions were attracting migrants. One, however, would experience climatic disasters that discouraged settlement, while the other would continue to grow, encouraging an even larger migration after 1945 to the southernmost tier of US states, from Florida to California, a region that became known as the Sunbelt. The Sunbelt drew migrants from the US Northeast and Midwest in part because of its warmer climate. By examining these regions, and the climatic migrations they spurred, this article illustrates how perceptions of climate changed in the US

Climate was transformed from a problem into a commodity. For prospective migrants, climate, once a matter of profound concern, became a benign asset. Yet the Sunbelt region is subject to major climatic hazards, from droughts to hurricanes. By better understanding historical perceptions of climate, we can more clearly see how it could prove either an obstacle or an attraction for migration, and why people migrated to areas of environmental hazards, whether in the US or elsewhere.

**“All That Country Will Be Taken Up
by the Thrifty Settler”: Migration, Environment,
and the Cutover Lands of Minnesota, USA
from the 1890s to the 1930s**

Kevin Brown

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the lumber industry in northern Minnesota transformed vast swaths of forested land into lumber products for burgeoning capitalist markets across the United States, a process entailing not only the destruction of old growth pine forests, but the creation of a new (albeit severely degraded) space: the cutover. These lands – marshy, rocky, and now riddled with tree stumps and debris – presented serious economic problems for lumber companies themselves, in the form of tax burdens and the risk of spreading fires to still valuable timbered lands.

Lumber companies and boosters promoted the climate and ecology of this region as ideal for agricultural development by migrants of “modest means.” This understanding of the cutover reflected a mix of ideas about nature, climate, and migration as much as it did the ecology of the region itself. By the late 1920s, the dream of these cutover boosters resulted in a landscape of impoverished migrants and abandoned farms across the former lumber regions of both states. When, during the 1930s, New Deal planners examined the cutover and evaluated its climate and ecology they saw its future in radically different terms than boosters had. These spaces, they argued, should be removed from agricultural development and reforested under public control. This case study demonstrates that the ways institutions and individuals think about climate and ecology matters when examining the connection between migration and climate.