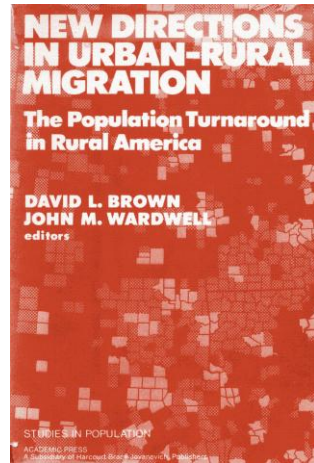


Examining Rural Migration in the 21st Century

David L. Brown

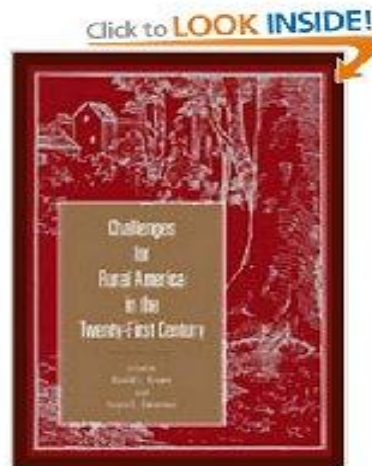
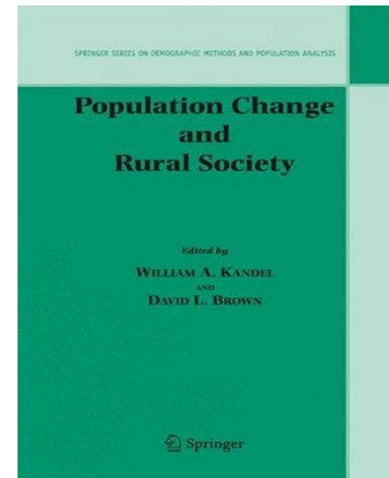
European Society for Rural Sociology
Thematic Symposium on
Mobilities and Stabilities in Rural Space

I've made a career studying rural migration



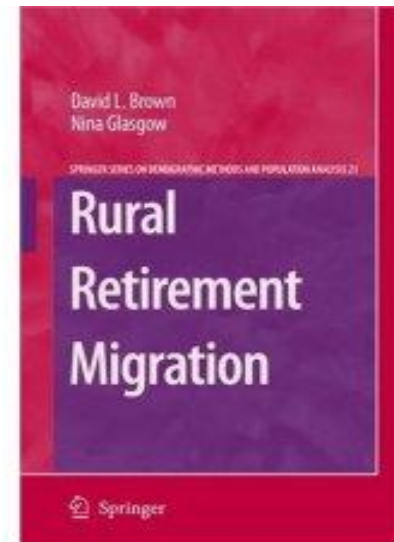
But, today I want to talk about the epistemology of research on migration

•How research practice affects what we know about rural migration



Rural and Small Town America

G.V. Fuguitt
D.L. Brown
C. Beale



What I Plan to Do

- Examine changes over the last half century that have affected the practice of migration research
 - Social, economic and political transformations
 - New theoretical approaches in the social sciences
- Main question
 - Does conventional research on migration reflect these trends and changes, or does it lag behind?
 - What are the implications for knowledge of migration if research practice lags behind?
 - Not just rural migration, migration in general but with a particular concern for rural migration

The “Social-Demographic” Perspective

- Migration and community organization are mutually interrelated
 - This sounds intuitive, but
- The theoretical and empirical associations between migration and community are underdeveloped

Changes Affecting Migration

- Social, economic and political transformations
 - Increasing inequality
 - Globalization
 - Transportation & communication technology
 - Population ageing
 - Family and gender
- Social science theory has become more pluralistic and synthetic
 - Released from the “strangle hold” of functionalism and modernization

Global inequality

[Uneven development]

- Inequalities between countries have grown
- Inequalities within many countries have grown
 - US gini coefficient = .39 in 1970; .46 in 2000
- ***Relation to migration***
 - Inequalities provide motivation for economic migration
 - Between countries
 - Within countries
 - Inequalities produce instability and social conflict
 - Increases ***involuntary*** migration and population ***displacement***
- ***Relation to rural migration***
 - Persistent poverty is often concentrated in rural areas
 - Origins of both international migration and internal migration
 - Rural areas especially vulnerable to strife and environmental disasters that result in population displacement
 - Not necessarily true in parts of Europe where rural areas have become destinations for both internal and international migration

Globalization

- ***The Change***

- From a federation of relatively autonomous nation states to a unified system of politico-economic integration
- Featuring relatively unfettered flow of information, capital and culture across national boundaries

- ***Relation to Migration***

- Off-shoring from more developed to less developed nations
 - LDCs: new production jobs enhance population retention
 - DC: Loss of jobs stimulates out-migration
- Globalization has contributed to inequality, and hence migration
- Free flow of information reduces migration risks and uncertainties, thereby enhancing migration

- ***Relation to Rural Migration***

- Rural jobs are lower wage, lower skill than urban
 - hence are easily off-shored

Transportation and communication technology

- *The Change*
 - Cheap air travel
 - Cell phones, computers, internet
- Relation to Migration
 - Reduce the friction of distance/ break down spatial barriers
 - Changed migration's social organization
 - Contributes to production and maintenance of social networks that channel migration
- Relation to Rural Migration
 - National and global forces “penetrate” rural spaces
 - Undermine “protection of distance”
 - Rural areas are embedded in global networks
 - more effectively linked internally, internationally: economically, socially, politically
 - Therefore, more likely to be migration origins and/or destinations

Population Ageing

- ***The Change (a global phenomenon)***
 - In more developed nations like Europe, ageing results from
 - low fertility
 - increased longevity
- ***Relation to Migration***
 - Older persons are less likely to move than younger persons so aging societies have lower internal migration rates
 - With increasing longevity and enhanced economic security, migration at older ages becomes more attractive option
- ***Relation to Rural Migration***
 - Rural Retirement migration
 - An economic development option?
 - A pensions and care issue?

Family & Gender

- ***The Change: Families have been restructured***
 - Family living arrangements are diverse
 - no typical family today
 - Women have gained relative power in family decisions *partly* because of their increased economic contributions to family budget
 - Many families now female headed
- ***Relation to Migration***
 - Migration decision making is now generally a ***family decision***, not an atomized individual one
 - Unit of analysis is family, not individual
 - Tied spouse, trailing spouse now often the male
- ***Relation to Rural Migration***
 - Rural family restructuring parallels urban family changes
 - Rural women have more agency in migration decisions

Theoretical legacy

- **Ravenstein (1885/89): a lasting legacy**
 - distance, stages, stream/counterstream, selectivity, dominance of economic motives, etc.
- **The neo-classical equilibrium framework**
 - dominated migration research until 1960s: A variant of modernization theory
 - Push/pull and gravity models
 - Micro level [individual is unit of analysis]
 - Migrants are income maximizers who move to increase returns on human capital
 - Distance and intervening obstacles are measures of risk
 - People move when stream of **expected** future benefits > costs and risks of moving
 - Macro level [inter-area variability in migration rates]
 - Migration streams reflect sum of individuals rational income maximization
 - Migration balances labor supply and demand in competing labor markets
 - Over time, migration will reduce inequality between areas
 - Human ecology
 - migration is a collective adaptation to imbalance between population and environment
 - Human ecology still uses equilibrium framework, but social structure brought into the analysis

Contemporary Theory;

A synthesis of many theoretical threads

- Social structure and agency emphasized
 - Emphasis on role of **social networks**
 - People are *embedded* in social relationships and institutional structures
 - Social networks develop, operate and become self sustaining between origin and destination communities
 - Massey: “each act of migration creates the social structure needed to sustain it”
 - Networks make migration more likely by reducing cost and risk, and enhancing expected returns to migration
 - Network based decisions are **collective** decisions
 - Migration as a family livelihood strategy—diversify risk and vulnerability
 - Persons are embedded in families which are embedded in communities
 - Information flows through the network linking origin and destination in **trans-local communities**

These Changes Challenge Some Fundamental Concepts and Research Strategies

- Internal and International Migration Are Complimentary, and Sometimes Linked, Processes
 - Conventionally treated as separate processes carried out by separate researchers
- Social structural framework is equally useful for examining internal and international migration decision making, community-level impacts and adaptation processes
- In addition, this perspective provides a frame for linking internal to international processes
 - Many international migrants move on from initial destination gateways
 - Trans-national and trans-local migration networks regulate social behavior

These Changes Challenge Some Fundamental Concepts and Research Strategies

- Who Has Agency in Migration?
- Conventional Approach focused on individual income maximizer
- Social Structural approach sees individual ***embedded*** in institutions
 - Multi-level process
 - Families are locus of decisions, not individuals as free agents
 - Families are embedded in communities
 - Institutions play prominent roles
 - select migrants from “applicant pools”
 - » Corporations, NGOs, government bureaucracies, higher education

Conventional definition of migration is inconsistent with contemporary realities

- **Conventional definition**
 - “Change of **usual residence** of sufficient **duration and distance** to **disrupt** everyday social relationships”
- **Usual Residence**
 - ***One and only one residence?***
 - Problematic in cultural systems where intergenerational families are the rule
 - **The only usual thing about residence is that people *usually have multiple residences***
 - Migration is often a family subsistence strategy that involves temporary, seasonal and/or circular moves
 - Migrants circulate between urban and rural places of residence in Europe, the US and origin countries
 - Snow birds
 - College students
 - Agricultural workers (prior to militarization of US border)
 - Movement between multiple residences within trans-local space does **not** disrupt every day relationships

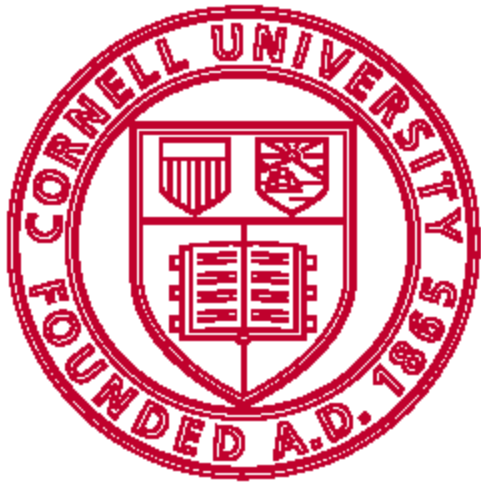
Conventional definition of migration is inconsistent with contemporary realities

- ***Migration Defining Boundaries***
- Political boundaries are typically used as markers of migration distance
 - Interstate > inter county > inter city
 - International > internal
- Political boundaries are no longer accurate markers of migration or migration distance (and by implication disruption)
 - Meaning of boundaries has changed as international and internal migration have become interdependent
 - As “blocks of countries” develop alliances to regulate migration
 - EU, NAFTA,
 - As migration is channeled via social networks that transcend political borders
 - More border enforcement but more migration?

Conclusions

- We have learned a lot about migration since the 1970s
 - Emphasis on social structure that now guides research presents new possibilities for examining determinants and consequences of migration for rural people and communities
- We cannot continue to deploy concepts and measures developed during a different historical era and when social scientific theory was dominated by **modernization** and **methodological individualism**
 - New forms of geographic mobility do not fit the one and only one usual residence measurement framework
 - Conventional borders no longer divide social space as they did
 - Migration is a collective enterprise, not individual rational choice
- Rural areas are full participants in the global world
 - Penetrated by global forces
 - Affected by modern technology
 - Nodes in trans-local, trans-regional and trans-national migration circuits
 - Where identity and social life are hybrids of social interaction in multiple environments

Thank You



“Ithaca is gorges”