

FRANK TROVATO

Canada's Population in a Global Context: an Introduction to Social Demography
Oxford University Press, 2009, XV + 646 pp.

The book, *Canada's Population in a Global Context: an Introduction to Social Demography* by Frank Trovato, is in a class unto itself. It is unique in many respects as to its subject matter and depth of coverage, variety of analytical and methodological approaches and the ingenious way the material is delivered to its readership

The book's subject matter spans a great variety of themes, from the review of population study in the broader context of social sciences and the basic demographic concepts, to the core demographic subjects – population structure and movement (fertility, mortality, migration), their determinants and their social and economic implications – and finally to the theories and policies as well as the relationship between population and nature defined broadly. What makes the book of this kind especially unique is that, as its title indicates, the Canadian population is examined in a global context, the underlying rationale being the growing interconnectedness between nations in the globalized world in which we live, where problems in one part have repercussions in other parts. As the author puts it “it seems no longer useful to examine Canadian population in isolation of the broader global context”. The recognition that demography, while having its unique core subject matter and its home grown methodology, has to rely on many other disciplines such as sociology, economics and biology among others for explanation of its variables, leads the author to take a distinctly interdisciplinary orientation. He takes care of identifying and defining from the outset the basic demographic concepts, and he does this with due rigor and precision, yet in a way understandable to a layman. His explanatory approach too has its special slant. He combines methodological, analytical and theoretical approaches in order to unravel the intricacies of how demographic processes work and the demographic configurations take shape, enhancing in this way the depth and the scope of students' understanding thereof. From a purely *didactic* point of view, the textbook's quality rests on the effectiveness of the variety of teaching tools adopted in the book. Thus, in addition to more obvious methods, like a selective bibliography (which includes many Web resources), exercises and study questions, the book makes use of many visual highlights in the form of typologies, models and elaborate graphics that stage the itinerary and linkages of a given demographic process. Questions, particularly those related to population doctrines and policies, are scrutinized from different competing points of view - a feature important to students' objectivity and critical mind coaching.

In sum, as a textbook, this book has few contenders for the richness of sub-

ject matter and depth of coverage and, more specifically for the way the methods and material geared towards teaching and training in the fields of population studies is presented. If I had to look for a comparable book in other disciplines, in economics for example, the field with which I am more familiar, I would pick *Economics: An Introductory Analysis* by Paul Samuelson. It is hoped that this new-born textbook will have as long a life as the Samuelson book with its enumerable editions.

So much for the *didactic* features of Trovato's textbook. I turn now to some specific features. In a book of this size, 645 pages and large format, with so many issues covered – substantive, analytical, methodological, theoretical, and policy – inescapably the reviewer has to be utterly selective, even at the risk of compromising to some extent the integrity of the book. Inevitably also one finishes with a somewhat skewed presentation, the selection being biased by reviewer's preferences. Thus, given the limited space imparted for this review, I shall skip making comments on the book's many substantive and analytical treatments, all excellent in themselves

Highly prominent in the book are various population theories which Trovato discusses in depth. For this presentation, this reviewer makes the distinction between those that are topic-specific, such as fertility, migration and health, on the one hand, and those with a high degree of generality, applicable to a complex of demographic phenomena, on the other.

We can give here only the gist of the theories discussed therein. Thus with regard to fertility, Becker's *economic theory* regards childbearing decisions as an act of rationality maximizing the individual or family benefits. Easterlin's *cyclical theory* implies an auto regulatory process whereby large cohorts give birth to small cohorts, which in turn give birth to large cohorts, thus generating a succession of high and low fertility cycles, the mediating factor being the varying levels of supply of population in the prime labour force ages. Countering Easterlin, Butz and Ward came with a countercyclical explanation. They claim that, if one takes economic cycles for granted, the determinant factor in childbearing waves is female's employment and wages. Whereas during an economic boom the wages are high and the opportunity costs of motherhood increase accordingly, the contrary happens during periods of economic bust, they argue. When motherhood opportunity costs diminish, women may choose to return to their traditional childbearing role. And then there is Caldwell's *wealth flow* theory which postulates that in traditional high fertility societies, wealth flows from children to parents, and therefore couples tend to maximize their childbearing. In modern societies the opposite is true, and the flow of wealth generally is from parents to children, thus in this context there is no interest in having large families. For their part, Lesthaeghe and Surkyn put forward the *individuation thesis* emphasizing the importance of post-material and post-modern values with regard to family, childbearing and marriage, whereby young people are offered many options as alternatives to parenthood.

Theorizing about internal migration, the author discusses some old and new theories of spatial mobility. Ravenstein's "laws" of migration, emphasizing short distance mobility is an "old" theory. This formulation evolved into a broader theory by Zipf, with his *distance-gravity* model, which makes distance a prime determinant of migration. The neoclassical *macroeconomic* theory of migration rests on the *microeconomic* rationality, whereby individuals make their choices based on the options they perceive as available to them. The decision to move is assessed in terms of individuals' perceived long-term benefits in comparison to long-term costs of relocation. On the other hand, in Todaro's rural-urban migration model, the fundamental rationale for migrating is the perception of a significant wage differential between rural and urban areas. Such is the gist of some of the specific theories Trovato presents and analyses with great dexterity.

If there is one social theory more general in scope than the ones examined beforehand, that can claim universality, it is the *demographic transition theory*. No wonder Trovato accords it particular attention. All nations go through the same three-stage evolution, from a high level equilibrium to a low level equilibrium of vital events – fertility and mortality – passing through a period of transition, whereby the decline in fertility lags behind that of mortality and gives rise to rapid population growth. Furthermore, generally speaking, in each transition experience there is a core of developmental determinants, such as urbanization, education, and non-traditional economic activities. But a closer look at the transition experiences world-wide will also reveal many differences as to the timing, duration of a given phase, and underlying causal mechanisms. Trovato goes on at great length to demonstrate and illustrate these differences.

The author also demonstrates that the demographic transition theory is not limited only to vital rates, fertility, mortality and ensuing population growth, as is generally assumed. It has application also to internal migration, as per Zelinsky's theory of changes in mobility patterns, from the *pre-modern traditional society*, with its low level of residential mobility, to the *early transition society* characterised by massive rural-to-urban relocation, and finally to the *late transition society* where population movement becomes increasingly urban-to-urban. Likewise very well presented and articulated with reference to the broader changes in the socio-economic and technological environment over time is the *epidemiological transition* beginning with the ages of *famine and pestilence* and eventually evolving into the age of *degenerative and man-made diseases*, to the present stage of *delayed chronic and degenerative diseases*. In short, the sweep and the depth of the discussion of demographic transitions in this book are just remarkable.

This reviewer has found little to quarrel with the book's author. He is, however, less sanguine about the so called *second demographic transition*, applicable primarily to the changes in matrimonial behaviours which are taking place in more recent times. For this reviewer there is only one *demographic transi-*

tion that deserves this name - the truly historic event that took place in the evolution of population growth and its related variables, from traditional high to modern low growth equilibrium. It should not be trivialised conferring the meaning of *transition* theory in the sense of its classical formulation to every demographic change, significant as it may be. It is time to recognize that humanity is entering a post-transitional, unprecedented era in the population evolution. It may be called *demographic maturity*, with its two defining moments – one related to *health* and *longevity*; the other to *procreation*. While we live longer and are healthier, our reproduction levels are consistently low, below generational replacement level. The emerging demographic configuration – generational sub-replacement fertility, advanced ageing and potential population implosion – requires a new way of thinking about population and new policy approaches.

I am also somewhat at variance with the author in references to the chapter on Malthus versus Marx population doctrine. It is almost a matter of convention to oppose these two authors whenever population doctrines are discussed. While Malthus can be credited with a coherent population doctrine, that is in no way the case with Marx, in whose writings population issues are only indirectly considered as important. Moreover, all the regimes of Marxian inspiration — most significantly China — have adopted pragmatic approaches to population policy, as evidenced by China's rigorous family planning program instituted in the late 1970s. The same can be said of the former USSR, having shifted from an almost anti-family stand during the early stages of communism, to a distinctly pronatalist policy in the later stages. There is really no symmetry between Malthus and Marx as far as population doctrine is concerned. In fairness to the author, he demonstrates enough discernment to recognise this fact.

On the subject of policies, the book, while making reference to various policies where appropriated for the understanding of a particular demographic variable, also reserves a special chapter for population policies at a more general level, both from a historical perspective and taking into account current population concerns.

Historically family planning has been the dominant policy issue and the major theme at international conferences from Bucharest to Cairo. Opposing views were brought to the fore by Jack Caldwell and scientists from the Population Council, who were strongly endorsing family planning, and others, like Kingsley Davis and Judith Blake, who viewed the policies as naive and a waste of money. The demographers from communist countries, on the other hand, regarded population problems as having to do solely with the longstanding economic inequalities between nations. Population policy since then has invoked human rights and has shifted from family planning to reproductive health. According to Trovato, the pro-family policies in economically advanced societies that were to boost failing fertility on balance have either not been effective at all or had only a slight positive impact. The current major policy

problem discussed in Trovato's book is the socioeconomic divide between rich and poor countries, which has triggered waves of legal and illegal immigrants towards wealthy nations of the West. The author notes that problems do arise on both ends of the migration stream. Poor countries are particularly concerned about the brain drain hampering their economic development. The host countries, on the other hand, while looking for immigrants to counter their dwindling domestic workforce due to several decades of very low or negative rates of natural increase, are also concerned about the challenges associated with integrating immigrants into their societies and the threat they may pose to these countries' national identity. Policies by definition are controversial and at times quite divisive. Trovato manages to strike the right balance, impartially presenting opposing views so that readers and particularly students get a fair understanding of the respective arguments.

This reviewer has nothing but praise for the book, and hardly any critical remarks. As a textbook it is unsurpassed in terms of the sweep of its subject matter and the methodology of presenting the material, as well as for the extensive literature that it brings to bear upon each topic discussed therein. What gives the reading of the book its extra flavor of excitement and freshness is that, in addition to the solid analytical work that went into it, its content is interspersed with many excerpts from distinguished authors, and with anecdotal accounts and oddities spotted in the seemingly coherent world of demographics. But what strikes me most as a distinct feature of the book is the multitude of illustrative graphs, diagrams and narrative tables. That in itself is quite an accomplishment. Many of the graphical illustrations are the author's own renditions. Most descriptions and theories put forward by scholars in the demographic literature tend to be exclusively narrative. Therefore, it must have required a great deal of deep thinking from the book's author to graphically render the essence and the logic of the arguments inherent in the theories he covered in this book. In that sense the book makes an important contribution to the understanding of demography, especially for the beginning student. Finally, it is remarkable that the book has been written by a single author, whereas a team of specialists would normally be called upon to write a book of this size and topical variety.

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