

# In the Frontline or the Backwater? The Nordic Countries and the Global Population Drama

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## Abstract

Backed by a long history of domestic population statistics and analysis, Nordic social science – including demography – could well be in the forefront of international scientific attention to the global drama of population dynamics and development. But this appears not to be the case.

The paper is devoted to a discussion of this state of affairs. Following a brief presentation of the current state of population dynamics, it offers a few examples to show the value of a wider social science approach to the analysis of population/development relations. Dramatic features in current development are contrasted against the relative lack of engagement of demographers and social scientists today.

Finally, a case is made for the strengthening of links between demography and social science in general – indeed for “population studies” as a field of joint enquiry, combining the rigor of demographic methods and techniques with the theoretical substance of the social sciences.

Keywords: demography and social science, population and development, population studies, Nordic countries, world population

## Introduction

I would like to start by making a distinction between two types of demography. The first is sometimes called formal demography, essentially the advancement of the analytical side of population statistics such as vital rates dynamics and age distributions. Accuracy of data is often an unquestioned assumption, and models are an important part of the tools of the trade. One branch of this “technical” demography is the development of methods and techniques where data is incomplete or biased. This is often the case in non-European countries with high degrees of illiteracy and poor schooling. Over the last three decades real advances have been made, which in turn have enabled much more precise estimates of vital rates patterns, trends, and differentials. I have not yet found a commonly accepted term to describe this branch, and propose to call it ‘*poor data demography*’.

The other type of demography is best labelled ‘*population studies*’. Its roots have been described as lying in the classical political economy of Malthus (McNicoll

1992, 4). At the same time, political economists of today can hardly be complimented for the attention they give to demographic dynamics. The term "population studies" is not a bad term, attractive yet vague enough not to limit interdisciplinary creativity. There are a good number of institutes or centers of population studies, including one in Sweden, whose prime distinction appears to be their character of multidisciplinary.

Demography is a peculiar science. As a branch of statistics it is a fairly neutral science of numbers. On the other hand, its objects of study are we human beings, the people of a country or a region. And people are often the objects of politics. Sometimes we can note a temptation among demographers to want to play a role in the political domain. As when economists go to politics, the results are not always only positive. For instance, in the first decades of this century, demography had an embarrassing preoccupation with eugenics and "quality" dimensions of human beings. This came to an end with the European fascism that led to World War II.

Again, once the war was over, the beginnings of decolonization led to a rapidly growing interest in the demography of poor countries. Spurred by a growing aid business, this branch of demography began to take the traits of policy science, serving political programs for fertility reduction in the poor regions of the world.

The interaction with population politics grew very intensive about twenty years ago, when population issues were hotly debated all over the West, the Nordic countries included. Demographers were indeed engaged in the debate, not always on the same side. Since then, as Geoffrey McNicoll has said in a recent review of the field, "calm has returned". He explains what this means:

*"Demographers themselves seem to have reached a rough consensus that trends in vital events are progressing as they should, confirming their expectations and justifying the advice they have proffered to officialdom. In a familiar disciplinary trajectory, their attention is now taken up with technical issues – complex and, for those with that specialized taste, rewarding – leaving the public face of the field one of dull routine. Funding agencies, characteristically attuned to the new and the fashionable, have shifted their sights away from the subject: first to child health, lately to rainforests."* (McNicoll 1992, 3–4).

I propose to discuss this state of affairs. First I would like to present some traits of the current state of population and development, certainly worthy of the term "drama". Second, I will try and give examples of the wider social science approach that is required for an understanding of how this drama came about. Finally, I will present arguments for the strengthening of demography as a social science, and the integration of demography with the other social sciences – indeed the need for 'population studies' as a field of joint enquiry, combining the rigor of demographic methods and techniques with the theoretical substance of the social sciences. The perspective is international, with special attention to regions in the South.

### **The drama of current demographic dynamics and unsustainable development**

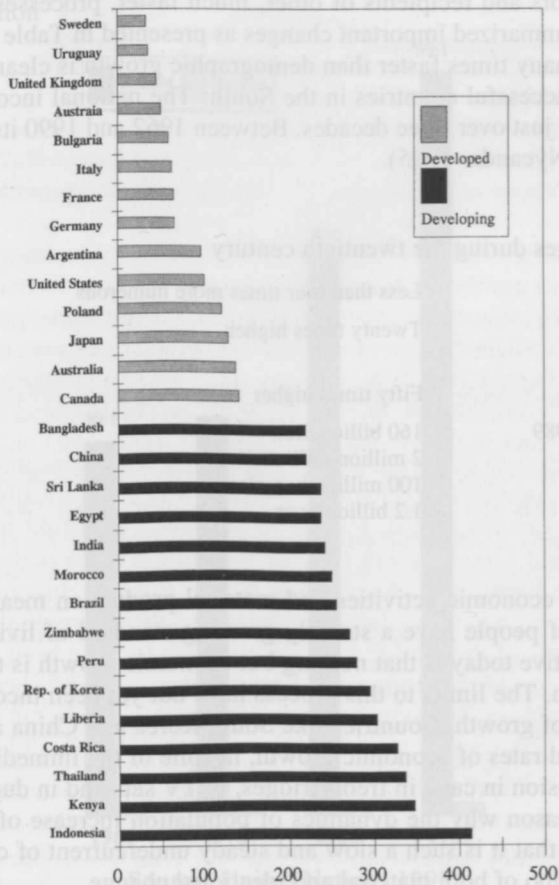
To give a fair presentation of the range of judgments of just how acute the world situation is today would require much more space than is available here. The demography of our own region is sufficiently known not to require presentation, while the recent dramatic declines in fertility and rises in adult mortality in the ex-Soviet Union are increasingly well documented (see e.g. Cornia 1995). What follows is a brief run-down of the demographic dynamics in other parts of the world. They are summarized under four headings:

1. *In terms of fertility*, a significant number of so-called Developing Countries are now concluding the demographic transition. They are found mainly in Latin America and in East and South-East Asia. Fertility is today declining in all regions of the South, including Sub-Saharan Africa. Some of the Arab countries are the most change-resistant. The variation in fertility in the South itself is dramatic, with TFR ranging from less than 2 to close to 8 births per woman. The implications of the high TFR in terms of the long-term increase of national populations are, if we accept current UN projections, nothing less than drastic.

2. *The rapid mortality decline* in many countries of the South in the last decades affects not only child mortality but also the lifespan of the grown-up. The effect is a persistent increase in older people, which – in combination with the trend towards one or two children – leads to emerging problems with aging in countries we saw only as high-fertility regimes (Figure 1). The HIV/AIDS pandemic will aggravate the problems by killing primarily adults in the productive ages.

3. The third heading is *the enormous inter-regional variation in demographic/economic imbalance*. Countries which are more advanced in the demographic transition are also those experiencing a thorough socioeconomic transformation. Those weakest in economic base and public ability to handle their affairs are also those charged with handling the most rapid and longlasting periods of population increase. Thus, any analysis of economic/demographic interrelationships would need to be very area-specific.

Figure 1. Percent increase in elderly population 1990 to 2025



4. Fourth, *the global population distribution will change radically*, in favor of the Asian and African regions. Migration is likely to grow to proportions very different from those of today. But there are no new Americas or Australias to conquer from their indigenous peoples. Seen in relative terms, South-North migration is bound to remain a small fraction of the total, with streams between neighboring countries taking the bulk, tomorrow as today.

It is common to talk about population change in a global perspective, but that level of aggregation yields little of relevance. Where the population drama unfolds is within the nation. In reality we are witnessing many local dramas, most acute for the resource-poor nations. These nations are now in the midst of a process, which can be summarized thus:

- a) Population increase is an inevitable concomitant of their development process. Mortality decline in itself sets in motion a long-term increase in human numbers, which potentially is a real contribution to development – the investments in a pregnancy, a childbirth, feeding and socializing, are no longer so often lost to death but returned in productive labor over an adult span of life.
- b) The prime problem of what never was a drama in European history is the speed of demographic dynamics. First, a historically very rapid mortality decline combined with a persistent high fertility. Second, in more fortunate countries, an equally rapid fertility decline, in the others a continued increase in human numbers at very high rates of growth.

Human numbers increase at a historically unique speed. At the same time, we humans are both actors and recipients of other, much faster, processes of change. Alan Durning (1989) summarized important changes as presented in Table 1. That economic growth could be many times faster than demographic growth is clear from recent data from one of the successful countries in the South: The national income of South Korea grew tenfold in just over three decades. Between 1962 and 1990 its export increased with 30% a year (Nycander 1995).

Table 1. Changes during the twentieth century

Population	Less than four times more numerous
Total value of goods and services	Twenty times higher
Industrial production	Fifty times higher
Income differences 1989 (round figures)	160 billionaires 2 million millionaires 100 million homeless 1.2 billion poor

The growth in economic activities and material production means that a steadily growing number of people have a steadily growing standard of living. The standard economist perspective today is that nothing but economic growth is thinkable, if society should function. The limits to this process have not yet been incorporated into the economic models of growth. Countries like South Korea and China are applauded for their high sustained rates of economic growth, in spite of the immediate reflections in a formidable explosion in cars, in freon-fridges, in TV sets and in dump heaps.

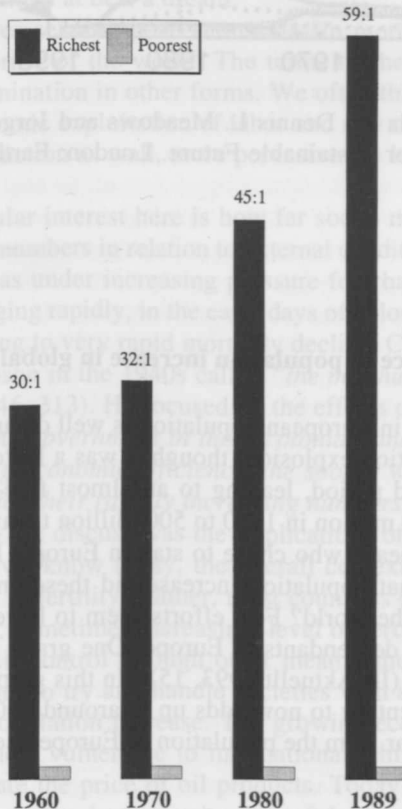
Perhaps one reason why the dynamics of population increase often fails to catch our imagination is that it is such a slow and steady undercurrent of change in relation to the dramatic tempo of both material and ideational change.

It could be a positive drama – a drama with a happy end. However, although the end of the drama is yet to be written, it is increasingly difficult to find convincing arguments against the expectation that the future is pretty gloomy. Twenty years ago, Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal gave his 1975 Nobel Memorial Lecture in Stockholm, devoted entirely to the equality issue in world development. In those days, the South was pressing for a New World Economic Order. Myrdal indeed agreed with such demands. But in his speech he was pessimistic:

*The blunt truth is that without rather radical changes in the consumption patterns in the rich countries, any pious talk about a new world economic order is humbug.* (Myrdal 1975, 273).

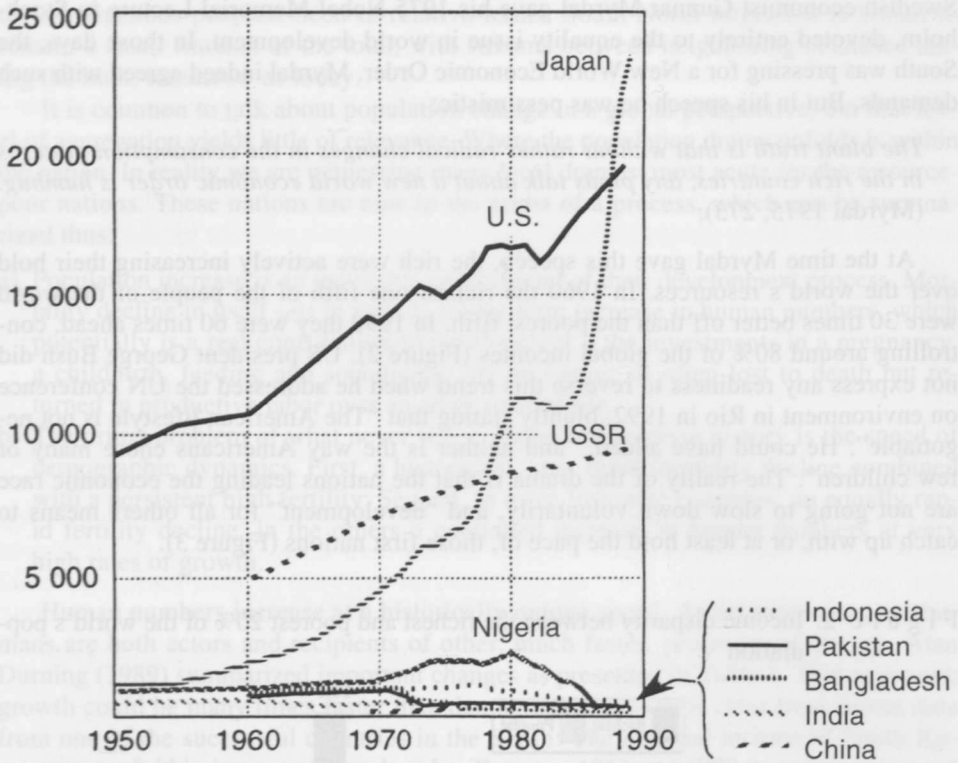
At the time Myrdal gave this speech, the rich were actively increasing their hold over the world's resources. In 1960 the richest one fifth of the people of the world were 30 times better off than the poorest fifth. In 1990 they were 60 times ahead, controlling around 80% of the global incomes (Figure 2). US president George Bush did not express any readiness to reverse this trend when he addressed the UN conference on environment in Rio in 1992, bluntly stating that "The American lifestyle is not negotiable". He could have added, "and neither is the way Americans chose many or few children". The reality of the drama is that the nations leading the economic race are not going to slow down voluntarily, and "development" for all others means to catch up with, or at least hold the pace of, those first nations (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Income disparity between the richest and poorest 20% of the world's population



Source: United Nations 1993

Figure 3. Per capita GNP of selected countries. GNP per person per year in U.S. 1987 dollars



Source: Meadows, Donella H., Dennis L. Meadows and Jorgen Randers. *Beyond the limits – Global Collapse or Sustainable Future*. London: Earthscan Publications Limited, 1992.

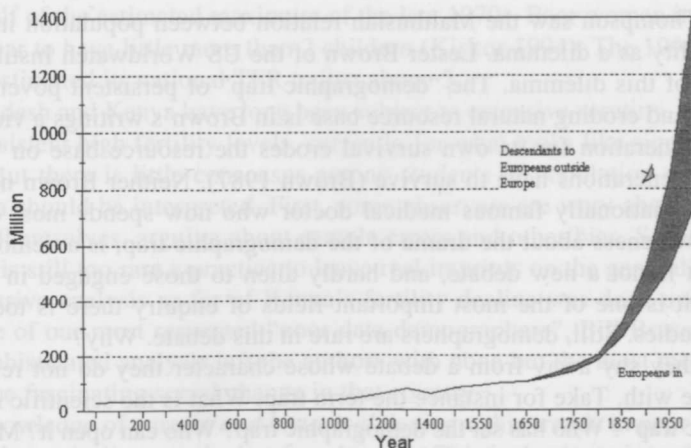
### The historical significance of population increase in global development

The historical growth in European population is well documented. Few of us have chosen to call it a population explosion, though it was a historically unique speed of increase over an extended period, leading to an almost five-fold increase in human numbers from around 110 million in 1750 to 500 million today (Livi-Bacci 1992).

These were the Europeans who chose to stay in Europe. How many have left the region over time, and what population increase did these emigrants of Europe give rise to, in other parts of the world? Few efforts seem to have been made to estimate the current population of descendants to Europe. One graph has been published in a text for Swedish teachers (IF-Aktuellt 1993, 15)<sup>1</sup>. In this graph, the net of all emigration from the mid-17th century to now adds up to around 600 million Europeans and descendants abroad, not far from the population of Europe itself (Figure 4).

<sup>1</sup> The graph is reportedly based on data from McEvedy's and Jones' *Atlas of World Population History*.

Figure 4. The European population explosion



The most significant dimension of such a successful “populating” of vast areas is the social and economic impact of the European settlement expansion. Without European labor to organize the work, the slave trade would never have grown to the proportions it reached, the American plantations would not have been there to exploit them, the Berlin conference to divide Africa would have been unnecessary, the colonization of Asia would have remained at best a dream.

The emigration waves set European economies in motion in a global expansion with effects in every corner of the world. The terms of the expansion were occupation, colonization or domination in other forms. We often think of the European domination in terms of economic exploitation of labor and raw material for Europe. But it included a cultural domination as well, more pervasive the less resistant was the other culture.

One result of particular interest here is how far social mechanisms for regulating reproduction and human numbers in relation to external conditions were disturbed. Family life was in many areas under increasing pressure for change. Morbidity and mortality patterns were changing rapidly, in the early days of colonialism often to the worse, in the latter phases leading to very rapid mortality decline. Colonialism paved the way for what Warren Thompson in the 1940s called “*the malthusian dilemma of all colonialism*” (Thompson 1946, 313). He focused on the effects of rapid mortality decline: “*The more successful any government in these colonial lands is in organizing health service and in increasing economic efficiency, the sooner will these peoples face the problem of how to care for their rapidly increasing numbers...*” (idem., 313).

What Thompson did not discuss was the implications of the colonial intervention for fertility change. As we know today, the overall context of mortality decline did not induce a similar fall in fertility. Rather, most countries passed the decolonization phase with a stable high, sometimes increasing, level of fertility. The colonial powers withdrew, retaining a fair control through other means, and leaving “these peoples” (in Thompson’s language) to try and handle societies with sustained, though entirely unsustainable rates of population increase. The growing economic integration in the world economy made them vulnerable to international whims, such as when the oil producers united to inflate the price of oil products. Today many of “these peoples” are caught in debt and poverty, in the least successful cases possibly trapped in a vicious circle of dependence, poverty and population increase.

## Are there "demographic traps" in development?

Warren Thompson saw the Malthusian relation between population increase and food availability as a dilemma. Lester Brown of the US Worldwatch Institute has his own version of this dilemma. The "demographic trap" of persistent poverty, population increase and eroding natural resource base is in Brown's writings a vicious spiral where each generation for its own survival erodes the resource base on which ever larger future generations have to survive (Brown 1987). Neither Brown nor Maurice King, the internationally famous medical doctor who now spends most of his time raising our awareness about the drama of the demographic trap, is a demographer by profession. It is not a new debate, and hardly alien to those engaged in population studies. But it is one of the most important fields of enquiry there is today, within population studies. Still, demographers are rare in this debate. Why?

Perhaps they shy away from a debate whose character they do not really understand or agree with. Take for instance the term trap. What is the scientific meaning of "demographic trap"? Who has set the demographic trap? Who can open it? Many among us might feel it would make sense to go back to Robert Malthus and his political economy to refine the terms and concepts of this neo-malthusian debate.

Ronald Lee (1986) has made an admirable effort to compare and synthesize the two leading theoretical schools of thought on population/development relations, the Malthusian and the Boserupian. What is of interest for us here is that his analysis presents the possibility of societies getting entrapped in states of equilibrium within one technological regime, from where they have difficulties in making the transition to the next technological regime. His prime case is China, which four or five centuries ago was far ahead of Europe, but only now seems to have started the leap from medium-level agriculture to full industrialization (Idem., 122ff).

Both Lee and his predecessors work on a macro-demographic level, treating society as a single whole. Methodologically, this is problematic. The rapid diffusion of goods as well as ideas to any part of the world makes exogenous influence effectively a part of any local process of change. This is certainly the case for population growth and technological change. Another problem with the demographic part of the analysis comes from the wide variations inside a nation. In most countries with high average levels of fertility, they vary significantly in the wealth-poverty dimension. Is poverty then a condition which creates its own internal driving forces, insulates its members from external change?

In his works on macro-level development issues, political economist Samir Amin (1974; 1976) rejects such a perspective. He argues that many poor countries in the South suffer from a structural distortion he terms "disarticulation", or weak or missing links between economic sectors. The developed sector uses modern techniques, monopolizes capital, and is the source of dynamism in the economy. Underdeveloped sectors use traditional and labor-intensive techniques with low productivity. The different levels of development across such sectors of the economy sharply constrain exchanges between them. Developed sectors are unable to use extensive inputs from the traditional sector, which in turn lacks the purchasing power to provide a significant market for the developed sectors (Stokes and Anderson 1990, 66).

Disarticulation in a national economy restricts the ability of a poor community to effectively satisfy its members' basic needs and move the community out of poverty. If we accept that a significant fertility decline requires an environment supportive of continued mortality decline, structural distortions in the economy may provide a major constraint on the demographic transition, difficult to bridge through the dissemination of new ideas on family size and contraceptive services.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion in this respect of Kenya, see Wortham 1993.



Still, it seems, fertility does change even among poor communities. The latest DHS survey from Bangladesh, from 1993/94, reported fertility levels below 4 children per woman, half of the estimated maximum of the late 1970s. Poor women in Tamil Nadu, India, appear to have little more than 2 children (Kiskor 1994). The 1993 DHS survey in Kenya estimated its national TFR to just above 5.

Bangladesh and Kenya have long been subject to extensive scrutiny, in earlier years for the persistent high fertility levels, currently for what looks like significant fertility declines. But there is little consensus among students of population as to how these phenomena should be interpreted. First, some observers are wary about accepting the figures in themselves, arguing about sample errors and other bias. Second, micro-demography is still too rare a practice to leave real imprints on the general analysis. The most extensive analysis so far of Kenya's fertility decline was done under the direction of one of our most respected "poor data demographers", Bill Brass, whose technically sophisticated analysis left the authors with none but the most meager interpretation of the fascinating social change in that country.<sup>3</sup>

Our knowledge of current *and historical* demographic trends in poor countries has improved dramatically over the last few decades. This is thanks to ingenious ideas and patient work on new methods among those demographers who came to deal with poor data demography. A hard data base has been established, and routines exist for the updating. High on the agenda today should be soft micro-research, using qualitative as well as quantitative data. Demography needs to be better integrated in the curricula of undergraduate studies in social sciences, and demographers need to encourage the infusion of social theory into demographic analysis<sup>4</sup>.

### Population studies and the Nordics

Around 1930 TFR in Sweden fell to below replacement level. The reports about possible long-term consequences had repercussions far beyond the scientific debates. There is no doubt that concerns about the reproduction of the population of Sweden came to influence much government policy to improve the welfare not least of families with children (Åse 1992). This is an interesting example of a government population policy based on what in current language would be called demand theories of fertility change. It might be valuable to investigate whether the official reluctance to liberalize contraceptive services and abortion laws – the Swedes had to fight hard for their reproductive rights! – was linked to the official pro-natalistic orientation.

One of the most influential actors in this arena of Swedish political development in the 1930s was an economist already mentioned above, Gunnar Myrdal. His involvement with demographic dynamics went well beyond Swedish politics – in fact it remained a central theme in much of his later research and writings. He was also early to raise what has become a major problem for demography and population studies; the exchange between science and politics. In an article published in 1964, Myrdal dwelt at some length on the influence of the political environment on the social sciences. His case was development research. He pointed at the dramatic new orienta-

<sup>3</sup> I refer to Brass and Jolly 1993, whose main – though cautious – conclusion was that fertility decline was related to employment in the modern sector. While other studies (including my own – see Egerö and Mburugu 1994) have emphasized the gradual empowerment of women in conjunction with deteriorating economic conditions as central explanatory factors, a recent study concludes, to quote Susan Greenhalgh, that it "is due less to the empowerment of women than to the deterioration of the economy and the struggle between men and women for pieces of the shrinking pie..." (Greenhalgh 1994, 33).

<sup>4</sup> For a further discussion of this theme, see for instance Greenhalgh 1990; 1994.

tion of economics to development issues in colonial countries, where earlier only anthropologists have been encouraged to do their work. Myrdal meant that this was only an illustration of a general situation:

*“For social scientists it is a healthy and useful exercise in self-criticism to try to see in a clear way how much the orientation of our scientific efforts is influenced by the wider society in which we live, and in particular by prevailing political conditions.”* (Myrdal 1964, 36, my translation).

In demography, his warnings have been echoed many times over by clear-sighted observers such as Paul Demeny and Dennis Hodgson (see Egerö ed. 1992). They maintain that postwar demography came to be heavily influenced by the needs and resources of an international lobby group concerned with the high rates of population growth in poor countries. Demeny, who himself works in one of the most influential think-tanks of the population establishment, the US Population Council, has devoted much of his writings to the necessity of reestablishing an independent social science on population, freed from, as he says, “the role of handmaiden in family planning programs” (ibid., 24).

Sweden was not left untouched by the new global order of decolonization and development. The Swedish government was early out to help poor women in the Third World get what had so long been denied their sisters in Sweden. Member of Cabinet Ulla Lindström was the first government representative ever to address the UN general assembly on the necessity of contraceptive services to newly independent countries. Swedish bilateral aid included such services in countries such as Tunisia, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Educationalists and sociologists were enrolled in efforts to increase the efficiency of family planning programs, and evaluations were done of possible demographic effects. Professor Hannes Hyrenius in Gothenburg was responsible for at least one of them. Another Swedish demographer, Erland Hofsten, spent a year in Accra, Ghana, at the UN medium-level institute of demographic training RIPS, and later came to publish extensively on demography in world development. He also became an outspoken critic of the population establishment and policy-oriented demography.

There are, to my mind, two reasons why these early initiatives did not leave any sustained legacy or imprint on Swedish demography<sup>5</sup>. One is the issue Gunnar Myrdal had studied – the influence of the political climate on developments in social science. Many of you may remember the population debates during the 1970s. The first UN conference on population and development was held in Bucharest in 1974. It became the center point of all the ideological contradictions in North/South relations, including that of population increase. Demographers who had – perhaps somewhat innocently – gone along with the Euro-American position found themselves caught in a web of politicking, culminating in the scandals around Indian programs of involuntary mass sterilizations. This shook the whole aid establishment, and may have made young demographers reluctant to enter a field so mined with policy issues.

The Swedish involvement in some of the less acceptable programs for fertility control were increasingly criticized even from within SIDA, to the point where SIDA withdrew its support altogether.

<sup>5</sup> Hannes Hyrenius, professor in statistics, was in 1969 given a chair in demography. He did not leave sufficient institutional strength behind to ensure a continuity in the work, and in 1981 the chair was moved to Stockholm and redirected to demography with a demometric orientation. Erland Hofsten worked at the Swedish Statistical Bureau, where ‘poor data demography’ today is part of the statistical consultancy services to countries receiving Swedish bilateral aid.

The other reason is no less significant. When **PROP**, the Programme on Population and Development, was initiated in Lund in 1990, there were still distinct traces found of the student revolt of 1968. It is reflected in the prevailing dominance of essayistic work and of qualitative empirical methods in sociology, and in a corresponding relative lack of interest in development issues. Demography was part of the basics in undergraduate studies in sociology up to 1968. Today there are few teachers in sociology who would be prepared and capable of giving undergraduate courses in demography or population studies.

One hypothesis is that the events of 1968 and the debate following Bucharest may have contributed to making demography retreat into statistics. It did survive 1968 within human geography and economic history, and has since come to flourish in the framework of historical research. But it never reappeared in the form given to it by demographers such as Erland Hofsten. Is this a characteristic that is particular of demography?

Nathan Keyfitz seems convinced that it is so. Writing in 1984, he compared demography with the other, more expansion-oriented social sciences (quoted in McNicoll (1992, 24): "*Far from being imperialistic, [demography] has withdrawn from its borders and left a no man's land which other disciplines have infiltrated.*" And Massimo Livi-Bacci complained, in a foreword to the same book: "*[O]ur discipline, after several decades of very rapid growth, of increasing specialization and technical sophistication, [runs] the risk of isolating itself, of becoming more a technique than a science...*" (Idem., 26).

The International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, IUSSP, epitomizes in its own history the problems of demography. Before 1940 it was the intellectual wing of the eugenics movement in Europe. From the 1950s, it became closely related to the population establishment, and devoted a substantial part of its scientific work to fertility and population policy matters in poor countries (Egerö and Bernhardt 1978). It was only through a process of internal democratization, which helped scientists from the South to get their voices heard, that this bias gave way to a more autonomous scientific orientation to population/development relations. Today, the conferences and scientific committees of IUSSP attract social scientists of all kinds.

The latest UN conference on population, held last year in Cairo, has been hailed for offering new perspectives on population and development. Certainly it had little of direct interest for the formal demographer. The final document of the conference had very few figures, few "hard facts" about current and future population trends. In the sections on population growth it dealt primarily with what we may call the demand factors of fertility, in particular poverty, mortality, women's subordination and ignorance. In this sense it reflected the growing trend of interdisciplinary work on population and development which I have chosen to call "population studies".

It is symptomatic of the current trends at least in Sweden that no professional from the ranks of demography was linked to the Swedish preparations before Cairo. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs commissioned two publications, one on the position of women in Sweden over the last century, the other on the growth of counseling and services in the area of sexual relations and fertility regulation. SIDA in its turn commissioned one study on population policies, another on the social dimensions of fertility decline. Still another study was made on human rights and reproductive rights. This broader social science orientation to the population/development issues is a new orientation which characterizes SIDA's new policy formulations for Swedish development cooperation in the future.

Where did this reorientation in the aid business originate? The international movement in this direction has many intellectual sources. We may include among them the emergence of the so-called revisionist school on population led by Julian Simon and others, which has forced a sharpening of analysis and theory. Another source may be

called the developmentalist trend – “development is the best pill” – which got a good start with the 1974 Bucharest conference and encouraged more broad-based scientific approaches. Still another is the international feminist movement which emerged in strength in the preparations to the Cairo conference.

Lastly, we may mention the environment movement, part of which prefers to link environmental deterioration to growth in human numbers. Under pressure to “explain” the relation between population increase and environmental change, the serious scientist will soon find that multidisciplinary approaches in the direction of political economy are necessary to advance our understanding of population/environment interactions.

Sadly enough, there are few signs of this broadening of the area of population studies in the Nordic countries. The Nordic demographers who devote their work to countries in the South are indeed few and far between. The knowledge of appropriate methods – indirect methods – is sparse and no regular courses exist in the Nordic countries<sup>6</sup>. Social scientists with an inclination towards population studies *and* South/North relations are equally rare.

The pressures on SIDA and the Swedish government to redefine the population/development issue in line with other criteria for development cooperation – justice, democracy, gender, poverty reduction, etc. – do not come from the demographic profession, nor from social scientists engaged in population studies, in Sweden. Rather, they emanate from Scandinavian and international movements and pressure groups, whose message is well received by our development bureaucrats, and who even get financial support to carry it around.

Where then are the demographers? Some answers are provided by a just concluded excellent review of Swedish demography, made by a working group chaired by professor Rolf Ohlsson (*Demografin i Sverige* 1994). Among its main observations are the following:

- First, that demography basically is well and alive. Scientists engaged in demography and related issues are active in a variety of disciplines.
- Second, that there is today a broad interest in population issues among social scientists, who often feel that their own competence is insufficient.
- Third, that the courses offered today are insufficient to satisfy the needs of research
- Fourth, and indeed paradoxical in the light of the above: that demography still lacks a defined status within the university hierarchy in Sweden. The only chair that exists in demography is specialized in formal demography – and linked to the department of sociology, University of Stockholm. Demography is not recognized as a discipline. Its continuity depends on the involvement and efforts of individual people or groups.

The conclusions of the working group are well taken: create one more chair in demography with a social science orientation, plus some posts on lower levels. This would enable students from various other disciplines to get the education they need, and gradually integrate elements of demography with their own major discipline. A fertile soil from which population studies would grow.

But even if the government agrees to fund the proposal, there is still a long way to go. Initiated by the Swedish review, new steps need to be taken towards the revitalization of demography as a social science. Population studies has, in the experience of PROP over the last five years, the potential to become the uniting framework of different disciplines in social science, and could provide research themes of such relevance as to attract students into an interdisciplinary framework.

<sup>6</sup> One course has recently been started at the University of Helsinki, under the direction of professor Veijo Notkola.

A few years ago, a seminar was held at the University of Uppsala under the auspices of U-Forum and the unit of development studies (avdelningen för u-landsfrågor). The purpose was to debate interdisciplinary exchange, or perhaps multidisciplinary cooperation. In order to get beyond the level of general statements at the meeting, all invited were requested to present the views of their discipline on "population issues". Apparently, the exercise went well. A multidisciplinary steering group is now preparing a major conference for the Fall of 1995, called "Twice Humanity".

This initiative comes from social sciences, health sciences, most likely also agricultural sciences. It shows the interest in testing that elusive term "population" in a development context, identify its relevance and attract students of very different origins to incorporate the temporal and spatial dynamics it stands for, in their own work.

Even if demographers today are homeless, there is a need not only to build their own house, but also to leave the relative comfort among immediate colleagues and expand into the social sciences. They need to be present when the Uppsala colleagues want to discuss development research with a population dimension. They need to become part of the "soft" social science whose micro-studies in poor countries too often lack in attention to the steady undercurrent of population increase. They need to sit in with development aiders to make sure that the latter relate to the phenomena of migration and reproduction whether in rural or urban development.

A way to start would be that the Swedish colleagues who participated in the review already mentioned invite interested colleagues from other social sciences to debate and formulate a common program for population studies. A good starting point might be to establish contacts with the organizers of the Uppsala conference, and add a day for informal interdisciplinary exchange. Similar work could be done in the other Nordic countries.

It could be argued, and indeed supported by recent experiences of demographers as policy scientists, that demographic dynamics is too serious a theme to be left with demographers. The undercurrent of population change plays a role in the Rwandan crisis and the war in Bosnia. It affects the balance of forces in South Africa, it has an explosive potential in the Israel/Palestine conflict. It is a sensitive issue in the democratization process in other countries. Local struggles over resources are sharpened by differential demographic dynamics.

We are all participants in a dramatic era of human history. We are, reluctantly or not, part of the development studies tradition in social science, firmly placed there by Malthus himself. The demographers have the instruments not only to trace our own history, but also – more than most other sciences – to outline future changes in the basic dimension of human numbers. The social scientists have a wealth of social theory through which to better understand the functionings of human society, and thereby also to identify the means of social change. Let us join hands and get down to work.

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