REFLECTIONS ON 'REPLACEMENT MIGRATION'

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'With their birth rates low enough for long enough, a number of countries, mostly European, face the likelihood of a lengthy period of decreasing population'. A recent UN report calculates the migrant intake required to hold their populations constant — what it terms replacement migration. The implication, perhaps unintended, is that such constancy should be a policy objective with immigration the principal instrument. Privileging demography in this way, however, is hard to defend. There are social limits to immigration in terms of the acceptable proportion of migrants among total recruits to a society (births plus migrants) which may come into play well short of full replacement. The relevant economic issues in considering migration have more to do with trade pacts and human capital than with domestic market size and human numbers. And environmental quality might benefit from a smaller population. For many countries migration is likely to be only a small part of the complex array of responses to persistent low fertility.

Most industrialized countries today are approaching a situation in which they will have fewer births than deaths — and hence, in the absence of immigration, a decreasing population size. In these societies it is rare for a family to have more than two children and many have only one; a fifth or more of women are set to remain childless; and the large cohorts of parents born during the post-World War II baby boom are being replaced by the slimmer cohorts born in the last decades of the twentieth century. Some developing countries are approaching a similar demographic situation, though delayed by a decade or two.

The arithmetic is straightforward. If women on average have 1.5 children (about the present figure for the European Union), which is 25 per cent below the two-child average needed for population 'replacement' in conditions of low mortality, then the next generation of parents will be smaller by 25 per cent. The effect on overall population size will be delayed where there is a large current generation of parents (from earlier high fertility), but ultimately it will show through.

Fertility prediction, of course, is not a science. Western-world fertility was also low in the 1930s. There were expectations at that time too of falling populations, with talk of the 'twilight of parenthood'. But then came that unanticipated upturn in births, banishing the decline scenario for several decades. Despite this experience, few observers are predicting another baby boom in today's circumstances. This time the population declines may actually take place.

In the current United Nations medium-variant projections, usually taken as the standard forecasts for world population, a few countries are already shown with negative growth rates over the next ten years: Russia, a number of Eastern European countries, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Eurostat data would add Germany, Sweden, Greece and Austria. In the decades following, more widespread and deeper declines set in. Over the half-century 2000 to 2050, within the lifetimes of today's young adults, Italy, for instance, is forecast to drop in size from 57 million to 41, Spain from 40 to 30, Germany from 82 to 73, Japan from 127 to 105. These numbers assume some recovery in fertility, though to a level still slightly below a two-child average. The UN's *low-variant*

projections, with no such recovery, give even larger falls — Germany, for instance, dropping to 65 million rather than to 73, Japan to 92 million rather than to 105. (The UN projections also assume some immigration, which, being policy driven, is even more hazardous to predict than fertility. For Europe and Japan, however, the envisaged numbers are small and the effect on the total population figures can be ignored.)

These population declines are concentrated at the younger ages. Life spans are continuing to rise, and the baby boom cohorts, not much thinned by mortality, will stay around for many more years to boost the numbers of the elderly. It is the population at school and workforce ages that will drop in numbers. The result is a steady rise in the average age of the population.

So what should be done? Perhaps nothing: we can learn to live with declining numbers — indeed, we might hardly notice the fact, aside from some school closings. Incentives for early retirement would need to be reversed and pay-as-you-go pension plans replaced with funded schemes. In the longer run we would hope that fertility moved back nearer to a two-child average. Or we can search for social policies that promote childbearing — making paid work more compatible with childraising, increasing child allowances or tax concessions, and so forth. Or, since arithmetically a shortage of births can be made up from elsewhere, we can admit more migrants.

This last response option is the subject of a recent publication of the United Nations Population Division: *Replacement Migration: Is It a Solution to Declining and Ageing Populations?*[1] What the UN has done, besides putting the term replacement migration into circulation, is to answer three hypothetical questions for a selection of countries and regions. How many migrants are needed to prevent a decline in total population? How many are needed to maintain a constant population in the age group 15-65, the conventional workforce ages? And how many are required to maintain a constant old-age dependency ratio (the ratio of persons aged over 65 to those at workforce ages)?

Innocuous, it might seem: the result of some simple calculations based on assumptions about future birth and death rates and the age distribution of migrants. But for societies unused to large scale immigration — indeed, more used to dealing with emigration — the numbers at first sight are startling. Take the case of the European Union with its current membership of 15 and population at the beginning of 2000 of 376 million. During the next 50 years, under the UN's fairly optimistic fertility assumptions, it would take 47 million immigrants to hold the EU population constant, and 80 million to sustain the workforce-aged population.

Converted to annual numbers, these figures lose something of their drama. For the next few decades, they are equivalent to 600,000 and 1.3 million immigrants per year, respectively, for stability of population and labour force. According to Eurostat estimates, the EU population grew by 989,000 in 1999 — 278,000 from natural increase, 711,000 from net migration. Hence continuation of close to the current rate of immigration would make for population constancy; labour force constancy would call for a near doubling of the intake. Given the strong feelings aroused by the present level of immigration in various EU states, however, a replacement-migration debate that proposed the long-term continuation of that level as a minimum option would likely be fierce, the more so if (as is entirely

possible) fertility drops further.

The third question in the UN report, as might be guessed, produces farfetched answers. Unlike those entering the population by birth, migrants can and typically do come at all ages, and so their impact on the population's age distribution is muted. You need a very large and steadily increasing number of them to have much effect on population ageing — since migrants too get old and since migrant fertility soon comes to resemble that of the native born. To prevent a rise in the old-age dependency ratio, the EU would need an average annual intake of 13 million (youngish) migrants over the next half century; Japan would need 10 million. Such numbers produce massive overall population growth: a threefold increase over 2000-2050 in the EU, sixfold in Japan.[2]

The UN report was launched last April with a degree of fanfare unusual for as sober an agency as the Population Division and caused more of a stir than the Division's publications usually do. What appeared newsworthy was not so much the idea that a demographic deficit was emerging — that was hardly news — but that the UN seemed to be advocating a solution for it: mass migration. Moreover, it had precise calculations of the response required. (Not surprisingly, press discussion of the report focussed on the third question.) In the magazine *India Abroad*, an article on the topic was headlined *Europe needs more migrants: U.N. report*. In his institute's newsletter, Immanuel Wallerstein, the pioneer world-order theorist, interpreted the gist of the UN report as follows:

> The wealthy countries must choose between allowing the standard of living of their retired-age persons (an ever-growing percentage of the whole) to go down considerably OR permitting what will probably seem at first an incredibly high number of annual migrants from the poor countries.

At a recent EU ministerial meeting the French Interior Minister presented a document calling for 50-75 million immigrants to the EU by 2050 — numbers that echo the UN's replacement-migration range — and drawing the implication that Europe must become an area of *métissage* (interbreeding).[3]

Demographers are used to trying to disguise predictive ambition by claiming that they are merely doing arithmetic — working out the implications of some assumptions about trends in birth and death rates. That is, until something they project is borne out, at which time they happily accept plaudits for their prescience. Users of such exercises know better all along: 'projections' they routinely read as predictions. The present case is appears somewhat analogous in the domain of policy: though the UN demographers deny any intent to advise, 'replacement migration' is widely read by others as a proposed population policy for low fertility countries. And if, as some expect, actual fertility stays well below the UN forecasts, such a proposal could become truly radical.[4]

What then to make of it? Population policy is a sensitive subject in liberal democracies, threatening on the one hand to intrude on essentially private individual and family decisions and on the other to release unwelcome nativist and xenophobic sentiments. Yet the emerging demographic conditions will increasingly demand greater and more systematic attention to population issues. An annoyed or even a bemused response to the UN report may itself be a useful spur to that debate. The following comments on replacement migration look at its implications for several major ingredients

of future well-being. They are not directed especially to the Australian situation, where zero natural increase is still some way off (more than 30 years away, according to the ABS's latest projections), but many of the points do apply here to some extent.

SOCIAL LIMITS TO MIGRATION

The 'replacement' in replacement migration is of births by immigrants, the implicit assumption being that recruitment to a population by immigration is an equivalent process to recruitment by birth. In an individualistic economic calculus, the difference may indeed be immaterial — or, with a selective admissions policy, even in migration's favour, since it is the parents or taxpayers of other countries who have borne the costs of the migrants' education. But for the society rather than for the economy, the two modes of entry have very different implications.

A society virtually by definition needs to sustain its organisation and cultural identity over time with a steadily changing membership. At any time most of its members see themselves as stakeholders in it, concerned that it have a future that is recognisably — that is, culturally and institutionally — an extension of the present. The sources of societal continuity lie in the memories and expectations of individuals, held over their lives and transmitted to new members; in social institutions and in the symbols accorded value and public recognition; and in the natural and built environment people inhabit. Drawing on these sources, a society can maintain its sense of identity in the face of fairly rapid membership turnover. For ordinary generational turnover through death and birth, this maintenance is accomplished through the familiar processes of socialisation and acculturation of youth — within the family, through the school system, and through the web of peer-group and media influence. Members of successive generations absorb a sense of place and a knowledge of their society. The direct agency of parents may have weakened, but these channels together preserve a distinctive, though of course far from immutable, cultural identity. Population turnover by migration, simply because on average migrants are necessarily much less exposed to these processes, has potentially greater effects on a society's identity. For society, we can in most respects also read nation.

Leaving economic issues to one side, most people would agree that a nation benefits from a steady leavening with migrants. They make for a less parochial and more cosmopolitan outlook — famously, a more varied cuisine — and may promote a healthy measure of self-criticism. At the same time this broadening probably stops short of any fundamental challenge to cultural assumptions — since over time, irrespective of official stances on assimilation, migrants, or their children, gradually come to identify with the society they live in: its history, including the story of its enrichment by migration, becomes in a sense their own. But at what range on an increasing scale of immigration do diminishing and eventually negative returns set in? To answer never, or to dismiss the question as ill-posed, is to put scant value on the nation's own cultural inheritance — to regard the struggles and achievements of past generations of members as if they were sunk costs, detached from the present.

In liberal societies a very rough index of migrant influence is the proportion foreign born. (Rough, because it lumps long-ago entrants with new arrivals;

perceptions of influence might be better captured by the flow measure of recent migrants as a proportion of total recent recruits.) Australia, at 23.6 per cent foreign-born in 1999, ranks high indeed in international terms. Comparative data for OECD countries in 1990 are shown in Table 1. Some non-OECD countries have higher proportions of migrants than Australia, but most are Middle Eastern states with large numbers of foreign workers not on any citizenship track or microstates like Liechtenstein. Another special case is Israel (31 per cent in 1990). The United States in the 1990s has edged upwards, and is now about 10 per cent foreign-born; the highest it reached in the twentieth century was 15 per cent in 1910. Canada's foreign born was around 22 per cent over 1910-30 but has been near a 15 per cent level since 1950 — until the 1990s, when it too began to trend upwards.

There is no rule of thumb that sets limits of social acceptability in proportions foreign-born in a population or among its new members. The rhetoric of multiculturalism notwithstanding, that acceptability would seem to depend on the extent of cultural similarities and the working of the melting pot. Both factors have had a role in the Australian case to make the exceptionally high intake possible, if not without an undercurrent of disgruntlement: substantial numbers of New Zealanders, Britons, and others needing little 'melting', and rapid assimilation of most migrant groups (into a more pluralist society) has occurred, as reflected by intermarriage rates and dramatic second-generation declines in languages other than English spoken in the home. In Switzerland, the foreign-born proportion of the population, which has now risen to over 19 per cent, a remarkable figure for Europe, is a more politically charged issue, even though most of Switzerland's migrants are from Italy and other EU countries. Swiss anti-immigrant sentiment is focussed on refugees from former Yugoslavia, now 4.5 per cent of the population, and from developing countries. (The latest of a series of ballot initiatives in Switzerland aimed at curtailing immigration, in September 2000, sought but failed to cap the foreign-born proportion at 18 per cent.) Political parties with strong anti-immigrant platforms play a role in a number of EU states, even with proport-

Table 1: Proportion foreign-born, OECD countries of over one million population, 1990

Country	Per cent foreign-born
Australia	23.4
Switzerland	16.0
Canada	15.5
New Zealand	15.5
France	10.4
Ireland	9.3
Belgium	9.0
Sweden	8.9
United States	7.9
Netherlands	7.8
United Kingdom	6.5
Germany	6.4
Austria	5.8
Norway	4.4
Denmark	4.1
Poland	3.6
Greece	3.2
Italy	2.7
Korea, Rep.	2.1
Turkey	2.0
Spain	1.8
Portugal	1.4
Finland	1.2
Japan	0.7
Mexico	0.4
Hungary	0.3

Note: No data available for Czech Republic
Source: UN Population Division, Series A, no. 154, 1996

ions of foreign-born less than half Switzerland's.

At any given level of fertility tolerance of high immigration is likely to be greater if there is a past history of immigration, as in the so-called settler societies where expectations of social diversity have been long-established and where a large fraction of the native-born are at most a few generations removed from their own immigrant ancestry. Tolerance may also be a reflection of indifference, whether flowing from liberal individualism (Margaret Thatcher's 'there is no such thing as society') or from the shift to 'post-materialist' cultural values.

Simple averages of proportions foreign-born can be a deceptive indicator of the demographic reality. Migrants move principally to where employment is most available and to where they can find support networks of compatriots. This tends to be in the larger metropolitan areas. Many big cities thus have very substantial foreign-born populations. US census data for 1990 put New York at 28 per cent, Los Angeles at 38 per cent — both likely to be underestimates. In the 1996 Australian census, Sydney was 32 per cent, Melbourne 30 per cent. Concentrating immigrants into particular regions also separates off the economics and politics of the subject, tending to make immigration a local rather than national issue — and at the same time giving migrant voters a potentially important voice.

ECONOMICS OF POPULATION DECLINE: NUMBERS AND SKILLS

Behind many of the worries about a fuure of declining population numbers is the assumption that the economy would suffer. This was a view strongly held by the classical economists, and by the mercantilists before them. It remains the conventional wisdom today. As the arguments are unpacked, however, they seem to lose force.[5] Consider the three main propositions, to do with size, age distribution, and 'dynamism'.

Size

Greater population size can bring with it economies of scale; population decline might be supposed to give them up. However, for the rates of decline we are typically concerned with, and the time frame of most political calculation (for which a generation is the very long-term), the effects would seem inconsequential. Even that staple of populationists, the envisaged benefits of immigration to the housing industry, hardly applies when the issue is filling the existing housing stock, not building more. Scale economies in provision of infrastructure are well-tested, but these have as much to do with population distribution and settlement densities as with total population size.

Redistribution will occur whatever is happening to overall population size. Countries routinely have had to accept the consequences of *local* population changes of greater relative magnitude than those now being projected for the national level — notably, the evisceration of towns and villages by the departure of the young in search of better opportunities in the cities. The economic case for trying to stem this outflow or promote a reverse flow — local replacement migration — is hard to sustain, and policies to do so are either expensive, (as with subsidies to invest or settle in remote areas) or inadmissibly coercive (like China's rustication policy of the 1960s.

A much easier way to retain, as it is to achieve, the gains associated with population size is through economic

alliance among states. Establishment of a freetrade area encompassing one or more comparable economies is in many respects a de facto population enlargement for each member state, without the complications of actual relocation. If trade is too fragile a base to rely on (at risk from resurgent economic nationalism), fuller economic integration and stronger institutional safeguards can be designed.

Consider, for instance, the Closer Economic Relations treaty between Australia and New Zealand. From a population standpoint this treaty, aimed at creating a single trans-Tasman economy, represents for Australia the demographic equivalent of 30 or more years of immigration — moreover, with migrants who are English-speaking, well-equipped with capital and supporting infrastructure, and — in accord with the fond hopes of successive Australian governments but unlike actual migrants to Australia — decentralised well away from the main east coast cities.[6]

On a vastly greater scale, the EU has established a single labour and consumer market across its member states, garnering the benefits of size with fairly limited actual relocation of labour. Should it find advantage in a still larger domestic market, there is no shortage of new candidates for membership. Whether relocation would remain within socially acceptable limits might then become a political issue. Thus far, the economic differentials across the EU for the most part have not been big enough to counteract the mobility impediments of culture and language. However, they may well be big enough in an expanded EU, unleashing large-scale East-West labour migration — a prospect worrying to many in the West whether or not it is thought of as replacement migration. In the North American case, fears of an even higher level of Mexican migration into the US and Canada than occurs at present (and added migration from other Latin American countries, if NAFTA expands southwards) have been a factor in limiting economic alliance to a free-trade agreement rather than moving towards full-fledged integration as a common market: NAFTA's richer participants are not about to relinquish formal control over entry of people.

Age distribution

A stationary (persistently ZPG) population is an elderly population; a declining one is even older. With a life expectancy in the high 70s, a zero-growth population, after age-distribution fluctuations have played out, would be about one-quarter over 60 years of age; with a one per cent annual rate of decline, the population would be one-third over 60. Demographic decrepitude, many would feel, surely makes for economic stagnation: resistance to new ideas, slow turnover of personnel, stolidity and stasis.

This, nonetheless, is the demographic world of the future. As the UN calculations demonstrate, the immigration it would take to halt population ageing, maintaining current levels of old-age dependency, are far beyond what any society could accept. And mere replacement migration, maintaining population size, does little to retard ageing (except for an initial boost from changing from a low to a high rate of inflow). The intuition that it would do so is resilient, but it is not borne out by the arithmetic.

Fortunately, the analogy of an ageing society with an ageing human body, although widely taken for granted, is flawed. Many of the apparent parallels supporting the stereotype of a stagnant society are consequences of lingering notions that economic activity is to do

with manual labour, of customary but by no means unchangeable practices such as early retirement and the organizing of education as a pre-labour force activity, and of institutional and fiscal designs carried over from a higher-mortality past.[7]

Dynamism

If maintaining size within national borders is often overrated and halting population ageing is infeasible, what remains of an economic case for replacement migration? One argument, in particular. Many of the claims about the economic benefits of immigration amount, at base, to an assertion that migrants bring 'dynamism', shaking up a somnolent or sclerotic economy. This was the justification for a high migrant intake to Australia made in the 1988 FitzGerald Report and, in passing, in the 1989 Garnaut Report. Somnolence and sclerosis could be seen as outcomes, in Australia and elsewhere, of an uncompetitive work culture and lifestyle and entrenched 'distributional coalitions' (Mancur Olson's term for groups that have positioned themselves politically to make non-market claims on the social product).[8] An ageing population, settled in its ways, might be particularly prone to such conditions. Migration, even if doing little on the ageing front, at least introduces new blood.

The migrant-dynamism thesis is more an expression of faith and hope than of evidence. There may be a link working through labour-market deregulation, although it is not one the proponents are inclined to advertise.[9] The more defensible part of the thesis comes from considering skills and entrepreneurial abilities rather than mere numbers. In calculations about replacement migration, people are taken to be homogeneous apart from their age. That is admirably nondiscriminatory (ageism excepted), but it does not describe how major receiving countries endeavour to choose migrants. Such countries favour the young and educated, they screen for good health, and they seek good prospects for success in the labour market and for assimilation into the society. In other words, they try to select for human capital and have an eye for effects on social capital. Refugee migration would be an exception, but is rarely likely to be more than a small proportion of the total intake — kept relatively small precisely because it is judged less likely to pass muster on those criteria.[10]

Most rich countries today, and those aspiring to be so, are comparatively open to immigration at the top end of the skill range. The Silicon Valley example hovers over all of them, part of its lesson being seen as the need to recruit talent worldwide. They take note of the Indian software engineers in the Californian and Massachusetts IT sectors and the foreign-born PhDs rife in the new biotechnology enclaves. Recruitment of foreign students, sometimes defended as a pure export of services, is one source of such talent, provided there is a liberal policy in place for students to gain permanent residence.[11]

But migration of the highly skilled is really a different issue from the demography of mere warm bodies, the subject of the replacement migration debate. Migrant numbers do not have to be large to be economically important: the supply of potential innovators is proportional not to population, as some have held, but to mobilized human capital — capital, moreover, that must be supplied with the needed complementary factors (by no means a straightforward task: look at the hemorrhaging of talent

from present day Russia and Eastern Europe). Most low-fertility countries could not absorb skilled migrants in anything close to the numbers projected in the replacement-migration calculations, even if they could attract them.

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES AND AMENITY

Replacement migration calls for a country to maintain its population at its present size, nearly always the highest level it has reached. Why constancy, and if constant why at that maximum? To use a familiar bath metaphor, if the migration tap can be adjusted to compensate for a leaky plug, why keep the bath filled so deep, perhaps near the brim? That level was not planned: it was the fortuitous outcome of economic and cultural change — influencing the offsetting effects of fewer births and greater longevity. If it deliberated on the matter, a country may conclude that it would prefer having less congestion and more environmental amenity — and more energy flux left to the rest of nature. Mightn't a moderate population decline provide at last an opportunity to regain lost environmental conditions?

Ecologists keep reminding us of natural resource constraints on economic and demographic growth. Crude efforts to find the world's 'population supporting capacity' at specified standards of living have given way to detailed calculations of each country's 'ecological footprint' — the estimated total area needed to supply the environmental resources for life as it is currently being lived. For many countries, in particular for most rich countries, the footprint has an area larger than their own territory.[12]

China presents an instance in which consideration of long-run sustainable resource use was held to argue for a cutback in population numbers. When China first adopted its one-child policy in the late 1970s, its demographic planners of the time, applied mathematicians steeped in optimal control theory, had calculated a population trajectory that would never exceed 1.2 billion and in the long run would drop back to reach a stationary size of 700 million — the figure considered to be sustainable with the country's natural resource base.[13] Such calculations, of course, are highly contingent on assumptions about technology and substitutability, and subject to many uncertainties about the requirements for, and even the definition of, sustainability.

What is a *desirable* population size from an environmental perspective is quite different from — and presumably well below — what might be estimated as a country's population supporting capacity. The casual equating of the two, a widespread practice, is puzzling. It perhaps derives from an animal husbandry analogy, where profit-maximisers need to seek the optimal carrying capacity of a landholding. There are echoes too of the goldmining era, where claims not only have to be staked but have to be worked, where under-exploitation is an invitation to claim-jumpers and other interlopers. A similar argument even extends to sub-national regions: in direct contradiction to the *concentration* of population that development brings about, there is a feeling that open spaces need to be filled. In Australia this has been a rationale for the series of ill-fated settlement schemes like the one that sought to establish demobbed soldiers as yeoman farmers in the Mallee, and later settlers, in a still more far-fetched plan, in the Ord River region. The impetus is to even things out, to spread

people over the landscape. Hence the worry people feel about the emptying out of Australia's countryside, of our proclivity for living near the coast. It offends not lifestyle, or economics, but physics.

The pure environmentalist case was put 150 years ago in the famous chapter on the stationary state in John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*. Asserting that the populous nations had already reached densities that yielded 'in the greatest degree, all the advantages both of co-operation and of social intercourse', he put forward the claims for nature:

> Nor is there much satisfaction in contemplating the world with nothing left to the spontaneous activity of nature; with every rood of land brought into cultivation, which is capable of growing food for human beings; every flowery waste or natural pasture ploughed up, all quadrupeds or birds which are not domesticated for man's use exterminated as his rivals for food, every hedgerow or superfluous tree rooted out, and scarcely a place left where a wild shrub or flower could grow without being eradicated as a weed in the name of improved agriculture.[14]

Reflecting such a sentiment, EU rural policy now increasingly sees farmers as custodians of a rustic environment, even if their hedgerows have been largely uprooted. That is one of the justifications offered for continued high agricultural subsidies. Even with those subsidies, swathes of farmland have been reverting to forest.

The environment that is immediately encountered by nearly all people in the developed countries (and by close to half of those in the developing countries) is urban. Increasing congestion and diminished amenity are the common experience of residents as cities grow, albeit an outcome contributed to by poor planning and inadequate investment. The cessation of urban population growth, through low fertility and the drying up of the potential migrant sources in rural areas and small towns, many would see as offering a significant environmental gain — a prospect that is all too distant for most poor countries. Actual falls in city populations may be less good for urban amenity. In many circumstances an expanding immigrant presence invigorates decaying neighbourhoods and adds to the attractions of urban living.

MIGRATION POLICY AS A RESPONSE TO LOW FERTILITY

The regionally staggered sequence of birth rate declines around the world, roughly linked to the timing of social and economic modernisation, has produced today's situation of sharply contrasting population growth rates and age distributions. The countries in the forefront of this demographic transformation, now with ultra-low fertility, face a deficit of young people, burgeoning old-age dependency, and actual depopulation. The issue under discussion is what role should immigration play in a policy response.

Open borders would be one extreme, advocated by the occasional libertarian or redistributionist far from the political mainstream in one or other direction.[15] At the other extreme would be a policy of demographic autarky. The human right to emigrate (stated in article 13 of the Universal Declaration) has no associated right to immigrate. Total exclusion of migrants, except for the special case of refugees, is a sovereign right of a state. The most important case of a rich low-fertility country pursuing a policy close to this has been Japan. Japan's economy may need migrants but, for

essentially cultural reasons, its society does not want them. As foreign workers, admitted on short-term visas or slipping through undocumented, become familiar and indispensable elements of the labour force, a progressive relaxation of this exclusionary policy is probable, even if award of actual citizenship remains sparing. But there is no likelihood that immigrant numbers would approach the UN's replacement levels.

Japan is sometimes belaboured for its stance on immigration, as if cultural reproduction were not a defensible social value. In a stable, secure world, the economic counterarguments would themselves be weak: migration is inherently a clumsy way of equilibrating imbalances in the international economy. As its economy matured and its population aged, a country could safely become a rentier state, boosting its domestic product, and in particular paying its pensions, with the income from its international investments. The more youthful countries at the receiving end would no doubt prefer the inflow of capital to an outflow of labour. In the world as it is, however, that may be less a prudent portfolio diversification by an ageing society of retirees than a hostage to fortune.

Between near autarky and open slather lie the migration policies of most of the low-fertility Western democracies. They accept immigration as economically useful and, given the pressures for entry, inevitable. They are intent to preserve their cultural identities, but relaxed (in varying degrees) about multiculturalism at the fringes. Social and therefore political acceptability limits the rate of intake — and governs the stringency of measures employed to limit the undocumented inflow. If (as assumed in the UN medium-variant projections for some of these countries — France, for example) fertility recovers to a level little below a two-child average, say 1.8 or 1.9 children per woman, the future rate of natural decrease will be modest. Population stability, if that is desired, is then achievable through migration at little political cost. The question might be, why *should* it be desired other than in the very long term: constancy of population numbers may not seem a compelling social objective.

For countries with ultra-low fertility — nearer one child than two — the demographic future can hardly escape becoming a major social and political issue. This looks to be the case for Italy, Spain, and Germany, and quite possibly an expanding array of other countries. With present attitudes in most of them, the acceptability constraint would be unlikely to allow for anything close to replacement-level migration. Unless those attitudes changed, or were devalued in the political calculus, a radical population decline would set in. The accompanying social dynamics can only be guessed, but a plausible eventuality would be that over time the migrant inflow would edge upwards and finally tip the political balance towards acceptance of a replacement scenario. There would also be political dynamics in play, perhaps making for more EU-style amalgamations with diminished roles for national-level decision making.

Whatever those changes in structure, the premise that very low fertility is a permanent condition would certainly also be challenged. Although pronatalist policies have not thus far proven more than marginally effective, as awareness of the societal need for children intensifies parenthood may become more socially valued — and rewarded. At the same time a broader range of pronatalist options, not yet in sight, might become feasible.[16]

Talk of ‘acceptability’ and ‘political balance’ implies a smoother, more consensual polity than the case probably justifies. The historian William McNeill has likened today’s South-North migration to rural-urban migration in early modern Europe.[17] Cities then were disease traps, killing their inhabitants with lethal infections at rates far higher than prevailed in the surrounding countryside and needing continually to draw in people from their hinterlands to offset that high rate of attrition. In an analogous way, the advanced countries of today could also be described as demographic sinks, their consumer values and institutional designs creating conditions in which their inhabitants choose not to reproduce. The migrant sources are now the *global* hinterlands. But as McNeill also notes, the recipient societies in the past were highly stratified and socially immobile: the migrants were slotted in and kept to their place. In modern liberal democracies which value merit and equal opportunity, immigration on a similar scale may be much more socially disruptive.

Demographers guess it will be a century or so before the numbers in today’s hinterlands start to shrink and the era of global population growth ends. By then there may be anywhere from two to four billion additional people to be, so to speak, geographically allocated. How the global economy evolves —what shifts take place in technological leadership and the international economic hierarchy? how are the gains and losses of environmental change distributed? does an enduring underclass of states emerge? — will have much to do with that allocation. But the potential migrant-destination countries will also be evolving politically as they adjust to low fertility: reordering intergenerational relations, constructing new alliances and compacts, and, for many, dealing with the tensions that go with relinquishment of monoculturalism. The replacement migration exercise, while a useful reminder that low fertility has a spatial dimension, has nothing to say about such matters.

References

Views expressed in this essay are those of the author.

[1] New York, 2000. (Available online at www.un.org/esa/population/unpop.htm)

[2] The numbers depart still further from reality in cases where mortality and fertility declines are too recent to have yet boosted old-age dependency. South Korea, the UN report calculates, would need a total of about five billion migrants over the next 50 years to maintain its present dependency ratio.

[3] *India Abroad*, January 14, 2000; Immanuel Wallerstein *Comment* No. 32, 2000; *Guardian*, July 28, 2000

[4] The report is more plausibly seen as an astute means of calling public attention to an emerging issue than as an instance of one-worldism, or of pushing a redistributive agenda. The latter views do occasionally find expression in the UN system — for example in the *Human Development Reports* — but they are rarely extended to demographic issues. An artless recent exception is *GEO2000*, the status report of the UN Environment Programme, which writes apropos of globalization that ‘all people should be able to move freely to live and work wherever they like’. This would allow, it says, ‘a rapid reduction in the economic and social disparities between countries that are so destabilizing at present’ (UN Environment Programme, *Global Environment Outlook 2000*, New York, 2000). In an altogether sterner vein, the durable first director of the ILO under the League of Nations once proposed consideration of ‘some sort of supreme supernational authority which would regulate the distribution of population on rational and impartial lines, by controlling and directing migration movements and deciding on the opening-up or closing of countries to particular streams of immigration’ (Albert Thomas, ‘International migration and its control,’ *Proceedings of the World Population Conference, Geneva, 1927*, Arnold, London, 1927).

[5] See G. McNicoll, ‘Economic growth with below-replacement fertility,’ in K. Davis et al. (eds.) *Below-Replacement Fertility in Industrial Societies: Causes, Consequences, Policies*, Cambridge University Press, 1987

[6] I have pursued this argument elsewhere — see G. McNicoll, 'The economics of Australian immigration, with reference to trans-Tasman flows,' in G. A. Carmichael (ed.) *Trans-Tasman Migration: Trends, Causes and Consequences*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1993.

[7] Ageing and depopulation, it is argued, also make for military weakness. There are fewer men to fill the ranks. In the later years of the Cold War, some defence analysts saw the West as demographically weakened by low birth rates, unable to sustain the troop strength of the NATO divisions on the Rhine, while the Warsaw Pact armies they faced could recruit from the fecund societies of Central Asia. The reality of the quite different contrast between a professional volunteer army (increasingly of both sexes) and ill-paid, linguistically-diverse conscripts was not then apparent. Nor, in the case of conflict between technologically unequal forces, was the ability of a superior technology to radically limit military casualties on the side deploying it.

[8] M. Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation, and Social Rigidities*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1982

[9] In the US, it can be argued, unskilled immigration perpetuates a low-wage tail of the income distribution which helps to maintain a flexible labour market — a positive factor in overall economic performance. At the same time, some research suggests, it significantly harms the economic prospects of the unskilled native-born. This conflict of interest — between those who gain from having access to a low-wage labour pool and those who feel threatened by it — is an underlying factor in many debates on immigration. See G. J. Borjas, *Heaven's Door: Immigration Policy and the American Economy*, Princeton University Press, 1999

[10] The United States departs appreciably from these selection criteria in that its formal program gives comparatively heavy emphasis to family reunion and its total intake is swelled by illicit entry, mainly of the unskilled.

[11] There is not a global free-market for the highly skilled, however. The more organized professions mount strong opposition to migration of their own kind, with stringent licensing restrictions employed to limit income- or job-threatening competition

[12] M. Wackernagel and W. Rees, *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*, New Society, Philadelphia, 1996. An exhaustive account of earlier carrying capacity estimates is given in J. Cohen, *How Many People Can the Earth Support*? Norton, New York, 1995.

[13] See Jian Song, Chi-Hsien Tuan, and Jing-Yuan Yu, *Population Control in China: Theory and Applications*, Praeger, New York, 1985

[14] J. S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Book IV, Chapter 6, 1848

[15] The late Julian Simon was a prominent libertarian supporter of virtually open borders (and if selection has to be made, auctioning the right to immigrate). See his *The Economic Consequences of Immigration*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989.

[16] Again, this is far from just a numbers issue. The 'quality' or human capital (broadly construed) of the next generation, at least as important for a society's future, may depend in large measure on who is bearing and raising the children. On this topic, see T. Sowell, *The Economics and Politics of Race: An International Perspective*, Morrow, New York, 1983 and J. S. Coleman, 'The rational reconstruction of society,' *American Sociological Review* 58, pp. 1-15, 1993

[17] W. McNeill, 'Human migration in historical perspective,' *Population and Development Review*, vol. 10, pp. 1-18, 1984