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Massimo Livi-Bacci. 2026. *Geodemography: How Population Shapes the Relations Between States*. Polity Press. ISBN-13:978-1-5095-6787-4-Paperback. Pp.131.

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Already published in Italian in 2024, this is the English translation, thanks to David Broder. Massimo Livi-Bacci is the most revered Italian demographer, with an Award instituted in his honour by the European Society of Historical Demography (ESHG).

ESHG celebrates his historical and interdisciplinary erudition about the Italian as also world population thus: "His work is characterized by frequent incursions into disciplinary fields different to his central demographic interests, in order to both better understand the issues addressed and, at the same time, offer extensive comparative analysis framed by the long run. Indeed, Massimo Livi Bacci has produced some large and intense frescoes on the history of population. The books he has published in recent decades include: *The Population of Europe. A History; Conquest. The Destruction of Native Americans; A Concise History of World Population; Eldorado in the Marshes: Gold, Slaves and Souls between the Andes and the Amazon; A Short History of Migration; Amazzonia. L'impero dell'acqua, 1500-1800; and Our Shrinking Planet.*"

All this scholarship is useful to understand the relationship between population size on

the one hand, and development, wealth, power, environment and wellbeing, on the other, of the countries in the world by considering various hypotheses. It is also useful to evaluate the relations between the demographic variations of human groups and the functions of the boundaries that define and separate them via the history of borders throwing light on the subject of disputes (sometimes even violent) and controversies among the various states. I have not read the above-mentioned books, but my intuition is that they would also surely help in appreciating this book which would otherwise be rather terse and readily unfathomable for the reader like, for example, myself not rooted in historical and interdisciplinary methodologies of research.

Based on this meta historical as also contemporary scholarship, this book is a study of the relationship between demographic dynamics and international relations, especially via international migration. There are indeed potential political consequences of demographic processes and human migration. As Livi-Bacci says, there "are deep and structural (demographic, environmental and economic) forces that set flows of people on the move, and disordered political forces that will change their intensity and

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direction.” Labour on the move, due to human supply chains originating in global South (and even in less developed areas of Europe) and getting integrated into national and global value chains originating in global North (Gordon, 2022) is in trouble everywhere. The Ultra-Right in the North is after it, to cudgel it to death in this ‘world without rules’ even as the labouring occurs without any decency at all (see Cintio, 2025; Theodoropoulos, 2025).

The storyline of this book is as follows. The world population reached 1 billion inhabitants at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and then accelerated its rate of population growth. Towards the end of World War I, the population had doubled to 2 billion, rising to 4 billion in 1974 and then doubling to 8 billion by 2022. In 2050 the planet will have between 1.5 and 2 billion more inhabitants with a doubling of the sub-Saharan continent, declining Chinese population and more or less stationary population of the developed world. It is not at all easy to predict “what about after 2050” due to some knowns and many unknowns (especially migration), making the discussion very complicated and planted in the air, so to say.

However, there will continue to be some populations on the rise and others in decline. The economic divide between the advanced global North and the late-developing global South has been there for centuries, deepening over the last hundred years especially during the last four decades of globalization. It is overlaid by the growing disparity in the mass of numbers populating these two parts of the world. These factors put accelerating pressure on migration from South to North even as the Northern countries are strengthening restrictive measures against regular migration and

introducing measures cracking down on irregular immigration. The increased mobility of people will be aided by AI creating labour surpluses, and by the environmental and climatic balances endangered by the growth and distribution of the population. And areas of more densely packed human populations in conjunction with increased mobility will create increased risk of the possibility of future pandemics in the world.

Given that demographic dynamics can affect international migration and thereby international relations, Livi-Bacci is sane in arriving at the following conclusion which exudes noble statesmanship that is conspicuous by its absence among many geographers as also the politicians and the corporates in the world: “The sheer scale of the forces that shape the human condition on this planet calls for major, international political interventions. This is what is needed, for example, to bring order to the seemingly irresistible development of artificial intelligence, and to manage its fallout, primarily on labour. This is also what is needed to cope with the great migration disorder—a problem implicitly recognized by international bodies, though they limit their response to bland documents and non-binding and purely formal promises. More concrete are the understandings and agreements between states to curb climate change and adapt to its effects. Here, international action backed by the United Nations and the IPCC has created awareness of the anthropogenic origin of climate change, which may translate into concrete action. Finally, the great COVID-19 pandemic convinced states of the need to heighten their preparedness to deal with the outbreak of other future pandemics. This means strengthening research cooperation, monitoring measures, coordination between

states regarding the availability of drugs and medical supplies, and joint management of international mobility. It is thus clear that the successes and failures in handling these global phenomena also have geopolitical repercussions.”

According to Massimo Livi-Bacci, global migration should be taken as a normal phenomenon which is beneficial to both North and South. Based on empirical evidence collected throughout human history, “migrating is a constant and absolutely normal prerogative of human beings.” Global North now is dependent on global South’s labour not only for its economic growth but also potentially, after all, for taking care of its aged population. It is a shame that the world is not reconciling to this inevitable reality and thereby pragmatically addressing the humanitarian concerns across the world along with the human rights of the migrants. Chapters 2 to 8 in the book are very disturbing as also illuminating. For example, there are two obvious conclusions about the intertwining of ethnicity, demography and geopolitical systems: “first, in vast regions of the world, ethnic boundaries do not coincide with political borders, and the conflicts that arise produce changes in the settlement pattern of populations, generating—often forced—migration; second, demographic factors fuel inter-ethnic conflicts, especially if these are not moderated by strong state or international institutions.” There are attempts to forcibly separate ethnic groups within a unitary state. Yet another example concerns disputes and conflicts between the states along transboundary rivers involving intertwining of population dynamics, economic growth and historical and geographical claims which reveal that “Demography is far from neutral in this regard.” Furthermore, there are connections

between geodemography and religion, with many conflicts having a significant religious motivation.

Livi-Bacci’s scholarship complements that of another great interdisciplinary scholar such as Kolodko (2014) calling for the acceptance of multiculturalism in the face of migratory pressures. He had said thus: “...we need to look the future in the eye. And what can we see there? Twelve Great Issues for the Future: The rate and limits to economic growth; The evolution of values and their cultural implications for development processes; The institutionalization of globalization versus the growing chaos and lack of coordination; Regional integration and the way it meshes with globalization; The position and role of non-government organizations; The natural environment and competition over dwindling material resources; Demographic processes and human migration; Poverty, misery and social inequality; The knowledge-based economy and society; Scientific and technological progress; The evolution of networks and its economic consequences; and Conflicts and security, war and peace.”

Kolodko (2014) highlights with respect to migration thus: “The world is in a dangerous place. There will be increased pressure for mass migration from overly dense and economically backward countries, if they don’t start on a path toward a balanced economic growth... Huge waves of migration are unavoidable. We are in for more migrations of the peoples. As many as over 200 million or perhaps even almost a quarter of a billion of us live elsewhere than in the country of birth. With time this number will be growing. This is both a great threat and a great opportunity. It’s a threat because mass scale migrations – not only from North Africa to the south of Europe,

from Mexico to the USA or from Papua New Guinea and other South Pacific regions to Australia, but also from Syria to Turkey, from Ukraine to Slovakia, from Mozambique to South Africa, or from Myanmar to Thailand – may get out of control. We may not and should not block them altogether by force, nor can they be totally controlled. However, they can be reasonably steered into a desired direction. Reasonably, that is to say in a way to ensure that countries from which people are leaving are not deprived of the human capital necessary to function and develop. After all, there may be no good prospects for Iraq, if tens of thousands of doctors from their work in the West, or for Zimbabwe if nurses educated in this poor country are hired, in their thousands, by the rich United Kingdom. Reasonably, that is to say in a way to ensure that in the USA there aren't over a dozen million illegal immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean. Some of them have been living there for a generation already and if they themselves still feel like guests, their children are already at home there. Reasonably, that is to say in a way to ensure that we don't have to send back thousands of Romas from France to Romania, the country they came from, giving them several hundred or even a whole thousand euro as a parting gift, and worrying we can't do the same with several million of Arabs...Still, the problem is not that some countries are incapable, as much as they'd like to, of getting rid of the masses of immigrants who are putting down deeper and deeper roots there. If they cannot satisfactorily cope with the resulting multiculturalism, then they have nothing left to do but take a leap forward; they must make an effort to succeed, as it's possible, though difficult. It must be possible as multiculturalism is becoming a characteristic of the unavoidable

future. The thing is new waves of mass migration, bound for more developed countries, are coming from countries that are incapable or unable, under the present geopolitical and systemic circumstances, to get emancipated. We're not talking here of yet another boat or truckful of people, but of population movements involving hundreds of thousands and tens of millions."

I wish well-grounded scholars such as the Italian demographer Livi-Bacci and the Polish economist Kolodko (2021), with their respective 'new pragmatism', had ruled a new league of nations transcending all the man-made variegated divisiveness and internecine conflicts in the world—a world without borders, so to say, that responds to the heart and soul of the multicultural melting pot within the ecological limits of the planet. Both of them emphasize the need for supranational politics to realize this enlightened 'utopia', so to say, of resolving social and ecological issues plaguing the humankind.

Students and teachers of demography and geopolitics in India and elsewhere must not ignore the invaluable contributions of Massimo Livi-Bacci. I salute him for his critical, radical and decolonial study of geographies of populations, past and present, and his call for a cooperating and humanistic world order.

It seems his contributions are not part and parcel of the Masters syllabus and readings of Population Studies or Population Geography in India, leave alone economics curricula. It is rather unfortunate that the fourth reference mentioned below, which the Indian students might be reading, has completely ignored Massimo Livi-Bacci's contributions.

These sentences of his should be particularly appealing, therefore, to the student-reader: "...we need only think of the great revolution of the last century, with the constant fall in Europe's relative demographic weight and the explosion of Africa's; of the changes in the direction, volume and characteristics of migration patterns; of the widely varying reproductivity levels of different countries and ethnic groups; or of the rapid growth of large urban centres. These phenomena all strain the relations between the states and regions of the world, shaking up old balances and creating different ones. They influence political choices, with a speed and force that are variable and often unpredictable. Geodemography, which examines these phenomena, offers an aid to the study of geopolitics and thus contributes to a better understanding of the relations between countries and of their future prospects."

Acknowledgement

Finally, I must say kudos to Polity for making Massimo Livi-Bacci's knowledge and wisdom accessible to the English-reading audience.

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