

The Overpopulation: Selected Environmental and Geographic Aspects

Keywords: Demography; Population; Migrations; Environment; Nuclear Energy

Abstract

Ecological damage is generally proportional to the population density. The demographic growth contributes to shortages of fresh water and food. Many countries experience water scarcity while agricultural production increases through overexploitation of water resources, deforestation and other environmental damage. Potential solutions would require adoption of new principles, in particular, that no population group on a national or international scale, neither ethnic nor confessional minorities, may obtain advantages because of a faster growth. Relevant demographic problems of the North Caucasus and the eastern Mediterranean are discussed here. Both the mountainous and arid territories are hardly suitable for self-sustaining existence of the dense population. Both regions receive financial support and, at the same time, are sources of emigration. The agriculture in conditions of insufficient water and energy supply is economically and ecologically unfavorable as fossil fuels are used for the water desalination, which is accompanied by greenhouse gas emissions. The energy for desalination could be supplied by nuclear power plants. The weightiest argument against nuclear facilities is that they are potential war targets. Durable peace and international cooperation are needed for this and other humanitarian projects.

Introduction

Ecological damage is generally proportional to the population density. The demographic growth contributes to the shortage of fresh water and food [1,2]. Many countries encounter water scarcity while agricultural production increases through overexploitation and pollution of water resources, deforestation, desertification, soil erosion etc. The humankind is in a demographic deadlock [3] but no realistic solutions have been proposed. Such solutions would require a revision of certain ethical clichés and propagation of new principles, in particular, that no population group on a national or international scale, neither ethnic nor confessional minorities, may obtain advantages because of a faster growth, even if it would disagree with numerical democracy. In view of the global overpopulation, those who have had many children must logically live in more crowded conditions. Acceptance of this principle could build a basis for international understanding and trust. Without procreative competition, different peoples would more likely live in peace. In the last quarter of the 20th century, the population grew faster in less industrialized countries than in more developed ones; while the increment in greenhouse gas emissions has been much higher in Asia and Africa than in America and Europe [4]. The forthcoming industrialization of the regions formerly regarded as developing is significant due to less efficient environment conservation measures and vast dimensions of the process, proportional to the population size. In the past, overpopulation has been reduced by homicide, epidemics and starvation. Today, there is a possibility to apply humane, scientifically based methods, consciously choosing between



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the birth rate restriction and mortality rise. Surgical sterilization is the most reliable method of birth control; it was applied in India in the 1970s, but later these measures have been rolled back. India is the most populous country in the world today. China had the largest population for many decades with a fertility rate as high as 6.0 before 1970, decreased to 1.5-1.7 by the late 1990s. In an attempt to elevate birth rates, the one child policy was replaced by two child policy from 2015. However, the total fertility rate continued to fall, reaching 1.3 by 2020. Additional pronatalist measures have been introduced in 2021 [5].

Countries receiving immigrants decide whom they admit and whom not. Sterilization can be taken into account making decisions about residence and work permits. The male sterilization (vasectomy) is a simple and harmless procedure. The female sterilization (tubal ligation) can be performed without additional trauma at a birth by cesarean section. A more frequent use of cesarean tubal ligation would be especially favorable for overpopulated regions with a gender imbalance [6]. Certainly, surgical sterilization can be seen as a violation of the bodily integrity. The same, however, can be said about sexual and reproductive coercion committed for migration/accommodation purposes or to spread a certain genotype, with conscious or subconscious geopolitical motives (discussed below).

Overpopulation and ethnic transformations

Logically, rapidly growing peoples should live in less spacious conditions. Consequences of the gender imbalance must be borne by populations with a male predominance due to immigration and/or sex-selective abortions. The recognition of these principles should become a basis for the international understanding and trust. In consideration of ecological and economic conditions, an optimal fertility level must be recommended for different regions. Who would determine the level? Primarily, everyone for her- or himself. In a country with sufficient food and water resources, the birth rate of the titular nation can be higher than in the regions where people are consuming desalinated water and foodstuff acquired for the foreign aid or oil revenues. An international authority could issue evidence-based recommendations.

In the former Soviet Union (SU), the fertility rate varies from 3.8 in Tajikistan to 1.2 in Ukraine and 1.5 in Russian Federation (RF), which includes the Caucasus and other ethnic homelands with high fertility [7]. Within RF, maximal population increase has been observed in Ingushetia, Chechnya, Tuva and Dagestan; while the population is decreasing most rapidly in Tver, Tula, Pskov, Leningrad and Novgorod provinces [8]. The emigration of ethnic Russians from the Caucasus and Central Asia started several decades ago and increased after the dissolution of SU. At the same time, indigenous people from these regions come massively to Russia. Migration distances reach from the Caucasus and Middle Asia to Moscow, St. Petersburg, Siberia and the Far East [9]. The highest emigration rate was registered in North Ossetia-Alania [10]. Armenian minority is increasing on the Caucasian Riviera, where they have massively participated in privatization and construction of houses, changing the panorama of the Black Sea coast [11,12]. In Stavropol, Krasnodar and Rostov provinces, percentages of Chechens and other indigenous Caucasians are growing [8,13,14]. Among motives of the emigration has been the shortage of land, overcrowding, economic factors and lack of security [14]. At the same time, the Chechen Republic receives considerable federal funding. The region received assistance from the UN World Food Programme in the first decade of the 21st century. The North Caucasus takes a lot from the Russian federal budget giving not much back (Table 1). In addition, federal funds have been purloined on a large scale [15].

[16]. For prevention of conflicts, minorities should not grow faster than the titular ethnic group of a country. This is understood in many Jewish families. However, in the orthodox milieu the birth rate remains relatively high. In some cities, New York in the first place, the Jewish population is considerable. After the World War II, people of Jewish descent had a possibility to lead a normal life almost everywhere. Migration to the populated territory of Palestine with a shortage of water and energy resources occurred after individual decisions of the migrants, who were going, directly or indirectly, to take possession of other people’s land and housing. Arguments like “historical patrimony” or the dream of reassembling [17] are not necessarily acceptable for other peoples. Moreover, both sides of the Middle Eastern conflict have applied terrorism [18]. The state violence is generally more destructive than that carried out by non-state actors [19].

Back in the 1860s, the number of Jews in Palestine was approximately 14,000 or 4% of the total population of 350,000 [18]. From 1948 to 2002 the population of Israel increased from 806,000 to 6.3 million (including occupied territories – 9.8 million) [20]. Combined with immigration, the population of the arid territory,

Table 1: The part of the own income in the regional budget (%). The rest is the federal dotation (2020)

Dagestan	19.4
Ingushetia	11.6
Kabardino-Balkaria	23.7
Karachay-Cherkessia	20.4
North Ossetia-Alania	28.8
Chechnya	12
Stavropol province (Russia)	100

largely dependent on the foreign help and water desalination, heads to 16 million by mid-century [21]. Despite popular beliefs, the fertility rate of Israeli and Palestinian women is approximately equal (3.1): higher than in Iran (1.8), Tunisia (2.0), Saudi Arabia (2.1) and some neighboring countries, being the highest in developed parts of the world [21]. Even friends of Israel cannot answer the question, why Palestinian Christians and Muslims should cede the land, immobile property and water sources to immigrants from different continents, including those who declared themselves Judaists just because it was required for the “repatriation”. The law of return does not include those who practice other religions. As for atheists, according to witnesses, they must documentarily declare themselves Judaists. In view of the Ukraine conflict, the double standards should be stressed: no sanctions were imposed against Israel for comparable military actions. On the contrary, financial and technical aid was provided.

Apparently, certain spheres on both sides of the Middle Eastern conflict have acted for mutual benefit in receiving foreign aid: some get it from the West, others from oil-producing countries. The Camp David Accords was an efficient instrument of obtaining foreign aid. Prior to the Ukraine war, Israel was the largest cumulative recipient of the U.S. foreign help since the World War II [22,23]. After the Accords, American aid to Egypt increased considerably. By 2003, over a half of the economy of Palestinian Territories was dependent on the foreign help [24]. Besides, Israel receives regular financial aid from Germany. In this connection, ethnic discrimination in the German immigration policy should be pointed out. Since 1990, it sufficed to declare oneself a Jew to obtain an unlimited residence permit and social assistance. In this way, other foreigners are discriminated: after many years of work they have to leave the country. Some refugees exist for social benefits for years (so-called welfare dependence of immigrants). The welfare agency is regarded as a club for selected public, where the wealth is distributed: regular payment of benefits, medical and pension insurance, free education, apartments, etc. Some refugees are engaged in business evading taxes. Despite legal and moral barriers, many refugees of this kind travel to their native countries in the former SU. There are cases when the refugees rented out their Moscow apartments, or when a father operated business in Russia, while the family lived in Germany for the welfare benefits [25].

A solution for Palestine and some adjacent territories could be a protectorate by developed nations to ensure safety and to curb the population growth, stimulated by the long-lasting conflict. After the World War I, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon were governed by Great Britain and France according to the League of Nations mandates. The overpopulated territory is arid and has not much natural resources. It appears questionable, whether the West Europeans would be interested in getting deeply involved there. Then it is logically the turn of Russians and Turks. The Russian Palestine is an idea with rich traditions [26]. The Turks, for their part, have great experience of administration in the region. The spheres of influence could be reasonably divided.

The agriculture in conditions of insufficient water and energy supply is economically and ecologically unfavorable as fossil fuels are burnt for the water desalination. The water consumption and pollution in Palestine exceeds natural replenishment [27]. It is expected that the gap between the water supply and demand

will widen [24]. The energy for desalination could be supplied by nuclear power plants (NPPs). Obviously, durable peace is needed because NPPs are potential war targets. There are no alternatives to nuclear energy [28]. In the long run, non-renewable fossil fuels will become more expensive, contributing to the population growth in oil producing regions and poverty elsewhere. NPPs have come back to the agenda due to concerns about increasing global energy demand and climate changes. Well-run NPPs pose less risk than fossil fuel power stations [28-30]. Health burdens are greatest for power stations based on coal and oil. The burdens are smaller for natural gas and much lower for the NPPs. The same ranking applies also to the greenhouse gas emissions and thus probably to climate changes [30]. Hopefully, nuclear fission will be replaced in the future by fusion, which is intrinsically safer. The fusion should offer a source of safe, clean power generation with a plentiful supply of raw materials [31,32]. Durable peace and international cooperation are needed for this and other large-scale projects.

Migrations, heredity, reproductive coercion

It is known that birthrate inequalities can eventually result in geopolitical transformations. Here follow some details in addition to the previously published [25,33]. The social progress is supposed to go along with improvements of morals. However, migrations confound this process. Temporary, fictive marriages and reproductive coercion are used to spread certain genotypes and/or to cement marriages arranged to obtain a residence permit and/or accommodation [34]. This is a probable cause of increased birthrates observed immediately after the immigration [35]. Reproductive coercion can involve physical, sexual, financial or psychological abuse [36]. Reportedly, about 70% of sexual violence cases in Moscow are committed by immigrants from Central Asia; some other ethnic groups are also active in this field. About 75% of rapes in the Moscow province were perpetrated by migrants [37]. The sexual violence may be conditioned by ethnic, religious, economic or social conflicts [38].

Violence against women can be perpetrated or condoned by the state [39]. In 2017 Vladimir Putin has signed into law an amendment that decriminalizes some forms of domestic violence. Apropos, physical abuse was described in his biographies. It has been hypothesized that Putin is re-enacting his own and his family's traumas in conditions of an intergenerational traumatic chain; details and references are in [40]. Governmental policies aimed at the fertility elevation tend to disregard reproductive rights of women. Some church functionaries, endorsing the Ukraine war, engage in moralizing, opposing to abortions, sex education and birth control, depicting childbearing as a duty. Like in the Orient, the government joins forces with religious figures in order to curtail women's rights, including their sexual and reproductive autonomy [41]. The extremely popular TV series such as "Sled" (Trace) and "Slepaia" (The Blind) regularly present unexpected pregnancies both in and out of wedlock as natural and unavoidable while contraception is hardly ever mentioned. The risks associated with contraceptives and abortions are invented or exaggerated by some literature and mass media. Obviously, the propaganda follows governmental policies aimed at the birth rate elevation.

In societies with the rape myth acceptance, sexual violence is seen as a method of acquiring wives [42,43]. The fact that some victims

married their rapists was erroneously seen as indication that women enjoy it; in fact, existing accounts demonstrate various degrees of trauma [43]. In this connection, battered woman syndrome and learned helplessness must be timely recognized [44,45]. The sexual and reproductive coercion is not always realized as such by victims. Intimidation and shame can prevent a woman from describing certain acts as coercion [39,46]. The maltreatment of women is under-reported especially in less open societies. Some boys are taught sexual coercion in their families: experience with relatives is not unusual in certain traditional and chaotic milieus [47,48]. It was estimated that 49% of the "child perpetrators" had been sexually abused prior to their own abusive behaviors [49]. Studies indicate a link between child maltreatment including incest and sexual crime committed by victims in their later life [49,50]. Males imprisoned for sexual molesting had often been molested themselves in their childhood. A similar paradigm has been suggested for intergenerational incest [48]. Various methods are used by perpetrators: seduction and persuasion up to hypnosis, alcohol and drugs, intimidation and violence, reproductive coercion and contraceptive sabotage, marriage fraud and deceit including concealment of genetic diseases.

Cases are known when a hereditary disease was concealed from the partner and then acquired by offspring [33]. Approximately 20-25% of Ashkenazi Jews carry a mutation for a genetic disorder [51-53]. Among others, prevalence of the following conditions is above-average: Tay-Sachs disease, Alport, Lynch, Wolfram syndromes, Glanzmann thrombasthenia, adrenal hyperplasia, thromboangiitis obliterans, torsion dystonia, osteoporosis, cystic fibrosis, mucopolysaccharidosis IV, pentosuria, diabetes, polycythemia vera, some solid cancers and leukemias, certain ophthalmic and other disorders [51-61], as well as predisposition to neurasthenia [62]. Some conditions are comparatively very frequent; for example, familial dysautonomia occurs almost exclusively in the above-named population; Bloom syndrome is ~600 times more prevalent than in the background. Approximately one in 10-15 Ashkenazi individuals are carriers of a mutation causing type 1 Gaucher disease, 1/30 -familial dysautonomia, 1/75 - A or B type of Niemann-Pick disease; 1/40 are estimated to be carriers for Canavan disease, 1/89 - Fanconi anemia and so forth [63]. Many mutations are not uniquely Jewish, being the same as in the surrounding population [64,65]. Apparently, abnormal genes tend to be gathered and accumulated. The mechanism can be illustrated by a family case observed by the author. A professor, ethnic Russian, having recognizable Marfan syndrome, married a young and beautiful colleague of partly Jewish descent. Their daughter and grandson both had the same syndrome, which complicated their lives. The daughter migrated to Israel with her second husband who concealed a hereditary disorder from his bride; she noticed only polythelia, known to be associated with congenital malformations [66]. Their female offspring acquired Stein-Leventhal syndrome; other relatives had ocular, intestinal diseases, severe allergy etc. Screening of the Ashkenazi population for recessive disease-related mutations is recommended [61,67,68]; one grandparent suffices to offer a genetic examination [51]. The problematic heredity may give rise to conscious or subconscious motives to look for partners from different ethnic backgrounds [33]. A motivation for eugenics has been a fear of hereditary degeneration [69]. There is a maxim: "Do not have children unless you are sure that they will be healthy both mentally

and physically” [52]. This suggestion is not realizable in conditions of sexual and reproductive coercion, contraceptive sabotage or concealment of heritable conditions from partners. Reproductive coercion is regarded to be a form of intimate partner violence; it can lead to unintended pregnancy, abortions, poor pregnancy outcomes, sexually transmitted infections, psychological trauma and depression [70-73]. In the author’s opinion, contraceptive sabotage must be qualified as crime with infliction of bodily harm if an abortion or unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted or genetic disease has been inflicted intentionally or by negligence.

Among others, the propensity for migrations and vagabondage may be associated with certain genetic and/or ethnic characteristics. In particular, migration may be desirable for people with abnormalities because behavioral and other deviations are less conspicuous abroad as the person is not typical just because he or she comes from another country, due to the language barrier etc. In a foreign environment, persons with abnormalities may be devoid of stigma at least temporarily [74,75]. The grass is greener on the other side of the fence not for everybody but for some individuals for certain reasons. Among the causes may be inherited features and/or affiliation with ethnic minorities. Another demographic problem, the deepening gender imbalance due to sex-selective abortions and female neonaticide, has been discussed elsewhere [25,33]. It should be pointed out that the growing excess of males contributes to their marginalization, antisocial behavior as well as to militarism and international conflicts.

Conclusion

Birth control has been obfuscated by presumed national interests; the demographic growth being supposed to strengthen the sovereignty and defenses. Smoldering international conflicts contribute to the population growth in certain regions. In the past, the overpopulation was counteracted by wars, pestilence and famine. Today, scientifically based humane methods can be used to regulate the population size taking into account ecological and economical realities in different regions. Large projects could be accomplished to improve the quality of life: irrigation systems, nuclear and other energy sources as an alternative to fossil fuels. Hydroelectric power plants can be built on large rivers to produce hydrogen as nonpolluting energy carrier. New substances used in the industry, nutrition and medicine must be tested in large animal populations to achieve statistical significance and to register are outcomes. Such projects would create many jobs, being a reasonable alternative to excessive military spendings. Not only durable peace but also mutual trust is required for that. Unfortunately, trust may be abused. Some confidence building measures have been applied and planned recently [76,77]. An authority based in developed countries could counteract the growing overpopulation and environmental damage.

Conflicts of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare

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