

# Editorial introduction

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«The first and indispensable condition of the many reforms that were expected from Parliament, was to know the population of the Kingdom, and the way in which it was distributed in its different provinces». With these words the member of Parliament, Leopoldo Galeotti (1865), opened his account of the first Italian Census which took place at the end of 1861, only nine months after national unification<sup>1</sup>.

This issue of «Popolazione e Storia» contains a selection of papers presented at the conference «I censimenti fra passato, presente e futuro. Le fonti di stato dal XIV secolo» («The censuses between past, present and future. Population enumerations from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century»), organised by the Italian Society of Historical Demography (SIDES), in collaboration with the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT). This event opened the celebrations of 150 years of Italian unification. The Conference, which took place in Turin in November 2010, almost 150 years after the first national Census and in view of the 15<sup>th</sup> census, was aimed at highlighting the importance of national censuses in analysing the social and demographic characteristics of the Italian population, its history and evolution over time.

Scholars from other European countries were invited to contribute to a session of the Conference entitled European Censuses. This session showcased research projects that used historical census materials to reconstruct aspects of the social and demographic history of these other countries. A Canadian study, though not presented at the Conference, has been included in this issue of the journal. This is because important demographic research is concentrated there and also because in many respects it is a transplanted European society. Moreover, as Gaffield (1982) has noted, «The backbone of historical demography in Canada has been the census».

The contributions range across societies as diverse as Sweden, France, Britain, Ireland, Switzerland and Canada. The common feature that underpins all of these articles, however, is the intensive use of the original census manuscripts, and in particular the census household schedules. This edition of the journal showcases a variety of ways in which these fundamental source materials can be exploited to yield what are sometimes unexpected perspectives in social and demographic history.

The censuses have three key strengths: «complete geographic coverage, large sample populations, and broad chronological scope» (Ruggles, Sobek, Gardner 1996). As compared to the published census reports, the micro-level data derived from the original manuscripts offer a greater range of possibilities in terms of

uncovering key relationships and also undertaking comparative research<sup>2</sup>. See, for instance, Ngan and Moldofsky (2004, 1).

As has been recognised (Inwood, Reid 1995, 302), «the extensive use to which manuscript censuses have been put over the past few decades, by a wide range of researchers, is a reflection of the increasing diversification of academic inquiries. New questions that deal with issues of class, wealth, gender, occupation, political behaviour, and social structures have led researchers to exploit more fully manuscript records formerly neglected because of problems of size and complexity. This research has been facilitated by rapidly accelerating advances in computer technology, which have allowed the gathering and analysis of very large amounts of data in ways that would have been impossible just a short time ago».

Because demography deals with the fates and choices of individuals, the micro-level is well suited to study elongated chains of causation. Thus, demographers can now analyse processes of family formation and change that span life times and that cross generations. New strategies of data collecting and data sharing, as well as new statistical techniques, have opened up vistas of research that are currently reshaping the landscape of historical demography (Alter, Mandemakers, Gutmann 2009, 98). With more abundant source materials coming on stream, and more ambitious questions being framed by historians, the pressure for methodological innovation has intensified. This has involved sophisticated statistical techniques, the linkage of different historical sources, and most importantly perhaps the creation of complex databases. Because of developments in information technology, it is now much easier for instance to reconstruct the life histories of large numbers of people. Various forms of regression analysis have proved instrumental in teasing out subtle causal relationships. Thus the shift to micro-level analysis has been facilitated by these various developments, while micro analysis in turn has thrown up challenging new questions, as evidenced by this special issue of «Popolazione e Storia».

In previewing the contents of this issue of the Journal, we may begin in northern Europe. The study by Scalone and Dribe is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, they use the whole Swedish population (some 5.2 million persons), as captured in the census of 1900, and not just a sample of the Swedish population. Second, rather than using aggregate data, which can conceal subtle interrelationships, the approach is a micro-historical one using data at the individual and the household level. Their focus is the association between socioeconomic status and net fertility in Sweden's fertility transition.

There is fairly general agreement in relation to west European countries, with the exception of France, that fertility decline was first evident among the middle and upper classes, and only subsequently affecting the lower classes. But this leaves open the question of whether the deliberate control of family size was due to *adaptation* on the part of the better-off sections of society to changing economic and social pressures or whether it was due to *innovation* (the emergence of new knowledge about birth control or changing social attitudes in relation to fertility control). As we shall see, there is comfort for adherents of both schools of thought in the findings reported by Scalone and Dribe.

In the Swedish case fertility decline set in about 1880, one hundred or so years after infant mortality had begun to trend downwards. So, while a decline in infant mortality preceded the decline in fertility, this was after a very long lead time. Because the Swedish census of 1900 does not have the richness of information on fertility of the kind found in the United Kingdom census of 1911, Scalone and Dribe are obliged to rely on an indirect measure of fertility, that is, the child-woman ratio. A complication with this approach is that child mortality is likely to have varied by socio-economic group. The joint authors argue, however, that such differences were not pronounced in the later nineteenth century, and so do not invalidate their findings. In effect, they are dealing with measures of net fertility, so, if anything, the bias should serve to underestimate fertility decline among the better-off classes in Swedish society who enjoyed some advantage in relation to child mortality. Variations in fertility between different geographical regions or between different social groups could also be due to differences in nuptiality but the proportions marrying do not appear to have varied much. The key factor was marital fertility.

In line with other European studies, Scalone and Dribe find that control of fertility was most pronounced in the upper reaches of the Swedish social structure. These differentials were substantial before 1900, with higher socio-economic groups having considerably smaller numbers of children per 1,000 married women than the working classes. It seems clear that higher status groups were the pioneers of fertility control in Sweden, as elsewhere. Even after controlling for individual and household variables, and also sub-regional influences, the higher social groups still emerge as having lower net fertility than other groups. That said, the inclusion of additional variables in the regression equations does narrow these differentials. This in turn suggests that some process of adaptation to the changing costs and benefits of childbearing was going on. These adaptations to changing socio-economic forces, which included the twin processes of industrialization and urbanization, and a greater emphasis on human capital, seem to have affected the better-off first and the working classes later in time.

The fact that differences in fertility were still evident as between distinct social groups, even after controlling for many of the forces making for change, suggests there was a role for innovation as well as adaptation in the Swedish case. It seems plausible to argue that the better-off sections of society were better placed to gain access to information on fertility control and may also have been more favourably disposed towards changing attitudes to child-bearing and child-rearing, and perhaps towards social change more generally. Finally, it may be remarked that the study, despite the massive size of the dataset, rests on information derived from one census only, and this inevitably carries certain limitations.

This leads us directly into the article by Garrett, Reid and Szreter. They question whether it is safe to use indicators derived from a cross-sectional source such as a single census in attempting to understand processes such as marital fertility and infant mortality – vital events that unfold in time. In their view, caution must be exercised in using a snapshot view of individuals and households at a moment in time when drawing inferences in relation to processes that are inherently longitudi-

nal in nature. In a remarkable break with census conventions, the census of population for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1911 asked retrospective questions concerning fertility and child mortality. This was the first time that the Census Commissioners had included questions on marital fertility and child mortality. The timing is significant as the age at marriage of older wives would have reached back into the later nineteenth century, when the fertility transition is widely believed to have been underway.

It is tempting to use this information and then proceed to relate fertility or mortality declines to the social and economic indicators at a household (or neighbourhood) level that are also readily available in the 1911 census. Garrett *et al.* review work on the study of fertility behaviour and infant mortality decline that use nineteenth and early twentieth century censuses of England & Wales, Scotland and Ireland. After critically reviewing various approaches to the data, including an earlier study by Garrett *et al.* (2001) which suggested the importance of the local environment in which married couples were located, they turn their attention to the complicating factor of geographical mobility. Their chosen study area is Belfast, in Northern Ireland. This is used to explore the troubling possibility of why mobility may need to be taken into account in using household schedules of the kind available for the UK in 1911.

Using information for two moments in time, the censuses of 1901 and 1911, and combining these data with street directories for intervening years, they explore residential mobility between the two census dates. The striking finding is that children in more stable families are less likely to have died than children from highly mobile families. Of course, as the authors caution, the line of causation may not be as simple as appears at first sight. It is possible, for instance, that the death of a child may have prompted a move. It is also possible that mobility and mortality were driven by an external factor such as social class, job security or proximity to a place of work. These questions require further investigation but the initial findings raise important methodological concerns of a general nature in relation to the use of census data.

Belfast is also the focus of a study of marriage and fertility by Kennedy, Pozzi and Manfredini, using essentially the same database as that used in the work by Garrett *et al.* The article brings out clearly the segregated residential patterns of Ireland's only industrial city. Most of the city streets were overwhelmingly Catholic or overwhelmingly Protestant. Yet the surprising point is that on a range of social and demographic indicators, from literacy to household size, the two communities looked remarkably similar. This was not true of socio-economic status, however. Catholics were more likely to be found in lowly paid, low status occupations such as labouring, while skilled workers in engineering and shipbuilding were much more likely to be Protestant. The largest single employer was linen manufacturing, where the workforce was predominantly female and both Catholics and Protestants were heavily represented in the workforce. Segregation at work had a gender dimension.

Catholic women married at a slightly earlier age than other denominations, but

perhaps the more striking point is that these differences were small. Middle-class women, however, married a good two years later in life than working-class women, so social class did matter. Might this also be true of fertility, recognising that the great fertility decline in western societies is one of the watersheds in modern history? So it would seem. Women with husbands with white-collar occupations produced on average four and a half children, while working class families had at least two children more per family. This is consistent with the findings of Scalone and Dribe for Sweden and Garrett *et al.* for Britain (this Journal).

The relationship between fertility and religion is one that has attracted much attention and the experience of women in Belfast would seem to be a particularly good test case. Moreover, during the course of the twentieth century a marked contrast in fertility behaviour opened up between Catholics and Protestants, such that by 1971 the typical Catholic family was two-thirds larger than the typical Protestant family. It is unclear though when this divergence originated. A series of regression tests, relating fertility to religious affiliation, while controlling for differences in age at marriage and socio-economic status, produced varying results. There is some indication that for women aged fifty years of age or more in 1911, that is women with completed fertility, a small difference between Catholic and Protestant family size was noticeable. This finding needs to be probed further because it depends crucially on the particular specification of the model and there must also be some concern that the socio-economic indicators relate to 1911 only (bearing in mind the earlier methodological points made by Garret *et al.* about the possibilities of change over time).

Some countries have considerably better demographic sources than others to track the life-course, family evolution, and residential mobility of individuals. This is especially true of Italy, Belgium and Sweden, according to Boudjaaba, Gourdon and Rathier (this journal). But recently discovered or re-discovered nominative lists for the town of Charleville, in the Ardennes region of north-east France, promise to open up major new research possibilities. The new town of Charleville, founded in 1606, instituted a rare system of registration of its inhabitants which stretched across several centuries. Beginning in 1622, the municipal authorities started a «book of citizenship» which recorded the names of new residents. A more profound change occurred in 1698 when the authorities introduced an annual census that lasted until 1789. Even during the Revolution and the Empire, they took remarkable care when complying with national guidelines that requested regular censuses. Under the Restoration, at the initiative of the municipal authorities, annual counts resumed until the Second World War.

The form of the census evolved over time and inevitably there were some gaps in the information. But the preliminary work by Boudjaaba *et al.* on this remarkable source gives some indication of the richness of the possibilities for demographic analysis. The Charleville database, as it is being developed, contains not only information from the annual census reports but also data on baptism, marriage, and burial registers from the Saint-Rémy parish (the only parish in Charleville), as well as the town's notarial records (transactions relating to inheritance, annuities, and even

apprenticeships). The construction of the database was in itself a formidable research challenge and the process is described in detail.

To demonstrate some of the potentialities, Boudjaaba *et al.* analyse migration rates from Charleville during a period of rapid industrial and demographic development in the mid 1860s. Contrary to impressions of French towns as more stable than for instance American cities, their conclusion is that Charleville exhibited a high degree of out-migration. The correlates of such mobility included age (adolescents and young males were highly mobile) but not gender. In relation to the latter it seems that both females and males were spatially mobile. Not surprisingly, families with children were more stable than households without children. Servants, most of whom were female, were generally absent from Charleville one year later. The majority only stayed briefly in the city, as part of the life cycle of a servant girl, possibly returning to the village to get married. Rather unexpectedly, natives of Charleville seem to have been no more stable, when monitored a year later, than migrants to the town. More generally, these preliminary findings are suggestive of the promise of this massive database in terms of advancing knowledge of French and European demography.

Geneva had the reputation of being the Calvinist Rome. This bastion of Protestantism was, however, surrounded by a largely Catholic hinterland. When free migration to the town was enforced after the end of the Napoleonic wars the denominational composition of the town began to change. According to Oris and Ritschard, the succeeding decades marked out a period of significant political and demographic change. Between 1806 and 1850 the town expanded in population by almost half, and most of this was due to immigration. The proportion of Catholics in the population increased markedly from one-in-ten in the early nineteenth century to 28% in 1843, eventually reaching 46% in 1900. This might be expected to have given rise to politico-sectarian tensions of the kind found in Belfast. While there were certainly tensions between Protestants and Catholics in Geneva, centering particularly on interdenominational marriages, such a baleful outcome proved not to be the case.

One important reason for the relatively peaceful co-existence of different denominations was that Catholics did not form segregated areas or ghettos within the town. Catholic households constituted only 5% of all households in 1816. Three decades later this had risen to 18%. But the important point is that mixed households, containing both Calvinists and Catholics, were always more numerous than purely Catholic households. As the authors point out, this 'strategy' of invisibility on the part of the incomers may have been far more common in the pre-modern past than is generally recognised. Whether this was a conscious strategy on the part of Catholics or simply a process channelled by existing social structures is open to question. The authors go on to make use of a relatively new technique – statistical implicative analysis – to study the position and dynamics of the Catholic sub-population within the social structure of Geneva. The principal source used was six censuses of population carried out between 1816 and 1843. Individual-level information was linked from census to census, producing 24, 718 life trajectories. The

results can be summarised graphically and turn out to be clear cut. Protestants dominated the town in all significant respects. They 'owned' the town, as it were. Power struggles between the bourgeois elite and reformers, which culminated in the revolutionary outbursts of 1843- 46, were fought out within the older Protestant segments of the society. Catholics chose to stand aloof from these internal power struggles. The importance of this article lies in its use of a relatively novel technique of analysis, the use of demographic indicators to study pluralism and polarisation, and the possibility that largely invisible processes of infiltration may have characterised immigration in other towns and cities.

Finally, moving across the Atlantic to Canada, Darroch draws on census evidence to comment on the prevalence or otherwise of extended family households (to use Peter Laslett's terminology) in the Canadian past. Research for the United States indicates that extended family households accounted for a fifth of all households in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and this proportion did not decline much until after World War II. Darroch uses two public samples from the Canadian censuses for 1901 and 1911 to investigate the structure of households across Canada, in different regions of Canada, in different social classes, and in rural and urban areas of this vast country. The decade itself (1901-1911), though a short time frame, is a formative one as those years were characterised by massive immigration to Canada. The presumption might be that the great influx of people also influenced household structure and formation. The use of micro-level data, as in other articles in this issue of the journal, enables Darroch to explore household structure, and its determinants, in intricate detail.

An outline of the findings reveals that there was a reduction over time in the proportion of the population living in nuclear families, that independent households (that is residence with unrelated others) increased slightly in importance, and that there was increased residence in households with extended kin. However, national patterns mask large differences in household formation and experiences between the native-born and immigrant populations and also between major Canadian regions. Gender mattered, as did employment patterns and urban-rural differences. Broadly the findings seem to fit within a North American pattern embracing the United States and Canada. It would be particularly interesting to see how these tendencies in relation to household composition unfold as we move deeper into the twentieth century but that is work for another day.

More generally, this special issue of «Popolazione e Storia», highlights the wealth of analysis that can be conducted using micro-level census data, some of the methodological issues that inevitably arise, and the value of exploiting the time dimension (that is, where census data at different moments in time are available). Linking complementary source materials, such as street directories, baptism and marriage registers to census data, again where possible (and this is far from common), serves to deepen the analysis. Many of the articles in this special issue are exploratory in character, and in their different ways point towards the rich agenda still facing demographic historians.

<sup>1</sup> Both the planning and the implementation of the census were extremely rapid. Three months proved to be sufficient. On September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1861, the Minister of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce, had presented to the King for

signature, the decree calling for a Census, funded by an «extraordinary credit» of 300,000 liras.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Mosaic Project, <http://www.censusmosaic.org/cgi-bin/index.plx>.

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