Population Policy Initiative

Spring 2007

A different TAKES publication

# Babies, Burdens and Threats:

## Current Faces of Population Control

Published by the Population and Development Program
at Hampshire College
http://popdev.hampshire.edu

*different*TAKES

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Spring 2007

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# Babies, Burdens and Threats: Current Faces of Population Control

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# Preface

Population control has not gone away. Although women's movements won important gains at the 1994 UN population conference in Cairo and although population growth rates are declining faster than anticipated all over the world, population control programs and ideologies remain all too alive and well. However, the targets of population control are shifting, reflecting changing demographic, economic and political realities.

This series of *DifferenTakes* issue papers casts a critical eye on the current landscape of population control. It begins with an overview of ten reasons why rethinking 'overpopulation' is vital to creating the kind of global understanding and solidarity needed to advance women's reproductive and sexual rights and build a more just, peaceful and environmentally sustainable world.

## Population Transitions

The publication then moves on to address problematic new demographic discourses that are emerging as declining population growth rates, especially in Europe, are leading to a growing proportion of older people relative to younger workers. In *Too Many Grannies? The Politics of Population Aging*, Sarah Sexton looks at how old people are now being cast as burdens with alarmist images and arguments similar to those used to generate fear of "too many babies" in the Third World. In *From Explosion to Implosion: A Call for Population Skepticism*, Elizabeth L. Krause examines how popular media and demographic reports portray low birth rates in Italy as a threat to national identity. Both authors point to the racial undertones of these messages. The logical solution to labor shortages caused by population aging is to increase immigration levels, but instead immigrants are stigmatized as a threat to (white) cultural cohesion and social order.

In *What's Wrong with the 'Demographic Dividend' Concept*, Anne Hendrixson presents the shortcomings of this latest economic rationale for family planning that was developed primarily to rally support for international population assistance in a context of increased U.S. government restrictions on reproductive health. The concept draws much-needed attention and funding away from a rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health and could potentially trigger the resurgence of population control initiatives.

## Population and Purity

The next two articles in the series highlight the interface between population and purity. In *India's Saffron Demography: So Dangerous, Yet So Appealing*, Mohan Rao analyzes how Hindu fundamentalists in India have whipped up hatred and violence against the Muslim community through spurious claims that Muslims are outbreeding Hindus. In *Old Roots, New Shoots: Eugenics of the Everyday*, Betsy Hartmann explores the persistence of eugenic thinking in the U.S. and how it interacts with other forms of biological determinism that influence the fields of science, health, economics, politics and popular culture.

## Population and Scarcity

Of all the rationales for population control, the belief that 'overpopulation' is a primary cause of resource scarcity and environmental degradation is the most popular and pervasive. In *Colonizing the Future: "Scarcity" as Political Strategy*, the Corner House research and solidarity group

challenges this logic. The authors reveal how in the face of contrary evidence, population control advocates are now shifting their focus from claiming that human numbers are the cause of past and present scarcity to asserting that population growth will be the cause of absolute scarcity in the future. In *Population-Environment Programs: Problematic Assumptions and Contradictory Approaches*, Jim Oldham takes a critical look at projects that combine efforts to reduce population growth with natural resource conservation and presents alternative examples of projects grounded in both environmental and reproductive justice.

## Population and National Security

The last two articles of the series turn to the intersection of population control and national security. In *The Testosterone Threat: Sociobiology, National Security and Population Control*, Betsy Hartmann provides a critique of the book *Bare Branches* which argues that a sizeable "surplus" of young, unmarried adult males in countries like India and China poses a dangerous security threat. While sex-selective abortion of females is a serious problem in both countries, she points to women's rights activism as a more positive response to skewed sex ratios and the population control policies that exacerbate them. In *Control Freaks: "Homeland Security" and "Interoperability,"* Ben Hayes and Roch Tassé analyze how the post 9/11 homeland security industry in North America and Europe is becoming a powerful and chilling form of population control. Although presently targeted mainly at immigrants, the drive toward "interoperability"— the harmonization of government systems of surveillance and data collection — ultimately threatens the civil liberties of all citizens.

A central message of *Babies, Burdens and Threats* is the need to remain vigilant about the construction, circulation and deployment of *ideas* about population. Ideas matter. They are not innocent or neutral. Ideas and theories about population have informed and shaped harmful policies and practices in the past as well as the present, and have the power to do so in the future. By considering these new ideas with a critical lens, putting women's health and rights at the forefront, we can anticipate their policy consequences and begin to formulate feminist and socially-just alternatives. Our next *DifferenTakes* series will focus on new strategies for achieving reproductive justice.

*Betsy Hartmann and Amy Oliver,*
*co-editors,* DifferenTakes

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A Publication of the Population and Development Program at Hampshire College

# 10 Reasons to Rethink 'Overpopulation'

**by the Population and Development Program at Hampshire College**

Fears of overpopulation are pervasive in American society. From an early age we are taught that the world is overpopulated and that population pressure is responsible for poverty, hunger, environmental degradation and even political insecurity. If we don't get population growth under control now, the argument goes, our future is in danger.

Conventional wisdom, however, is not always wise. Placing the blame on population obscures the powerful economic and political forces that threaten the well-being of both people and the planet. It leads to top-down, target-driven population control programs that undermine voluntary family planning and women's reproductive rights. It reinforces racism, promoting harmful stereotypes of poor people of color. And it prevents the kind of global understanding we need in order to reach across borders to work together for a more just, peaceful and environmentally sustainable world.

Here are ten reasons why we should rethink 'overpopulation.'

## 1. The population 'explosion' is over.

World population is still growing and is expected to reach 9 billion by the year 2050. However, demographers agree that the era of rapid growth is over. Population growth rates peaked in the 1960s due to dramatic reductions in death rates and increased life expectancy. Since then, with increasing education, urbanization, and women's work outside the home, birth rates have fallen in almost every part of the world. The average is now 2.7 births per woman. A number of countries, especially in Europe, are now concerned about *declining* population growth as many women have only one child. The UN projects that world population will eventually stabilize, falling to 8.3 billion in 2175.

## 2. The focus on population masks the complex causes of poverty and inequality.

A narrow focus on human *numbers* obscures the way different economic and political *systems* operate to perpetuate poverty and inequality. It places the blame on the people with the least amount of resources and power rather than on corrupt governments and economic and political elites. It ignores the legacy of colonialism and the continuing unequal relationship between rich and poor countries, including unfavorable terms of trade and the debt burden. It says nothing about the concentration of much wealth in a few hands. In the late 1990s, the 225 people who comprise the 'ultra-rich' had a combined wealth of over US $1 trillion, equivalent to the annual income of the poorest 47% of the world's people.

## 3. Hunger is not the result of 'too many mouths' to feed.

Global food production has consistently kept pace with population growth, and today world agriculture produces 17% more calories per person than it did 30 years ago. There is enough food for every man, woman and child to have more than the recommended daily calorie intake. People go hungry because they do not have the land on which to grow food or the money with which to buy it. In Brazil, one percent of the land owners control almost half of the country's arable land, and more land is owned by multinational corporations than all the peasants combined. Globally, more than 1.2 billion people earn less than $1 per day, making it difficult to afford enough food to feed a family. Many governments have failed to make food security a priority. In 2002, when at least 320 million people in India were suffering from hunger, the government tripled its rice and wheat exports. The U.S. is the largest food producer in the world, yet more than one in ten American households are either experiencing hunger or are at the risk of it.

## 4. Population growth is not the driving force behind environmental degradation.

Blaming environmental degradation on overpopulation lets the real culprits off the hook. In terms of resource consumption alone, the richest fifth of the world's people consume 66 times as much as the poorest fifth. The U.S. is the largest emitter of greenhouse gases responsible for global warming – and the least willing to do anything about it. And just who is destroying the rain forest? While poor peasants sometimes play a role, corporate ranching, mining and logging operations are chiefly responsible for tropical deforestation. Worldwide militaries are major agents of environmental destruction. War ravages natural landscapes and military toxics pollute land, air and water. Nuclear weapons, reactors and waste pose the most deadly environmental threat to the planet. Imagine what a different world it would be if all the resources invested in producing deadly armaments went instead to environmental restoration and the development of cleaner, greener energy sources and technologies.

Focusing on population also blinds us to the *positive* role many poor people play in protecting the environment. In many parts of the world, small farmers, especially women, are the main preservers of plant biodiversity through cultivating local crop varieties, preserving seeds, and forest stewardship. Recent research in Africa reveals that increasing population densities, if combined with sound agricultural practices, can actually stimulate environmental improvements.

## 5. Population pressure is not a root cause of political insecurity and conflict.

Blaming population pressure for instability takes the onus off powerful actors and political choices. In 1994, for example, top officials in the Clinton administration blamed the Rwandan genocide on population pressure, diverting attention from the tragic U.S. and U.N. decision not to take effective action to halt it. Especially since 9/11, conflict in the Middle East has been linked to a 'youth bulge' of too many young men whose numbers supposedly make them prone to violence. Missing from this simple picture is how oil politics, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the Bush administration's war on Iraq are causing unrest in the region. Ideas like the 'youth bulge' can have very real and lethal consequences. A case in point is Chechnya, where the International Helsinki Federation has charged the Russian army of abducting and murdering young males in a deliberate process of "thinning out a population of young men."

## 6. Population control targets women's fertility and restricts reproductive rights.

Population control programs view women as 'breeders' of too many babies without considering the complex circumstances of their lives and their reasons for having children. All women should have access to high quality, voluntary reproductive health services, including safe birth control and abortion. In contrast, population control programs try to drive down birth rates as fast and cheaply as possible through the aggressive promotion of sterilization or long-acting, provider-controlled contraceptives like Norplant and Depo-Provera. In addition to their side effects, these contraceptives pose greater health risks for marginalized women in areas where screening and follow-up care are inadequate or nonexistent. Unlike condoms, they do not protect women from sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS.

The 1994 UN population conference in Cairo came out against the use of coercion in population programs, but unfortunately it persists. Today, in India, a number of states punish poor parents who have more than two children by denying them access to government assistance, employment and election to public office. In China, the one-child policy is still enforced through forced sterilizations and abortions. In both countries, the strong preference for bearing at least one son, coupled with restrictive population control policies, has led to sex-selective abortions of female fetuses and skewed sex ratios.

## 7. Population control programs have a negative effect on basic health care.

Under pressure from international population agencies, many poor countries such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, and India made population control a higher priority than primary health care. Especially in the 1970s and 1980s, reducing fertility was considered more important than preventing and treating malaria and other debilitating diseases, improving maternal and

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child health, and addressing malnutrition. This shift not only took a tragic toll on human life, but left countries without the strong public health infrastructure needed to face new threats like HIV/AIDS. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund further undermined primary health care by forcing countries to cut and/or privatize health services, putting them out of the reach of poor people.

This legacy continues today. Two prominent international family planners recently wrote that in Africa rapid population growth poses more of a threat than AIDS and therefore population control should be a high priority in the region. In actuality, while just over 10% of the world population lives in sub-Saharan Africa, it is home to over 60% of all people living with HIV.

**Fear...convinces many otherwise well-meaning people that it is morally justified to curtail the basic human and reproductive rights of poor people in order to save ourselves and the planet from doom.**

## 8. Population alarmism encourages apocalyptic thinking that legitimizes human rights abuses.

In 1968, Paul Ehrlich's famous book *The Population Bomb* warned that the world was on the brink of massive famine and that in the 1970s "hundreds of millions" of people would starve to death. Though not borne out in reality, such dire predictions have long been popular in the population field. Today, population funding appeals still play on fears of future apocalypse. Fear does more than sell, however. It convinces many otherwise well-meaning people that it is morally justified to curtail the basic human and reproductive rights of poor people in order to save ourselves and the planet from doom. This sense of emergency leads to an elitist moral relativism, in which 'we' know best and 'our' rights are more worthy than 'theirs.' Politically, it legitimizes authoritarianism.

Nowhere is the negative effect of apocalyptic thinking more dramatic than in the case of China. The decision to implement the draconian one-child policy was greatly influenced by the 1972 Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth*, a deeply flawed computer simulation that incorrectly predicted impending economic and environmental collapse due to population growth.

## 9. Threatening images of overpopulation reinforce racial and ethnic stereotypes and scapegoat immigrants and other vulnerable communities.

Negative media images of starving African babies, poor, pregnant women of color, and hordes of dangerous Third World men drive home the message that 'those people' outnumber 'us.' Fear of overpopulation in the Third World often translates into fear of increasing immigration to the West, and thereby people of color becoming the majority. Harvard professor Samuel Huntington argues that high numbers of Latino immigrants threaten a unified American Anglo-Protestant culture and identity. Anti-immigrant groups tied to white supremacists strategically deploy population fears to appeal to liberal environmentalists.

The demonization of immigrants ignores their positive contributions to the U.S. economy as well as the global economic forces that drive many people to migrate. In Europe, nativist policymakers are urging white women to have more babies to reduce the economy's dependence on immigrant labor.

In the U.S. there is a strong link between negative images of Third World overpopulation and racist views of African Americans as burdens on society. Eugenics programs and punitive welfare policies have subjected African Americans and other marginalized communities to sterilization and contraceptive abuse because of racist assumptions that their fertility is out of control. Even though women on welfare have on average fewer than two children, the image of the overbreeding 'welfare queen' remains firmly fixed in the white imagination.

## 10. Conventional views of overpopulation stand in the way of greater global understanding and solidarity.

In order to solve the world's pressing economic, political and environmental problems, we need more global understanding and solidarity, not less. For all the reasons cited above, fears of overpopulation are deeply divisive and harmful. Population control programs distort family planning and diminish human rights. In order to protect and advance women's reproductive rights in a hostile climate, we urgently need to work together across borders of gender, race, class and nationality. Rethinking population helps open the way.

For more information on population issues, see:

- *Population in Perspective: A Curriculum Resource*, by Mary Lugton with Phoebe McKinney, http://www.populationinperspective.org
- Population and Development Program at Hampshire College, http://popdev.hampshire.edu
- Committee on Women, Population and the Environment, www.cwpe.org
- The Corner House, www.thecornerhouse.org.uk

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7. Population control programs have a negative effect on basic health care.
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A Publication of the Population and Development Program at Hampshire College

# Too Many Grannies? The Politics of Population Aging

**by Sarah Sexton**

Until recently, pensions were primarily of interest to just two minorities: older people and actuaries. But no longer. As *The Economist* puts it, "for the first time, pensions are as hot as an issue can get."[1] Pensions are now prompting workers to put up the barricades and go on strike across Europe. They are triggering bankruptcies among top-ranking companies. They are filling newspaper pages and television screens.

Surely, headlines of people living longer and healthier lives should be a cause for celebration? Instead, media reports dwell on doom-and-gloom scenarios of masses of desperately poor, gray-haired folk who will be a burden on their families and society alike.

It has been an axiom of international politics for decades that our world is overcrowded with billions of humans — or rather poor and brown-skinned youth, largely from the South. Have the poor old of the North now joined these surplus billions? Or is the focus on aging simply a continuation in another guise of age-old Malthusian politics? After all, the apocalyptic language used in media reports is echoingly familiar. This time, however, "demographic time-bombs" refer to aging women, conflict is predicted between generations instead of countries, and the greatest risks are believed to stem from people living longer than they used to.

## Too many old people?

Demographic studies indicate that the absolute numbers of older people and their proportion in any given population are rising in many countries around the world. In Japan, the proportion of the population over 65 is the highest in the world at 19 percent, even though half a century ago, it was just five percent, well below that in the US, UK, France or Germany. In the UK, the proportion of the population over the age of 60 has been about the same for the past 20 years (21 percent), but this figure is predicted to rise to almost 30 percent by the year 2031. Of OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, Italy, Japan and South Korea are likely to be the "worst affected" by population aging. By the year 2050, more than one third of the populations in these countries will be over 65 compared to one fifth in the US, Mexico and Turkey. Although warnings usually focus on a "crisis" in Northern countries, some 60 percent of older people already live in the South, with the figure expected to rise to 80 percent by mid-century.

What actions should be taken based on these projections, however, is open to question. Historical demographic statistics do not show that the proportion of older people in a population has risen constantly: just like birth rates, it rises and falls over time as circumstances change.

Indeed, the increase in the number of older people is, to a certain extent, a temporary phenomenon, reflecting the advancing years of those born during the "baby boom" — the sudden leap in births that occurred in many industrialized countries after the Second World War between 1946 and 1964. This "old age bulge" will simply work its way to the top of the age pyramid and deflate by about the middle of the 21st century as the baby boomers die. Rarely mentioned is that societies managed to find the money to feed, clothe, house and educate all these baby boomers for their first dependent 16 to 20 years before they started working; or that the US economy will be three to four times larger when the baby boomers retire than it was when they were young dependents.[2]

Predictions of what will happen in the future based on current statistics and trends are notoriously problematic, not least because they do not allow for changes occurring between now and then. Population studies certainly do provide indications for future economic development and growth, labor markets, national savings, age structures, health, fertility and mortality, functioning of markets, welfare programs and inequality. But the results are simply *projections* rather than predictions, and in many cases they are inconclusive.

## …living for too long?

Besides a higher proportion of older people, another cause of the supposed pensions (and healthcare) crisis is significant increases in longevity. One financial journalist asserted that: "Once upon a time our biggest fear was dying too young. Now it is living too long."[3]

Life expectancy in many countries has been lengthening for the past 200 years. In the first half of the 20th century, lower death rates in early life accounted for much of this rise in longevity. But people now tend to be living longer because of changes that affect the rest of their lives: less smoking, less exhausting and dangerous jobs, better education, and medical advances in anesthesia and surgery.

Yet it is hardly a surprise that people are living longer. Governments and actuaries have had at least half a century's warning of any "crisis," given that pensioners were born 60 or more years ago.[4]

Many projections of life expectancy assume that people's lives will simply carry on lengthening, just as predictions of future population growth are often based on extrapolating birth rates way into the future. But just as population growth and birth rates do not continue ever upwards, so, too, life expectancy will not increase *ad infinitum*.

Indeed, average life spans in several countries are falling rather than rising. According to US Census projections, life expectancy in more than 40 countries is anticipated to be *lower* in 2010 than in 1990. In Russia, for instance, life expectancy has dropped significantly since 1985, especially for men, a fall attributed to alcohol-related diseases, accidents and violence. In sub-Saharan Africa, life expectancy has dropped precipitously by 10-20 years in the past two decades largely because of AIDS. If there are proportionally more older people in many African countries than there used to be, it is more because the young are dying than because the old are living longer.

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## . . . or too few babies?

Rather than "too many old people," the issue could be presented equally well as one of "too few babies," implying that a country will have "too few workers" in the future. In the past 50 years, the world's average birth rate has tumbled from five children per woman to 2.65 children. Most of the 44 countries classified by the UN as "developed" have birth rates below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman.

In recent years, Italy has had the lowest birth rate in Europe with Spain not far behind. But the most recent figures suggest that Germany now has the lowest: 8.5 births for every 1,000 inhabitants compared with 12.7 and 12 in France and Britain respectively. "Baby Shock: We Germans are Dying Out" headlined one newspaper article in March 2006. In response, some politicians have suggested that people (especially educated women) who do not have children should have their pensions reduced by half.

And it is not just in the developed world that fertility has fallen. In East Asia, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, many Caribbean countries and most South American countries, fertility rates are now below replacement level. Brazil, Iran and Turkey may all be below replacement level within 15 years. In some countries where more boys than girls are being born and raised because of sex selection and son preference, the decline may be compounded.

Yet reducing the birth rate has been a key international policy goal for more than 50 years. Rather than reassessing this goal, however, it has proved easier to target and to blame vulnerable older people.

An October 2005 OECD study projects that, by the year 2050, 10 active workers will be supporting, on average, more than seven older inactive people compared with just four in the year 2000. What is rarely highlighted in such studies is how the previous generation of retirees laid the foundations for economic growth through their own work and taxes.

Statistics, moreover, leave out the reasons why many people of all ages struggle to earn a reasonable living, such as a lack of skills, experience or aptitude, lack of educational opportunities, low wages, the outsourcing of manufacturing and, increasingly, service jobs to even lower-waged countries. Raising the age at which people can retire and draw a pension as a way of reducing the cost of pensions assumes that there are jobs and training available and that older people do not suffer age discrimination. In the UK, some 40 percent of the one million people between the ages of 50 and 65 who want to work are unable to find employment.

"Old" is, moreover, a relative term. Attitudes toward "old age" are anything but unilinear and unambiguous. Nor are boundaries between "working age" and "old age" completely rigid. Many retired people are part of the "active" economy rather than a dependent expense or a passive burden. This is the case whether they are seen only in the narrow calculus of economics and accountancy or whether they are considered as part of a broader politics of welfare. In financial terms, they spend, save and invest, all of which helps an economy. They may not be net consumers of public money or national wealth, if the broader effects of their activities are taken into account. For instance, many perform social, voluntary, group and family activities, such as (grand)childcare and community and charity work, all of which are not captured by quantitative measures such as GDP and thus are not off-set against public expenditure.

**If there is a crisis of too many old people, it is one of too many people in poverty in their old age, both now and in the future.**

## . . . or too few migrants?

Dull, number-crunching arguments about life expectancies, birth and death rates, and the affordability or otherwise of pensions and health care become emotionally charged when they overlap with debates on immigration. Indeed, fears of "too many immigrants" provide much of the subtext for the current debates on population aging. In the process, both migrants and pensioners are being scapegoated.

Supporters of increased immigration, either on a permanent or temporary basis, argue that migrant workers provide much-needed skills and labor, given the declining ratio of younger people to older ones. They thereby boost economic growth and enable pensions and health care to be paid. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan points to Japan, Russia and South Korea as examples of countries facing shrinking economies and "stagnating" societies. "Immigration alone will not solve these problems," he says, "but it is an essential part of any solution."[5] Opponents contend that immigrants take the jobs of "native workers," lower the wages of others, and thereby depress the economy for everyone.

While these arguments are ostensibly about economic costs and benefits, racism and nationalism are never far from the surface and other economic and historical realities are selectively left out of the picture. The UK and the United States, for instance, have been countries of migrants for centuries, and their preeminence still relies on the legacy of slavery and colonialism. Columnist Gary Younge of the UK's *Guardian* newspaper points out that "economically, without the huge pool of cheap labor emanating from the developing world, documented or not, we simply could not function as we do."[6] Many migrants are filling jobs that British people are unwilling or unable to do.

More and more migrants are going to OECD countries as highly-skilled workers to fill jobs in areas of shortage, such as nursing, teaching and information technology. Without nurses and doctors from overseas, for instance, the UK's public health service would collapse.

Far from depending on welfare, many migrants are supporting families and communities in the countries from where they came. In 2004, migrant workers formally transferred US $150 billion in total, and informally twice that amount — in all, triple the value of official aid to Southern countries and not far behind foreign direct investment.[7]

An estimated 200 million people now live and work outside their own country, double the number of 25 years ago, but representing just three percent of world population. Europeans migrated in vastly higher numbers in the 19th century to the Americas and Australasia. Nonetheless, migrants are often held responsible for unemployment among old and young alike. Three academic economists point out how easy it is to create a "popular wisdom [that is] simply false":

> "Start by substantially overestimating the number of migrants, as the natives invariably do. They assume the number of jobs is fixed. Evidently any immigrant must be taking the job of a native, so unemployment can be cut only by stopping immigration."[8]

Often left out of discussions is an international trade policy that allows capital to roam freely across borders in search of low wages, destroying jobs and livelihoods, but that does not allow people to move in search of better ones. To date, such free market policies have been instrumental in causing the *forced* movement of people who are simply trying to survive or are fleeing from torture and oppression — and in causing the increased racism and hostility they encounter if they manage to migrate. In a similar and related process, pensioners are denigrated as burdens on the young even as footloose capital depends on their savings.

## In Whose Interest?

A major goal of many of those who emphasize the aging crisis (too many old people will soon cause countries to go bankrupt) is to reduce direct state

provision of pensions so as to increase private, for-profit provision, albeit with significant public subsidies. Pension savings are not intended to be stuffed under a mattress or hoarded in a bank vault, but put into private pension funds that buy and sell stocks and shares around the world or gamble on other financial instruments such as derivatives and hedge funds.

The privatization of pension systems over the past decade and more has not led to better pensions for more people, nor to greater economic growth. But the theory persists because formidable commercial, political and social interests support it for their own opportunistic reasons: to expand stock markets, liberalize financial markets and change the role of the state. The "crisis" thus lies not in pensions nor in the numbers and proportions of old people, but in neoliberal aspirations.

Population aging may well be "unprecedented" and "without parallel in the history of humanity,"[9] but it does not follow that the challenges it creates are major, nor that proposed solutions are as obvious as they might appear.

If there is a crisis of too many old people, it is one of too many people in poverty in their old age, both now and in the future. Problems of pension financing derive less from demographic changes than from unemployment, low wages, and a shift in income distribution away from wages towards profits. Even if demography were the main problem, a private system based on financial markets would not be the solution, as it is more costly, less equitable and inherently less secure than public alternatives. Worsening financial problems won't be the result of the existence of more old people, but exaggerating the demographic challenge only makes that grim future more likely. As economist Paul Krugman points out, "The view of demography as destiny is only a half-truth, and in some ways it's as damaging as a lie."[10]

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***Sarah Sexton** is at The Corner House, a research and solidarity group based in the United Kingdom that aims to support democratic and community movements for environmental and social justice. This piece is drawn from a recent Corner House Briefing by Richard Minns with Sarah Sexton entitled, "Too Many Grannies: Private Pensions, Corporate Welfare and Growing Insecurity." http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk.*

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# From Explosion to Implosion: A Call for Population Skepticism

**by Elizabeth L. Krause**

Fears of global overpopulation pervade the American psyche. In the past several years, however, an unlikely bedfellow has slipped under the covers of the sleeping giant of overpopulation: The new ally stirs under the namesake of "population implosion." Loud alarms from Europe reverberate elsewhere in a chorus of too few babies and too many immigrants.

In the 1990s, Italian women gave birth to an average of 1.1 to 1.2 children — a trend that leading demographers reported as the lowest birthrate of any country in the world and "likely the lowest ever documented in the history of humanity for a large-scale population."[1]

Alarmism about declining births became widely accepted as proof of a society gone awry. In November 2002, Pope John Paul II joined the chorus, and in a historic and controversial address to Parliament described the situation as a "crisis of births" that amounted to a *grave minaccia*, or serious threat, that weighs on the future of Italy.[2]

In 1995, I embarked on an ethnographic study of Italy's demographic trend and for two years lived in a sweater-making zone of central Italy. As a cultural anthropologist interested in contemporary issues, I wanted to learn how a society known the world over as family centered was experiencing the trend of record-low birthrates, only children, aging first-time parents, and disappointed would-be grandparents. I participated in daily life as a parent activist, sweater worker, and coffee-group member. I also conducted library research at the University of Florence and pursued archival research in a commune in the Province of Prato.

To frame low fertility as a crisis erases a host of histories. Indeed, the last time the government took a stance against reproductive trends was the 1920s. Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini launched his infamous demographic campaign that taxed bachelors, made abortion a crime against the race, awarded prolific mothers, and attempted to create an Italian "super race" as part of an anti-malarial project of social engineering in the Pontine Marshes south of Rome.[3]

Ultimately, family-making among Italians is the outcome of a quiet revolution that began nearly a century ago against the rigid pecking order of the patriarchal family. It is a consequence of society's embrace of an egalitarian model of the family. Today, a generation grapples with gender relations in a context where a "culture of responsibility" weighs most heavily on women. Low fertility reflects the reconciling of family work with wage work in a context where social obligations of trust and reciprocity were and are foundational to the economy. Furthermore, it marks the rejection of the stigma of a rural past, which included attributing innate racial inferiority to certain segments of the population. Distancing oneself from the rural past meant striving toward a new location of social class and all the consumer practices that went with that. Having few children displays middle-class decency. Finally, low fertility signals the contradictory victory of rationality with regard to sex — contradictory because it leads to new forms of stigma for those who violate the norms.[4]

Taken from a critical and gendered perspective, then, the new-fangled alarmism about population implosion might be received with a hefty dose of

old-fashioned skepticism. The scientific discourse on fertility decline is anything but neutral. Fear-instilling metaphors dominate the media and demographic portrayals of the dynamic, leading to an unfortunate consequence: themes of dangerous demographies enable racism.

One women's magazine wrote of "demographic desertification"; a national daily newspaper described Italy as a nation that is "old and without babies," while another juxtaposed "empty cradles" with a growing "immigrant supply." More than a decade ago, then-Labour Minister Carlo Donat Cattin, in an interview with the newsmagazine *L'Espresso*, called on Italians to produce more babies "to keep away the armadas of immigrants from the southern shores of the Mediterranean."[5]

The weekly opinion magazine *New Republic* in 1999 forecast that "Italy will be a theme park in a couple of generations." Similarly, a 2003 BBC report entitled "Ageing Europe is Unprepared" provided one worrying statistic after another for Italy: a village with four births for every 14 funerals; predictions of a 1:1 ratio of productive worker to pensioner by 2050 in a population that will have dwindled from 56 to 40 million.[6]

A June 2006 issue of *Science* legitimated this dominant reading of Europe's current demographic moment, characterizing the situation as a "baby deficit."[7]

Overpopulation, population implosion, white people having too few babies, brown people having too many — in short, population is something to be controlled. In Europe, but also in Japan and the United States, a dominant message is that reproduction has gone awry.

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From a global perspective this obsession with dwindling numbers of people is suspect. Since the middle of the twentieth century, fears of "overpopulation" rather than underpopulation have dominated popular, scientific and academic studies. One might expect Italy to be held up as a model for other countries to follow. Instead, the demographic trend is viewed with great concern.[8]

The media alone cannot be blamed for distorted depictions of the "crisis." Worries about low birthrates, aging, immigration, and the societal consequences that are calculated to flow from them can be traced largely to demographic reports. As demographers churn out statistics and interpretations about the trend, the Italian government worries that its nation's birthrate is "too low."[9]

Demographers' reports exhibit several patterns, which frequently stray from fact, figure or observation into the realm of opinion and morality.[10]

First, Italian demographers consistently describe the country's birthrate as *bassissima* — extremely low. For example, a book entitled *Children of Italy* noted that the "birthrate has undoubtedly sunk to the lowest level in the world." The metaphor of sinking suggests a threatening process.[11]

Second, the demographic experts agree the low birthrate constitutes a serious problem. The report *Demographic Tendencies* describes the birth rate as: "provoking in the population — quickly but *silently* — a true and real 'mutation,' which has in itself the potential to unhinge the whole social and economic structure of the country." Similarly, the authors of *Atlas on Population Aging* classify demographic trends as bringing about "rapid and profound transformations that have radically modified, and in some cases unhinged, the entire structure of the whole society."[12]

Renowned Italian demographer Antonio Golini and his colleagues portray pending "deformations" in the age structure that will create a vulnerable society, weakening its ability to meet the needs of its citizens for services, buildings and jobs. They ponder the dangers that transmogrified generational ratios may pose to "adequate social cohesion."[13]

Third, many demographers believe that the Italians responsible for the low birthrate — those of childbearing age, and women in particular — have become irrational. Some demographers take the consequences of this demographic trend to signal a dire finale: the end of Italian culture. When a journalist challenged Golini for waking up "the ghost of Italian extinction," he said:

"If we have a global view [of population], there is no problem. If the Italian population declines quickly, the immigrants will arrive and Amen. But we cannot stop at this. I study Mayan civilization and just as I regret their disappearance, I can regret it if the Italian or European culture were to disappear."[14]

**While demographers are often silent on the subject of race, their silence can mask the effects that their alarmist claims have on racist feelings and actions.**

Golini implies that immigrants bring difference and hence pose dangers to Italian national identity on the assumption that immigrants cannot continue Italian civilization. In the few decades since Italy has been registering immigrants, Golini and his colleagues note that their presence "has already created some social tensions to the point of manifesting rejection."[15]

The disappearing discourse also appeared, albeit in a humorous rendition, in a 1999 ABCnews.com article that quoted the Population Reference Bureau's Carl Haub, who calculated that the last Italian would be born in the year 3880!

The alarms that demographers sound about the low birth rate rarely strike direct racial chords — yet racial intonations can be heard if one listens closely. While demographers are often silent on the subject of race and like to appear objective, their silence can mask the effects that their alarmist claims have on racist feelings and actions.

Race scholars acknowledge that the terms of racism have changed but that racism still matters albeit in new ways. As sociologists John Solomos and Les Beck have observed, race today is "coded as culture." In a review essay, Paul Reitter explains, "The structures of racist ideology remain operative, in other words, but they now stigmatize cultural — not specifically racial — groups as innately deficient and dangerous."[16]
Bodies once discriminated against through naked racializing discourses are now clothed in cultural discourses that have powerful and harmful stigmatizing effects.

Demographers' alarms assist in constructing and normalizing Italians as homogenous, "white" and European. They enable racism by promoting a politics of difference that heightens whiteness, not as an objective skin color but as a subjective ideology. This ideology functions as an instrument of power by guaranteeing and naturalizing privilege.[17]
Furthermore, alarmist discourses encourage a form of demographic nationalism in which the national population is depicted at risk from internal sources — low fertility and rapid aging — as well as from external ones — such as increasing immigration.[18]

Constant scientific, media and popular reiteration of the demographic "problem," the "crisis of births," and demographic "unhinging" does not cultivate sympathy or invite equality for immigrant populations. Immigrants understand who is implicated in this alarm-ringing. Cultivating a world of open frontiers, open hearts and equal footing remains the work of alternative initiatives whose shape is still emerging.

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*Note*: This essay was adapted from "Dangerous Demographies, The Scientific Manufacture of Fear," The Corner House, Briefing Paper No. 36, July 2006. Particular thanks are due to Sarah Sexton and Betsy Hartmann.


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A Publication of the Population and Development Program at Hampshire College

# What's Wrong with the 'Demographic Dividend' Concept?

**by Anne Hendrixson**

The September 2006 issue of the International Monetary Fund's *Finance & Development*, titled "6.5 Billion and Counting" depicts a bemused cartoon earth, overflowing with people. The earth's forehead is creased with concern as it strains to support surplus population in its hands, but despite its best efforts, people are slipping through its fingers and falling into space.

*Finance & Development*'s earth graphic is unfortunately typical of negative population tropes that tend to ignore or diminish the complex interplay of politics, economics, and other factors that contribute to global problems, while overemphasizing the role of population.[1] Even as population growth rates decline faster than expected, many such images and narratives continue to characterize population growth as overwhelming the earth.[2]

While the *Finance & Development* cover graphic conveys alarmist ideas about population, the magazine's content seems to depart from that alarmism. It features articles that look at some population characteristics as potentially beneficial to countries' economic growth and poverty reduction. In particular, the magazine explores how fertility rate, age distribution, life expectancy, migration and urbanization affect economic growth.[3] One of its focal points is the "demographic dividend" concept.

The latter describes an economic boom that is purportedly catalyzed by a population boom. Harvard economist and demographer David Bloom, one of the lead architects of the concept, explains that when the number of working age adults in a population is larger than the number of dependent seniors and children, there is a "window of opportunity" wherein the adults' productivity and consumption levels can rise and the economy can benefit.[4] The term "demographic dividend" has come to refer to the working age population, rather than the economic boom.[5]

The champions of this concept conjecture that the demographic dividend occurs as part of what many consider an archetypal demographic transition. "Demographic transition" begins when mortality rates fall and birth rates remain the same. During this transition there is a boom in the population, typically followed by a lowering of birth rates. As birth rates decrease and the population boom ages and enters the workforce, it can result in the demographic dividend. The demographic dividend concept recommends "catalyzing" demographic transition to help bring on this age distribution within a population.[6]

Some champions of the concept credit the demographic dividend with the potential to strengthen flagging national economies, particularly in the global South. Many point to the so-called East Asian economic "miracle" as evidence of demographic dividend activity.[7] Conversely, concept adherents contend that Latin American governments failed to capitalize on their demographic dividend, and have remained in a state of economic stagnation.

Often pointing to the example of Latin America, Bloom and others emphasize that the presence of a demographic dividend does not guarantee economic growth. They argue that countries experiencing a boom must "exploit" that burgeoning population as workers to stimulate the economy. Proponents of the demographic dividend concept argue that in order to transform the young population into productive workers and consumers, national governments must support them with adequate education, health benefits (including family planning), and neo-liberal economic policies to ensure a strong job market. Furthermore, governments must plan for future pensions for the dividend as it ages.[8]

Within this framework, family planning is particularly important to spurring economic growth. The argument is that family planning will hasten demographic transition, simultaneously lowering the number of children and infants, and freeing workers from private sphere responsibilities for work in the formal market. It is in the family planning and population policy arena that the concept has found particular traction and support.

## The Making of a Theory

In November 1998, select economists and policy analysts concerned with re-envisioning the relationship between population and economic growth attended the Symposium on Population Change and Economic Development in Bellagio, Italy.[9] Participants discussed whether it is possible to form an economic rationale that would bolster political and financial support for the family planning, education, and women's empowerment mandates of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development's (ICPD) Program of Action.

The meeting resulted in the influential book, *Population Matters: Demographic Change, Economic Growth, and Poverty in the Developing World*. The book argues that population can have a positive effect on economic growth and advocates for "speeding demographic transition" to create this positive effect. It sparked further interest in an economic rationale for family planning, particularly in the funding world.

*Population Matters* inspired the John T. and Katherine D. MacArthur Foundation's Population and Reproductive Health staff to hold a series of meetings with feminists, economists and demographers about the validity of the concept. Although some of the reproductive health advocates at the meetings questioned the usefulness of the concept, program staff decided to invest in further research.

So far, the MacArthur Foundation has invested about $1 million from its emerging issues portfolio into research on the demographic dividend concept.[10] Many of the Symposium meeting participants received funding, including David Bloom and Andrew Mason of the East/West Center. Ann Blanc, MacArthur Foundation Program Officer in Population and Reproductive Health, explains that the foundation has supported research into the demographic dividend because it may prove a valid economic rationale for operationalizing the family planning and reproductive health initiatives from the ICPD+10 Program of Action.[11]

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Foundation support for demographic dividend research, mainly in the U.S. and Britain, has strengthened existing partnerships between researchers, foundations and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), IMF and other organizations. These networks have helped to spread the concept. Meanwhile, development agencies and NGOs have adopted it to promote family planning, reproductive health, education and women's empowerment as advocated in the ICPD and ICPD +10 *Program of Action*, and the UN Millennium Development Goals.

## Economic Boon to Violent Doom

The World Health Organization, the United Nations, and the UNFPA are among the international development agencies that use the demographic dividend concept in their literature and presentations. For instance, the UNFPA mobilizes the concept in their 2005 handbook "The Case for Investing in Young People." The handbook directs UNFPA staff to leverage the concept to convince policymakers to allocate resources to young people in developing countries. The handbook suggests that UNFPA staff discuss the long and short-term economic benefits of supporting young people, including "capitalizing on the demographic transition."[12]

Interestingly, the handbook also evokes another population hypothesis, the "youth bulge" concept, to stress the potentially *negative* outcomes of ignoring young peoples' needs. In the authors' words, the threat of the youth bulge is the most "emotive argument" to submit to policy makers.[13] The "youth bulge" concept predicts that more than twenty percent of young people in a population can signal political rebellion and unrest. The concept sees young men as potential perpetrators of violence, particularly in the global South.[16] The UNFPA's message is this: the presumably peaceful and productive demographic dividend might, if not properly supported, turn into a violent and unruly youth bulge and threaten nations' security.

Other non-governmental, policy advocacy organizations mobilize the demographic dividend concept. US-based Population Action International (PAI) makes a similar link between the demographic dividend and the youth bulge in *The Security Demographic*, a publication aimed at policymakers and analysts concerned with U.S. national defense. "Viewed from countries where most young adults… have been educated or technically trained, and where their energy and ingenuity are sought by employers, such a large proportion of young people—a side effect of past population growth called the *youth bulge*—is seen as an asset."[17] The authors contend that the youth bulge, when unsupported, poses a danger to national security. The authors cite both the

demographic dividend and youth bulge concepts as evidence of the need for increased family planning programs in the global South.

The UNFPA handbook and *The Security Demographic* are examples of publications that elevate the demographic dividend (and youth bulge) concepts to common sense truths.[16] With frequent use, the concepts have moved from research topics to de facto policy rationales. In the process they have gained ascendancy over other demographic theories despite the fact that feminist reproductive health activists, economists and others have questioned the concept and developed important critiques.

## Critiques of the Demographic Dividend

Feminist Sonia Correa notes that the demographic dividend concept is not unique, or particularly new.[17] Demographers and economists throughout the world have theorized about the demographic "window of opportunity," particularly in Brazil. However, the demographic dividend language has started to prevail in global debates and the 1990s window of opportunity formula is losing ground.[18] This is unfortunate because the latter terminology is more accurate as it suggests that demographic change creates an opportunity that may or may not be positively used.

In contrast, the demographic dividend concept inscribes an inherent value to working age populations even as concept proponents caution that dividend benefits are not automatic. By valuing working-age populations because of their *numbers* rather than other characteristics, the concept tends to universalize population trends, rather than examine them in their context. Just as the concept relies on the debated "demographic transition" theory to explain global population change through a universal, European-based norm, the concept promotes a template for understanding and exploiting working-age populations, based on the supposed demographic dividend successes in East Asia.

However, the conditions and factors that explain the East Asian economic "miracle" cannot be replicated elsewhere. The particular context that contributed to the "miracle," including the national regime, political context, and relationship to the global market and the U.S., among other factors, does not exist everywhere. That particular economic surge in East Asia cannot be repeated, even in East Asia.

While the national, political and social context of the working age population matters, so does the composition of the population. Working age populations' characteristics differ from location to location. The demographic dividend concept views them as heterogeneous blocks. It assumes that all economic classes, ethnic groups and races within a population go through demographic transition at the same time, whereas often demographic transition occurs at different rhythms and paces for different sectors of the population. This tendency to generalize about working-age populations weakens an already simplistic concept.

## An Effective Rationale for Sexual and Reproductive Health?

Correa sees the demographic dividend theory as arising from the need for family planning champions to rally support in a context of increased U.S. restrictions on reproductive health. As the Bush Administration pulls federal funding for domestic and international family planning, advocates are looking for an argument that will function successfully in this conservative political arena.

The question is whether the demographic dividend concept's numbers-based arguments will support the kind of voluntary, comprehensive, quality sexual and reproductive health and rights programs advocated by women's health activists at the ICPD and elsewhere.[19] The prospect is unlikely. Such quality programs build from users' rights and participation and offer affordable health care for women and families. They are organized from a rights-based perspective which respects each individual's sexual and reproductive health decisions.

The demographic dividend concept tends to obscure or de-emphasize this rights-based approach. Instead, the concept advocates for an approach driven by the potential for economic growth. It mobilizes family planning as a means to achieve an economic end, rather than to promote information on and access to contraceptive methods as a fundamental human right of both women and men, and particularly young people. The suggestion that nations will benefit from catalyzing demographic transition may unexpectedly revive old models of fertility control measures to the detriment of sound sexual reproductive health and rights policies, as recommended by ICPD and by feminist reproductive health groups around the world. Correa notes that while concept proponents do not explicitly call for population control, their argument "may trigger initiative in that direction. I suspect this may be happening already."

Ultimately, the "demographic dividend" concept exhibits some of the same schizophrenia as the September 2006 *Finance & Development*'s cover and its content. While it promotes a more nuanced look at the relationship between population and economic development, it relies on numbers to validate the necessity of family planning.

Likewise, those who promote the concept to attract resources and support for family planning, while well-intentioned, draw away much-needed attention and funding from a rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health. This support would be better allocated to promoting existing feminist efforts for envisioning and providing quality sexual and reproductive health services. And, while it may be politically expedient to back an economic appeal for family planning during the conservative Bush regime, this approach could (as suggested above) undermine the services it aims to support. The provision of good-quality sexual and reproductive health services should be a goal unto itself, not a means to achieve economic growth.

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***Many thanks to Sonia Correa** for a long conversation which informed this article. Correa is the founder of SOS-Corpo- Instituto Feminista para a Democracia (Brazil). She is the coordinator for sexual and reproductive health rights of DAWN, Development Alternative with Women for a New Era, a southern-based research and activist network.

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# India's Saffron Demography: So Dangerous, Yet So Appealing

**By Mohan Rao**

In the early 1990s, the slogan *Hum Do, Hamare Do; Woh Paanch Unke Pachees*, meaning "We are two and have two; they are five and have twenty-five," became particularly strident in India. It played on the Government of India's slogan calling for a small family, "We are two and we have two." But it added something noxious to it: it implied that we, Hindus, are two and have two children, while they, Muslims, are five and have twenty-five children.

The arguments were simple, but deeply flawed. For example, the slogan meant that Hindus are not allowed by law to have more than one wife, while Muslims can have four.[1] What it did not consider was data that clearly revealed that polygamous marriages are significantly more common among Hindus than among Muslims. Moreover, Muslims, like Hindus, are not a monolithic and homogenous community: Muslims in Kerala or Tamil Nadu, indeed in South India generally, have smaller families than even Hindus in states like Uttar Pradesh in North India. Clearly, then, religion was not the real issue.

The slogan emerged in a period when the so-called Hindu communalist parties — the Sangh Parivar, or family — were trying to obtain political power. They mounted a fierce campaign, filled with bloodshed, around the issue of the Babri Masjid, a mosque in Ayodhya in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, which they claimed had been built on the precise site of the birthplace of the Hindu god Rama. Eminent historians as well as Indian courts revealed there was no basis to these claims, but the fundamentalists asserted it was not a matter of fact or law, but of faith. The campaign against the mosque bore fruit: in complete violation of all laws and commitments made to the Supreme Court of India, the Sangh Parivar demolished the mosque on December 6, 1992, a day the then President of India called a "black day for India." It led to appalling conflagrations across the country.

The "Hindu" parties were now on the upswing.[2] They are of course essentially not Hindu but political parties utilizing religious signs, symbols and metaphors. Religion in India, as in many parts of the world, including the U.S., can serve political purposes. Deploying demographic fears of Muslims outnumbering Hindus to build their constituency was a part of their larger campaign to build a theocratic state, a Hindu Rashtra, mirroring Pakistan, a state they hate but cannot help wanting to desperately emulate.

The RSS or the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh is the shadowy head of this group of right-wing Hindu organizations collectively called the Sangh Parivar. The RSS is a male, largely upper-caste, cadre-based organization involved in ideological work and behind-the-scenes politics. Its parliamentary wing is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), presently in the opposition, which headed a coalition government from 1998-2004. The Prime Minister at that time, Mr.Vajpayee, is a RSS member, as is the then second-in-command, Mr.Advani. Indeed most leaders in the BJP come from RSS ranks. The Sangh family also comprises the more militant, lumpen Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) that has played a large role in violence against Muslims and Christians, along with another organization named the Bajrang Dal. The Sangh Parivar also has organizations working among women, students, tribals, and workers and — extremely important for fund-raising —

organizations known as the India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF) and the Hindu Sevak Sangh (HSS) in the U.S. and U.K. Upper caste professional Hindus in these countries, searching for identity, myths and symbols of a glorious past, are massive funders of fascist organizations in India.[3]

As someone long involved in population issues in India, I wrote a series of articles and a pamphlet challenging Hindu fundamentalist demography. What took me aback — and frightened me, which was the purpose — was the response. I received letters asking me to convert to Islam, to change my name. The more frequent one argued that I was an enemy of India and of Hindus. I also had postcards — many of them, so clearly it was not just one mad person — telling me that should my wife go to Pakistan, the writer hoped she would be raped and converted to Islam. I received a long letter from a retired Inspector General of Police, who is with a front organization of the RSS named the Patriotic Front, enclosing two papers presented at international conferences, arguing that Muslims seek to overrun Europe which would soon be called Arabistan.[4]

Saffron Demography is the term Patricia and Roger Jeffery give to the Sangh Parivar's demographic myths and lies: saffron is the color that the Sangh claims represents Hindus.[5] What gives Saffron Demography such widespread appeal? Some of the complex factors at work are explored in the next section.

## Virulent Identities, Virulent Masculinities

Saffron Demography suffers from serious methodological, philosophical and empirical problems. It is based on assumptions — that there exists a uniform and homogenous Muslim community and an equally undifferentiated Hindu community in India — which are blatantly false. It is also supremely ahistorical: it does not look at trends of population over time among these homogenized communities; neither does it consider that in India today household economies differ between Hindus and Muslims and that these can have profound demographic consequences. Data also indicates that the use of contraception by Muslim women increased faster in the 1990s than among Hindus.[6] I can cite any number of other facts — all these only bring in responses that I should change my religion, or worse.

This communalization of demography has a long history. As early as 1909 U.N. Mukherji wrote a book entitled *Hindus: A Dying Race*, which went on to influence many tracts and publications by the Hindu Maha Sabha, the parent organization of the RSS. This book seemed to meet a widespread demand, going in to many reprints, feeding into Hindu communalism and helping create it. It had a special appeal to Hindu communalists at this time who were anxious to create a monolithic Hindu community in the face of demands for separate representation emanating from both Muslims and lower castes. Whipping up anxiety about Muslims would be one way to weld together hugely diverse, and often antagonistic, castes into one community, erasing the structural divisions in caste society. Indeed it has been noted that "for Hindu communalism, it [*A Dying Race*] had a more direct resonance as Hindu communalism was now preoccupied with numbers… the possibility of low castes declassifying themselves as Hindus was a motivating anxiety behind the origins of Hindu communalism." Deeply riddled with inaccuracies, wild flights of prediction of the future with utterly no basis, the book nevertheless provided "demographic common sense functioning as a trope for extinction."[7]

Fundamentally, the Hindu communalists believed — and continue to believe — that a nation is defined "culturally" as a Hindu nation, just as Muslim communalists believed in the purity of an Islamic Pakistan.[8] So neatly did the communalists of both religions, by evoking demographic fears, subscribe to colonial definitions of Indian society! The Censuses of the period also contributed. We must, however, remember that this discourse emerged in an embattled political space, as colonialism was contested, new political forces were emerging, the working class was congealing,

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and early feminist ideas were gaining ground. None of these of course configure in the communalist/fundamentalist discourse.

There was yet another flame stoking these fears among Hindu communalists resentful of social reform. Emblematic here was the tragic figure of the Hindu widow. Forbidden remarriage among the upper castes, she was at once responsible for the dying of the "Hindu race" and an allurement for virile Muslim men, a danger within the sacred heart of the Hindu household, waiting to be profaned. Fitting neatly into this gendered anxiety was the communalization of the issue of "abduction" of Hindu women. Indeed, this too was prominent in the form of epidemics of rumors before the genocidal carnage in 2002 in the western state of Gujarat where over 2000 Muslims were brutally killed, and hundreds of Muslim women gang-raped, in riots aided and abetted by the BJP state government. Thus the embedding of patriarchy, "nationhood," and violence against women in discourses on numbers, inscribing on women's reproductive bodies atavistic anxieties about the future and the politics of genocide.

**Deploying demographic fears of Muslims outnumbering Hindus was a part of their larger campaign to build a theocratic state, a Hindu Rashtra.**

Recently, we have had leaders from the Sangh Parivar opposing family planning among Hindus, claiming there is a "demographic war." The leader of the VHP enjoined Hindus not to accept family planning as their numbers were going down as those of Muslims were increasing. At a public meeting attended by thousands, and in the presence of the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, the leader of the Madhya Pradesh unit of the RSS claimed that the Muslim population was increasing at a rapid pace, and that this, combined with infiltration of Muslims from Bangladesh, portended doom for India. Claiming that this "demographic war" was being waged across the world, he attributed the break up of the Soviet Union to such "demographic imbalance." [9]

The same groups have also opposed access to abortion, arguing that a disproportionate number of Hindu women utilize abortion facilities.[10] In addition, we have had a huge and unedifying controversy erupting recently when the Census Commissioner announced the religion-wise data from the 2001 Census, failing to add that these could not be compared to previous figures since the 1991 Census had not been conducted in Kashmir, a Muslim majority state. The Hindu Right created an uproar about "them" outnumbering "us" in our own country, with a lot of help from the national media. This was despite clarifications issued by the Census Commissioner and figures showing that the decline of the Muslim population growth rate was substantial and indeed sharper than among Hindus.

Martha Nussbaum has noted that the creation of virulent masculinities is perhaps a part of the project of nationalisms of the European variety. Emulating this project, other communities, other nations of blood and tribes, are also creating masculinities of the European sort. She notes that Israel and India are both seats of construction of this notion of virulent masculinities, both directed at Muslims, who are classified in colonial discourse as "martial races." Those scoffed at as feminine or intellectual, not rational enough, set out to recreate themselves in colonial mirrors, creating a style of masculinity that is associated with the oppressor in the past, much as they recreate colonial definitions of history. This too is responsible for the horrors of Gujarat, as is the essentialism of numbers, as fundamentalists wreak murder and rape, "annihilating the female" both in themselves and in the Other.[11]

In 2002 the slogan *Hum Do, Hamare Do; Woh Paanch, Unke Pachees* helped the leader of the carnage in Gujarat, Mr. Naredra Modi of the BJP, win a shameful but resounding electoral victory. It also ties in with the trope of the alleged vegetarianism of Hindus along with the sexual rapacity of non-vegetarian Muslims. Sarkar notes that "there is a dark sexual obsession about the allegedly ultra-virile Muslim male bodies and over-fertile Muslim female ones." Recounting the unspeakable horrors perpetrated on Muslim women and children in the Gujarat carnage, she offers the following explanations. In communal violence, rape is a sign of collective dishonoring of a community; the same patriarchy that views the female body as the symbol of lineage, of community, of nation — and of their purity — would besmirch an entire community as impure

and polluted once "their" women are raped. There are also the calculated and politically charged rumors spread of Muslim men luring away Hindu girls, "a kind of penis envy and anxiety about emasculation that can only be overcome by violence." And finally, the anxieties whipped up over generations about "Muslim fertility rates," of their uncontrolled breeding and the dying of "the Hindu nation," led to the brutal killing of children, the new blood of the "Muslim race." [12]

By engendering fear and anxiety about the future, what Saffron Demography successfully does is insidious: it evokes complicity in morally offensive and violent policies and practices among people who would otherwise be repelled by them.

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# Old Roots, New Shoots: Eugenics of the Everyday

**by Betsy Hartmann**

Very few people today in the U.S. would openly identify as eugenicists, yet eugenic assumptions are widespread, interacting with other biological determinisms that influence the fields of science, health, economics, politics and popular culture. Like many other powerful ideas, the power of eugenic ideology lies partly in its capacity to *not* draw attention to itself, to appear commonplace.

Today eugenics is typically framed in terms of debates over the promise and perils of new reproductive technologies, from fetal genetic screening to the cloning of human beings. While feminists and progressives need to engage critically in these debates, we also should pay attention to more everyday manifestations of eugenics and how they affect movements all along the political spectrum.

In the U.S., conventional wisdom has it that eugenics disappeared with the exposure of Nazi atrocities. In reality, not only did eugenics survive, but eugenicists continued to occupy prominent positions in population, biology, and related fields. Moreover, eugenic sterilizations, mainly of poor people of color, continued in a number of states well into the latter half of the 20th century.[1]

Eugenics was a particularly powerful force in the post-war population control establishment. Frederick Osborn, the leader of the American Eugenics Society, served as both vice-president and president of the Population Council until 1959. The founders of the council debated whether to emphasize qualitative or quantitative aspects of population. In the end, because of Cold War fears of the 'population explosion' in the Third World, they reached the decision to focus on the quantitative dimension, i.e. reducing population growth, because of its supposed urgency.

However, the eugenic dimension of demography hardly disappeared. The council funded a number of eugenics research projects in the U.S. and its contraceptive research had a definite eugenic thrust. In 1968 Osborn wrote, "Eugenic goals are most likely to be attained under another name than eugenics."[2] Today, as population growth rates decline around the world, demography is focusing once again on 'quality' concerns such as the differential fertility of competing ethnic groups and the problems of population aging. This is especially true in Europe where a growing number of policymakers are urging white women to have more babies as an alternative to immigrant labor.[3]

The eugenic dimensions of molecular biology also gathered steam in the post-war period. Famous biologist Lionel Pauling, for example, argued for the purification of human germ plasm and population control to reduce the number of defective children born. Reminiscent of the Nazis' yellow star for Jews, he even went so far as to advocate tattooing the foreheads of young people with sickle-cell and other defective genes.[4]

Thus, while eugenic ideologies and practices have changed over time, they have hardly gone away. Following are key arenas where eugenic ideas continue to circulate today.

## Pure Nature: Environment and Immigration

American environmentalism has had a long and strong relationship with eugenics. Many of the early conservationists were eugenicists who believed in maintaining the purity of both nature and the gene pool as well as the manifest destiny of the white Anglo-Saxon race to steward (and colonize) the environment. In California, Mexican immigrants in particular were identified as a threat to both society and the environment.[5]

Eugenic ideas and actors have continued to influence the environmental movement. In the 'greening of hate,' anti-immigrant groups masquerading as environmentalists (with names like Carrying Capacity Network and Population-Environment Balance) have tried to take over liberal environmental groups, particularly the country's largest member-based environmental organization, the Sierra Club. Anti-immigrant groups blame pollution and urban sprawl

on immigrant-induced population growth and use billboards of pristine landscapes ("amber waves of grain") under threat from immigration to build popular support for anti-immigration ballot initiatives.[6]

Fortunately, groups that monitor the right are now exposing the links between these so-called environmentalists and white supremacist organizations and environmental groups are growing more wary of right-wing attempts at penetration.[7] Yet much remains to be done to challenge the problematic assumptions, language and images that make American environmentalism particularly susceptible to eugenic influences. These include persistent beliefs in 'pure' nature, pristine wilderness and a clear division between native and non-native species.

For example, as feminist biologist Banu Subramaniam points out, the same xenophobic metaphors about invasions of hyper-breeding illegal aliens are applied to non-native plant and animal species and human immigrants, stoking fears of the foreign in both nature and culture. Indeed, we need to keep close attention to the traffic between the worlds of nature and culture at a moment when heightened fears of globalization (and now terrorism) are leading to a resurgence of nativism and romanticizing of the local.[8] Notions of natural purity and cultural purity blend into and reinforce each other, making racism and ethnic prejudice more acceptable in the process.

## "I wish they all could be California girls": Bodies and Sexualities

Biological determinism is much in vogue these days as the media bombards us with messages that we are, in the end, mainly a function of our genes or hormones. Gender and sexuality are being re-centered in the body rather than in social relations. Biology is becoming the legitimizing script, providing fertile feeding grounds for what Nancy Ordover calls "the scavenger ideology" of eugenics.

For example, queer rights activists find themselves on tricky ground when it comes to the search for a genetic basis of homosexuality. "Of all the groups targeted by biological determinism," writes Ordover, "queers seem to be the only ones who have looked to eugenics to deliver us from marginalization." Ordover is referring to the push by several gay male scientists in the 1990s to locate a "gay gene," partly as a strategy to win greater social acceptance and legal rights for homosexuals. The search for a gay gene is not only scientifically flawed, Ordover argues, but politically flawed, reinforcing eugenic thinking in other arenas (race, crime, urbanization and class) and posing no substantive challenge to homophobia. She urges queers "to opt out of nature versus nurture arguments altogether."[9] The transgender movement too faces issues of biological determinism, particularly the question of how to make sure hormonal treatments for becoming more biologically male or female do not reinforce problematic gender ideologies and binaries.

In relation to the body, perhaps the most everyday — and often unexamined — manifestation of eugenics is in aesthetics. In the heyday of eugenics in the 1930s, the promotion of ideal body types took place in racist research on phenotypes, state fair contests to find the fittest (white) families, and graphic and sculptured representations of the ideal Nordic male and female. The perfect man and woman of the future would not only be geniuses, but have beautiful, efficient and controlled bodies.[10]

This aesthetic survives today, taking a variety of forms from paying blond, blue-eyed Ivy League women to be egg donors to the pages of fashion magazines. Where it may be most insidious is in the growing prevalence of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia among young women searching for an elusive physical perfection, sense of control and in some cases hyper-athletic physical efficiency. Although eating disorders have complex causes, we should not underestimate the legacy of eugenics in breeding the psychological monster of perfectionism that terrorizes so many women. The current mass marketing of hormonal birth control pills like Seasonale that have the 'liberating' side effect of stopping your periods also plays on the eugenic aesthetic of a clean, efficient female body.[11]

## Racing Backwards: Re-biologizing Race

One of the great ironies of the present moment is the resurgence of race-based biological and genetic determinism at a time when scientific research is exploding myths about the biological basis of race. For example, research has shown that genetic variation within a group is much greater than variation among "races" and that geographic proximity is a much better marker for genetic similarity than skin color.

As anthropologist Alan Goodman notes, another frequent error is the assumption that racial differences

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in disease are due to genetic differences among races. Not only does this over-emphasize and simplify the role of genes as a causal agent of disease, but it diverts attention from the social, economic and environmental determinants of illness, including the negative effects of racism. Native Americans, for example, may indeed suffer a higher rate of Type II diabetes, but poverty, discrimination, poor diet and reservation culture may explain this higher incidence much more than any genetic predisposition. Racism more than race is inscribed in the body.[12]

The social forces which perpetuate the biologizing and geneticizing of race can be found at varying points along the political spectrum. Pharmaceutical interests profit on these myths; the *Washington* Post, for example, recently published an article about the GenSpec brand of dietary supplements with the title, "Maker of race-based vitamins says they are targeting real biological differences."[13] Racist social conservatives are still fond of blaming inequality and poverty on the inferior intelligence of black people and the liberal press has proved all too willing to go along.[14]

Parts of the left, through some forms of rigid race-based identity politics, have also played a role. The more didactic approaches to anti-racism education can ironically serve to reify and consolidate the black/white binary while undermining possibilities for solidarity on the basis of class, gender, or a shared political perspective. The challenge remains how to address very real white racism and privilege without buying into biological constructs of race based on having the right genes, skin color and 'blood.'

## Scarcity Scares and Inefficient Efficiencies: The Role of Neoliberalism

Current forms of eugenics are complementary to, if not the product of, neoliberal ideologies and policies. These complementarities include:

*Concepts of burden* — Competitive capitalism has long required rationales for why people are poor and expendable. Under neoliberalism, the shrinking of the welfare state casts more and more people as drains on the economy and the state — not just the poor and people of color, but also elderly people and people with disabilities. It is not surprising then that one can hear echoes of negative eugenics in population control measures and technologies targeted at poor women (welfare 'reform' family caps, the Project Prevention organization that gives incentives to drug users to use long-term contraception or be sterilized, recent FDA approval of quinacrine chemical sterilization trials) and in genetic screening for fetal disability.

*Consumer choice* — Just as the concept of burden is intrinsic to negative eugenics, so is the concept of individual choice to 'positive' eugenics and new reproductive technologies. These technologies are often promoted to well-off women in terms of consumer choice and 'designer babies.' In a sense, burden and choice are two sides of the same coin as both impose reproductive duties on women in an era of privatization.[15] Eugenics, past and present, is also intricately linked to industrial mass production through the design and marketing of ever more standardized 'ideal' consumer goods and the associated rise in social expectations and conformity, faith in technological progress, and belief in consumer rights as the foundation of free enterprise and democracy.[16]

*Globalization* — Here we need to look more carefully at both ideologies and practices of global out-sourcing when it comes to genetic engineering and assisted reproduction. In addition, stem cell and cloning research is becoming the latest marker of which country is 'out front' in the competitive race to the new technological frontier.

*Efficiency* — Linked to all of the above is the heightened focus on 'efficiency' as privatization, competition, the information technology speed-up and the time/space compression of globalization put ever more demands on the human body and body politic to make more 'efficient' use of resources. Nowhere is this clearer than in health policy where the priority given to finding, treating and preventing the genetic causes of both physical and mental disease is touted as more efficient than, for example, identifying and ameliorating environmental and social causes. Most disorders are blamed on genes, and the quick-fix solution is pharmaceutical. Genetic screening, meanwhile, threatens to become a means by which health insurance companies, in their 'efficient' search for higher profits, can deny people coverage.

## War Within, War Without: The National Security State

Any discussion of eugenics must also take on the escalating role of the prison–military–industrial complex. Extremely high rates of incarceration, often with long sentences that extend through the reproductive years, are curtailing the family-making possibilities of black men and women. In addition, poor women of color are being imprisoned for supposed reproductive crimes, such as 'fetal abuse' for taking drugs during pregnancy. We also have to ask just who is being used as cannon fodder in the war in Iraq, who is viewed as less fit to live, more fit to die.

Coupled with tax cuts for the rich, the diversion of billions of dollars toward the 'war on terror' and war in Iraq, meanwhile, is creating very real budget deficits, with social programs increasingly cut to support national defense. In the hands of conservative ideologues, fears of

scarcity are manipulated in order to cast more and more poor people as burdens and to foment racist assaults on immigrants and people of color. This climate helps foster and legitimize eugenic thinking. A more speculative issue is whether there is a relationship between the widespread use of surveillance technologies in the national security state and increased acceptance of the surveillance mechanisms of genetic screening.

To challenge everyday eugenics, we need to use our political imaginations to create a powerful and persuasive vision of the future that celebrates diversity, creativity and difference, presents alternatives to neoliberalism and the national security state, harnesses scientific research for the real benefit of human and environmental health, and does away once and for all with the false and dangerous binaries of pure and impure, fit and unfit.

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## Resources & References

Groups that do progressive analysis and campaigning on eugenics issues include:

- Center for Genetics and Society (www.genetics-and-society.org)
- Council for Responsible Genetics (www.gene-watch.org)
- Committee on Women, Population and the Environment (www.cwpe.org)
- The Corner House (www.thecornerhouse.org.uk)

1 Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

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3 See Elizabeth Krause, "Dangerous Demographies: The Scientific Manufacture of Fear," The Corner House, Briefing 36, (July 2006), http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/pdf/briefing/36dangerous.pdf, and "From Explosion to Implosion: A Call for Population Skepticism," *DifferenTakes*, No. 46 (Spring 2007) http://popdev.hampshire.edu/projects/dt/dt46.php.

4 Lily E. Kay, *The Molecular Vision of Life: Caltech, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Rise of the New Biology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

5 See Stern 2005.

6 Betsy Hartmann, "Conserving Racism: The Greening of Hate at Home and Abroad," *DifferenTakes*, No. 27 (Winter 2004) http://popdev.hampshire.edu/projects/dt/dt27.php.

7 For example, see "The Puppeteer," *Intelligence Report*, no. 106 (Summer 2002), 44-51.

8 Banu Subramaniam, "The Aliens Have Landed! Reflections on the Rhetoric of Biological Invasions," in Betsy Hartmann, Banu Subramaniam, and Charles Zerner, eds., *Making Threats: Biofears and Environmental Anxieties*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2005), 135.

9 Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 60, 69, 207.

10 Christina Cogdell, *Eugenic Design: Streamlining America in the 1930s* (Philadelphia: University of California Press, 2004).

11 Amanda Bucek, "Beyond the Hype: What You Should Know about the Seasonale Birth Control Pill," *DifferenTakes*, No. 36 (Summer 2005) http://popdev.hampshire.edu/projects/dt/dt36.php.

12 Alan Goodman, "Reflections – Impure Biology: The Deadly Synergy of Racialization and Geneticization," in Hartmann et al., eds., *Making Threats* (2005).

13 January Payne, "Maker of race-based vitamins says they are targeting real biological differences," Reprinted from the *Washington Post* in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, May 9, 2006, C3.

14 *The Bell Curve* is one example, and more recently the attention paid to John Donohue and Steven Levitt's theory that the drop in crime in the 1990s was due to the 1973 legalization of abortion which kept potential criminal offspring from teenage, single and African American mothers from being born.

15 Dorothy Roberts, "Population Control and Reprogenetics in U.S. Neoliberalism," Speech for the plenary on The Politics and Resurgence of Population Policies, 10th International Women and Health Meeting, New Delhi, India, September 23, 2005.

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# Colonizing the Future: "Scarcity" as Political Strategy

**by The Corner House**

> The past is consumed in the present and the present lives only to bring forth the future.
>
> — *James Joyce*[1]

> Tomorrow belongs . . . Tomorrow belongs . . . Tomorrow belongs to me!
>
> — *Chorus, Nazi drinking song,* Cabaret[2]

> A preoccupation with the future not only prevents us from seeing the present as it is but often prompts us to rearrange the past.
>
> — *Eric Hoffer*[3]

Whenever global environmental crises, Third World poverty or world hunger are at issue, economists, demographers, planners, corporate financiers, and political pundits (at least in the North) have frequently invoked human numbers, whether gratuitously, cynically or for the most part subliminally. Reports on the economy and politics of Southern countries — invariably the "problem" of population is deemed a Southern problem — have begun by citing population figures, even though these may have little or no relevance to what follows. But the figures once cited frame the subsequent discussion, skewing the identification of both problems and solutions. The message remains the same: too many people.

Such Malthusian images and thinking — too many people outstripping supply — have not gone unchallenged, however. On the contrary, meticulous political attention to what is actually happening on the ground has invariably located the causes of hunger not in an *absolute* scarcity — no food at all — but in *socially-generated* scarcity — not enough food for some people in some places because other people have the power to deny others access to food, land and water.

Such power imbalances lie at the root of the manufactured scarcity that is the hallmark of food poverty, whether yesterday's or today's. An incomplete list of such imbalances might include: the enclosure of commons, lack of access to land, unequal gender relations, ethnic and racial discrimination, sexism, intra-household inequalities, denial of human rights, the political exploitation of famine, agricultural modernization, market liberalization, and ecological degradation.

Rooting deprivation firmly and squarely in power relations provides proof — if proof was needed — that no matter how much food is produced or water harnessed, how few babies are born or how dramatically human numbers fall, it is the nature of inequity remorselessly to generate "scarcity." Without changes in the social and economic relationships that currently determine the production, distribution and consumption of food and water, there will always be those who are judged "surplus to requirements" and who are thus excluded from the wherewithal to live. The human population could be halved, quartered, decimated even, yet hunger would still remain. So long as one person has the power to deny food to another, even two people may be judged "too many."

One result of detailed sociological studies showing that neither the historical record nor contemporary realities support the view that the numbers of people per se are responsible for scarcity is that fewer and fewer institutions now suggest that today's or yesterday's crises are caused by population growth. Even former bastions of Malthusianism, such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organization or the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), now acknowledge that politics rather than too many people lies at the heart of continuing famine and malnutrition. As Eugenio Díaz and Sherman Robinson of IFPRI note:

> "Providing an adequate aggregate food supply will not eliminate malnutrition and hunger, now or in the future . . . To achieve food security for the entire world population, countries must work to reduce poverty and achieve a more equitable distribution of income."[4]

But this does not mean that the political use of scarcity has been abandoned—far from it. Neo-Malthusians are increasingly shifting their focus from claiming that human numbers are the cause of *past* or *present* scarcity to asserting that population growth will be the cause of absolute scarcity in the *future*.

The marketing of genetically-modified crops is illustrative, and its messaging resolutely future-oriented. The predicted millions of yet unborn 'extra mouths to feed,' (primarily dark-skinned ones, of course), are used first to establish a foothold for genetically engineered agriculture as a "partial solution" to world hunger — and then to expand that foothold by smothering discussion of any other alternatives, particularly any redistribution of wealth or power. As a promoter of biotechnology states:

> "How do we feed a growing population — which some estimate will reach 9 billion in the next 30 years — when most arable land on the planet is already under cultivation? . . . Modern biotechnology is part of the answer. Modern biotechnology is not a panacea, but it can help make a difference in the fight against hunger and poverty. Using this new technology, we can feed hungry children, raise incomes, fight disease and protect the environment."[5]

The structural causes of hunger are now acknowledged, but they are dealt with solely in the context of the present. The future is used to thrust them into the background, casting them as petty distractions of purely academic interest compared to the overwhelming task of boosting future food production. This persuasive power of the future to depoliticize the debate on food poverty and to channel decision making towards a genetically-engineered future is evident in a report from the UK's influential Nuffield Council on Bioethics, which briefly considers redistribution as an option for addressing hunger — but then summarily dismisses it as infeasible:

> "Political difficulties of redistribution within, let alone among, countries are huge. Logistical problems and costs of food distribution also militate against sole reliance on redistributing income (i.e. demand for food) to meet present, let alone future, needs arising from increasing populations in less developed countries . . . What is required is a major increase in support for GM [genetically-modified] crop research and outreach directed at employment-intensive production of food staples within developing countries."[6]

In the process, questions over the very real role that genetically-engineered agriculture will play in exacerbating the structural causes of hunger — not least through the privatization of seeds — are effectively side-stepped.

Other future threats to environment and society are similarly being used to colonize the future and thereby capture the present. In climate change debates, for example, the talk is of future teeming numbers of Chinese and Indians causing whole cities to be lost to flooding through their greenhouse gas emissions — unless Northern companies are granted property rights in the atmosphere through carbon-trading schemes to continue their own pollution.[7]

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In regards to water, the World Commission on Water for the 21st Century readily conceded in its 2001 report, *Vision 21*, that current water scarcities do not lie in absolute shortage — but it went on to argue that future population growth will lead to generalized water scarcity. What the Commission terms the "gloomy arithmetic"[8] of future thirsty slum dwellers will condemn us to water wars, unless market discipline and privatization are brought to water use through water pricing:

> "Without full-cost pricing the present vicious cycle of waste, inefficiency, and lack of service for the poor will continue. There will be little investment from the private sector, services will be of poor quality and rationed, and there will be little left for investing in water quality and other environmental improvement."[9]

**So long as one person has the power to deny food to another, even two people may be judged "too many."**

The Commission's analysis has since been debunked by a succession of reports, most recently by the United Nations Development Program.[10] But the "war-room" mentality generated by such predictions of future scarcity-driven apocalypses diverts attention away from the awkward social and environmental histories of discredited policies and projects such as large-scale dams, nuclear power stations and genetically-modified agriculture. We are now told that these are the only ways to meet globally aggregated predictions of supposedly climate-friendly energy demand or food needs.

Such seems to be the power of "scarcity" to colonize the future that even those who ascribe today's scarcities to political conflict frequently set aside the insights of political economy in favor of human numbers as an explanation for future shortages.

In doing so, they grant Malthusianism an explanatory power that they would actively deny to it when applied to the present and the past. Instead of the past being a guide to future action, the future (implausibly) becomes a guide to the present. As the 20th century futurologist Herman Kahn (reputedly the model for Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*) stated, "Anyone can learn from the past. These days it is more essential to learn from the future."[11] The dictum that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"[12] is jettisoned in favor of the ungrounded, and thus politically even more malleable, exercise of "learning from the future." In the process, "scarcity" is rehabilitated. Removed from the messy political realities of the present, it regains its authority as an abstract model, redeploying its mesmerizing powers over those who would privilege theory over lived experience.

Yet future crises are likely to be rooted in the same dynamics in which they are rooted today: political conflict, exploitative distributive institutions, sexism, racism, human rights abuses and environmentally destructive practices. If society wants to prepare for future resource crises (and there surely *will* be future scarcity of one kind or another), it would be more prudent to look to the present rather than to some theoretical model of the future. As the future will grow out of the present, a better way of dealing with "future crisis" is not imagining a future Malthusian world that bears no relationship to what exists now or ever has existed, and then imagining how to stave off that hypothetical Malthusian destiny, but rather dealing with current scarcities *now* on the realistic assumption that what causes scarcity today is going to go on causing scarcity in the future.

Denying Malthusianism a refuge in the future is of critical importance if the past is not destined to be repeated and the present forgotten. But it is also important if "scarcity" is to be marginalized as a political strategy for diverting attention from the root causes of hunger, environmental degradation, conflict and the like.

Indeed, "scarcity," as used in modern economics, is best approached as an endlessly malleable means of legitimizing a particular set of social and political relationships, institutions and policies and of blocking inquiry, rather than as a theory that stands or falls on its ability not only to explain but also to predict. Empirical evidence, coupled with political organizing around other explanations for manufactured scarcity, may temporarily deny political space to those who would use scarcity as a strategy in one arena. But it does not, and will not, prevent its proponents from using it in other arenas where its power has not been weakened — yet. So long as it remains useful as a means of diverting

attention from causes of poverty that might implicate the powerful, it will be recast, adapted and re-used whenever and wherever possible, regardless of the empirical evidence that is built up to counter it.

For granting Malthusianism a space in the future is one of the principle everyday actions through which scarcity-terrorized thinking — and the power relations and activities that it helps to support — are reproduced, rejuvenated and allowed (even when debunked by practical experience) to return to haunt the present.

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***The Corner House*** *is a research and solidarity group based in the United Kingdom that aims to support democratic and community movements for environmental and social justice. This piece evolved from a collaborative project with the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights to analyze the continuing power of Malthusian thinking. www.thecornerhouse.uk.org.*

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# Population-Environment Programs: Problematic Assumptions and Contradictory Approaches

James Oldham

Over the last ten to fifteen years a new type of integrated conservation project has evolved that links reproductive health and family planning services with natural resource management and biodiversity conservation. Such programs represent a small but significant trend in both the conservation and the population fields.

Although integrated approaches for addressing population and environment issues date back at least to the 1960s, the promotion of pre-planned Population-Environment (PE) projects is newer. PE linkages are being promoted by leading actors in the population field such as Population Action International and Population Reference Bureau. PE programs are being implemented by major conservation organizations including Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Conservation International (CI). Funding has come in large part from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and a few private foundations. The presence of funders committed to this specific form of integrated conservation and development work has led to the creation of projects explicitly designed around theories of natural linkages between these two sectors.

PE projects are promoted as an opportunity to provide reproductive health services to isolated rural populations[1] and as a people-friendly approach to conservation—an alternative to a"fences and fines" approach that excludes local people from the natural resources on which their livelihoods depend.[2] Integration of family planning with natural resource conservation activities is said to produce synergies that will increase programs' effectiveness and sustainability both because "environmental factors and health consequences overlap directly" and because the linking of population and environmental work "provide[s] economies of scale and scope."[3] Other advantages claimed for integrated PE projects include facilitated entry into communities, opportunities to address a range of needs of hard-to-reach populations, increased involvement of men in reproductive health and of women in natural resource management, improvements to women's overall condition, reduced costs, and possibilities for reducing population pressures on the environment.[4]

Although the goal of extended access to reproductive health care and family planning and the goal of making conservation projects address human needs are both important, the current attempt to link the two in community-based projects raises important concerns. First, the assumptions made to justify these links tend to blame environmental degradation on poor communities and specifically on poor women's fertility. Second, the narrow focus on reproductive health tends to obscure the broader health needs of rural populations in the global south.

## Malthusian Narratives

Much of the PE literature tries to emphasize the social and human health benefits of integrated programs rather than focusing on environmental justifications. Yet many of the same authors and organizations also disseminate a vision of population threats to the environment on a global scale where the emphasis is on high and fast growing populations in and around biodiversity hotspots of the global south.[5] Most organizations carrying out community-based PE programs also acknowledge that one important objective is to reduce population pressure on the environment. For example, CI describes a global problem of population threatening key areas of ecological concern: "The regions of the planet undergoing the most severe environmental degradation are the same as those experiencing the most rapid human population growth."[6] This concern is then addressed locally: "Since 2001, Conservation International (CI) has been working in the Selva Lacandona of Mexico—one of the richest biodiversity hotspots in the world—to reduce human population pressure on natural resources."[7]

These generalized assumptions about population impacts on the natural environment are too simplistic. A significant body of research demonstrates that human

populations can actually enrich biodiversity and ecological complexity through their interactions with the environment. In one example, banning local people from a bird sanctuary in Bharatpur, India led to the decline in populations of key bird species.[8] Studies in parts of Kenya[9] and Java[10] have documented that growing populations have increased capacity for environmental remediation, resulting in enhanced biodiversity. Similar trends have been found in countries as diverse as Nepal, Guinea, and China.[11] Although such outcomes depend on many variables, these examples highlight the unreliability of broad generalizations about linkages between population and environment.

Madagascar and the Philippines provide two important examples of the role Malthusian narratives play in the promotion of linked PE projects and of the limitations and dangers of such narratives. Conservationists value Madagascar for its biodiversity, unusual ecosystems, and large numbers of endemic animals and plants. It is the site of a number of PE programs due to the perception of close links between population growth, agricultural practices and deforestation. Advocates for population programs link the tripling of Madagascar's population in the second half of the 20th century to the current environmental situation where the country's forests are less than 20 percent of their original size. They describe a rapidly multiplying population of poor farmers who are burning Madagascar's tropical forests and threatening the biodiversity that the forests support.[12]

Although both population growth and agricultural practices are implicated in the deforestation of Madagascar, the omission of other key facts contributes to a tendency to blame the growing numbers, and the behaviors, of poor subsistence farmers for forest loss. The major period of deforestation in Madagascar began with colonization at the end of the 19th century. Forest loss in the first half of 20th century was equal to or higher than that during the latter half of the century, yet it took place when population density was low and population growth limited by malnutrition and famine, disease, and labor conscription. In fact, government policies and economic and political inequalities, rather than human fertility, were the major causes of forest destruction, through the promotion of coffee and other export crops; colonial tax policies that stimulated migration and land clearing; and privatization of common lands for extractive concessions.[13]

The Philippines, another island nation with rapid population growth and internationally recognized biodiversity hotspots, is also held up as an example of the challenges human populations pose for environmental and natural resource management. Save the Children's PESCO-Dev project[14] and PATH Foundation Philippines' IPOPCORM initiative[15] are PE initiatives that combine reproductive health with coastal management. Both projects began with the premise that population growth is an important cause of environmental degradation, so they have emphasized family planning as a complement to natural resource management. In contrast, the Center for Empowerment and Resource Development (CERD)'s coastal management efforts began not with a particular vision of the links between population and environment, but rather a commitment to coastal communities' "control, use and management of the sea and its resources."[16]

CERD's research highlighted a series of complex, interlocking issues influencing both environmental and human health. These included the privatization of public lands and eviction of fishing communities; illegal quarrying of coral and sand; the cutting of mangroves to make way for private resorts and fishponds; the intrusion of large corporate fishing vessels into areas previously reserved for subsistence fishing; and the lack of political and economic power of subsistence fisherfolk.[17] This rights-based approach gives a fuller understanding of the interlocking environmental and social challenges and provides local people more options for addressing them. It also frees women to make reproductive health and family planning decisions solely on the basis of personal health and individual needs rather than as part of a conservation strategy.

## Women's Health

Advocates for linking family planning services to conservation or development projects make the argument that such linkages are developed in response to community health needs.[18] It is not clear, however, that the majority of current projects are really responding to locally perceived needs. Whereas earlier conservation projects incorporated health care as a motivator to engage communities,[19] now PE projects are being initiated according to a vision that prioritizes reproductive health and family planning from the outset.

When NGOs arrive with predetermined agendas, the danger is that these will be imposed on local communities, irrespective of local interest. An example of this is a PE

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project carried out in Manicoré, Brazil by Management Sciences for Health, where reproductive health classes, rather than responding to local demand, were actually a *requirement* for participation in a handicraft project aimed at women's economic empowerment.[20]

Although the Manicoré example may be an exception, as long as Malthusian narratives are part of program visions they are likely to be communicated to, and potentially imposed upon, target communities. PE programs frequently use "information, education, and communication" (IEC) campaigns and "social marketing" practices that have the potential to create pressures within the target community for individuals to participate in family planning and other activities. One example is the "Champion Community Voahary Salama competition" in Madagascar, where communities identify goals for vaccination, family planning, and the adoption of agricultural techniques[21] and "participatory monitoring" is used to determine whether a community has reached "champion status."[22] CI[23] and other NGOs have also adopted this model, described as "community target setting, monitoring and celebration."[24] This mix of externally supplied education and information with "community" goal setting for, and monitoring of, individual behaviors, raises important questions about the nature of participatory PE programs and even the concept of voluntary family planning.

**The assumptions made to justify these links tend to blame environmental degradation on poor communities and specifically on poor women's fertility.**

A related concern regarding PE projects in remote rural areas is that the implementing organizations' population agenda, combined with limited resources, may lead to services being offered based on what's doable and effective rather than on what's most appropriate for women's health. Evidence from some projects suggests that the drive to get *some* family planning services to remote areas has indeed led to choices regarding birth control technologies based on logistical and budgetary factors rather than on the needs, desires, and medical situation of the women and men involved.

Health concerns are raised by an emphasis in some PE projects on long-acting contraceptives. As a description of one project explains, "Depo-Provera is offered as a simple, secure, long-term, easily reversible, culturally acceptable method of family planning."[25] However, the health risks of long-acting contraceptives such as Depo-Provera,[26] and the need for proper screening and follow-up of users, raise questions about the appropriateness of these contraceptives in remote rural areas.

Finally, although "healthy communities" and "healthy families" are part of the titles and language of many PE projects, contributions to health care frequently are limited to narrow family planning services. For example, although an objective of the CI project in Mexico's Lacandona Forest included the provision of "information and training to improve maternal and child health, and reduce associated mortality rates," activities carried out under this heading appear to have been much more limited: classes for medical workers in reproductive health and family planning, and provision of contraceptives.[27] Voahary Salama's integrated PHE program in Madagascar has addressed a wider range of health issues including family planning, immunization, maternal and child nutrition, diarrheal disease prevention, and prevention of malaria and other infectious diseases in conjunction with work to promote reforestation and introduce new agricultural techniques.[28] Yet even this broader focus emphasizes health of mothers and children under five rather than all members of a community.

## Conclusions

While integrated approaches to conservation offer real opportunities to treat local people as partners and meet human needs and conservation goals simultaneously, the specific and narrow focus on links between population and environment undercuts many of the benefits of the integrated approach and creates its own problems. PE programs promote the idea that strengthening and empowering local communities are key to both improving lives and meeting conservation goals, yet this urge to take a pro-human approach is undermined by the Malthusian narratives that underpin PE projects. The provision of reproductive health and family planning services in remote rural areas needs to be rights-based, not justified through dubious linkages between population and environmental degradation.

One of the justifications for PE projects is that they respond to the needs of women in the communities being served. However, *a priori* assumptions can lead to narrow interpretations of local health needs and a bias in favor of particular interventions. Local health needs will only be met if projects are guided by genuine participatory processes not limited by the population or conservation agendas of funders or implementing organizations.

**This issue of *DifferenTakes* is based on a larger study titled "Rethinking the Link: A Critical Review of Population-Environment Programs," which can be found at http://popdev.hampshire.edu/news.php.**

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# The Testosterone Threat: Sociobiology, National Security and Population Control

**by Betsy Hartmann**

Continuing son preference and the widespread practice of sex-selective abortion of female fetuses in India and China are leading to ever more skewed sex ratios in those populations. India's 2001 census, for example, revealed a shocking decline in child sex ratios in many areas of the country. Overall, there are 927 girls for every thousand boys, but in a number of northern states the figure is much lower. In Delhi, in the first six months of 2005, only 716 girls were born for every 1000 boys.[1]

Such declining sex ratios are certainly an extremely serious problem with many negative ramifications, especially for women and girls. But do they pose a threat to national and global security?

This is what Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. den Boer argue in *Bare Branches: The Security Implications of Asia's Surplus Male Population*.[2] The book has circulated widely in academic and policy circles and its arguments have attracted the attention of media pundits as well as the CIA. "Women's issues, so long ignored in security studies, could well become a central focus of security scholars in the twenty-first century," the authors write. But precisely *how* will they become a focus? If *Bare Branches* is any indication, there is cause for concern. The book not only reinforces deeply problematic gender stereotypes, but grounds much of its analysis in sociobiological explanations of difference. These in turn help to naturalize broader social and economic inequalities and pathologize migration and political resistance.

The book's central thesis is that a sizeable "surplus" of young, unmarried adult males in a populationposes a potential threat to security. These 'bare branches,' a Chinese expression for males who lack a spouse and offspring, are more likely to be poor, transient, uneducated and most importantly, prone to violent crime, substance abuse and collective aggression. In order to control them, governments become increasingly authoritarian and while suppressing violence at home, export it abroad through colonization or war (in the case of China). Countries that are more ethnically heterogeneous like India tend to experience civilian strife directed against minority groups. In other words, bare branches, more than the fascistic organizing strategies of the Hindu Right, are behind recent anti-Muslim violence in India. Lest they appear too deterministic, the authors venture this metaphor: "The mere presence of dry, bare branches cannot cause a fire, but when the sparks begin to fly, those branches can act as kindling, turning sparks into flames."

*Bare Branches* is a new variation on the older theme of the 'youth bulge,' another 'demography as destiny' national security theory that became popular in U.S. defense and intelligence circles in the mid-1980s and is still widely used today to explain violent conflict in the Middle East and Africa. If over 20 percent of a country's population is comprised of young people, this 'youth bulge' supposedly makes it more vulnerable to political instability. The unemployed young males of the youth bulge, in particular, are easy recruits to terrorist causes. According to Anne Hendrixson, a twin set of images bolsters youth bulge theory in the post 9/11 period: pictures of angry young men of color as potential terrorists and veiled young women as victims of repressive regimes. "The implied dual threat — of both explosive violence and explosive fertility — provides an apparently seamless racially- and gender-based rationale for continued U.S. military

provides an apparently seamless racially- and gender-based rationale for continued U.S. military intervention and U.S.-promoted population control initiatives in other countries."[3]

*Bare Branches* goes even further than youth bulge theory in embracing sociobiological assumptions about men. The authors present male human reproductive behavior as a link on an evolutionary chain that includes not only monkeys but song birds. Testosterone 'T' levels tell all. Because T levels are ostensibly lower in married men than bare branches, "the larger the number of men who are unable to marry, the higher their circulating T, and the greater amount of violent and antisocial behavior they will exhibit." (Interestingly, the authors avoid talking about violence *within* marriage). The authors also confidently pronounce that low-status males commit more violence than high-status ones. (What about Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, or for that matter, Osama bin Laden, scion of a rich Saudi family?) In support of this statement, they cite a study where unemployed males had the highest T levels among males categorized according to occupation.

They also draw on the work of York University researchers Christian Mesquida and Neil Wiener who claim that the "coalitional aggression" of young males is an advantageous inherited trait because it is the way men gain enough resources to attract a mate. It follows then that the more young men there are in a given population, the more possibility for conflict and war. Mesquida and Wiener's theories have also been taken seriously by the security community. At a 2001 symposium at the prestigious Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C., Wiener told the audience that war "is a natural phenomenon, in accord with human nature and part of human nature." Showing pictures of insurgents from various countries, Mesquida emphasized their commonality as young men. "We see Somalis when, in fact, we should see young men."[4]

**In the name of women's rights, *Bare Branches* could make more palatable the stereotyping of young men in the global south and migrants in the global north.**

Biological determinism of this nature reinforces rigid gender definitions, not only for men but for women who by contrast are the weaker, passive sex. It reinforces heterosexism too. But it also plays a more subtle ideological role in naturalizing and rationalizing class differences and neoliberal supremacy. Hudson and den Boer show their political cards when they talk about how reducing social and economic inequalities could reduce the resentment of poor young males and hence intrasocietal violence. Alas, however, they note, "this option is virtually impossible to achieve in a free market economy." And lest we feel bad about that, we should remember that even if incomes were equalized, surplus males still wouldn't be able to find spouses. À la World Bank, they argue for a few targeted safety nets.

Indeed, a critical subtext of the book is fear of popular resistance to social and economic injustices. Migrants, who are pathologized throughout the book as 'transients,' are particularly scary. In addition to their high T levels and low-life habits, 'transients' in China, for example, have had the audacity to engage in strikes and other protests over labor grievances. This kind of bare-branch "disruptive behavior" threatens the established social order.

It remains to be seen just how long-lasting this book's influence will be in security circles. Though conservative, it plays to liberal interests concerned about the very real problem of distorted sex ratios in Asia. Therein lies the danger. In the name of women's rights, it could make more palatable the continuing stereotyping and scapegoating of young men in the global south and migrants in the global north. Just the term 'bare branches' is deeply dehumanizing,

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robbing young men of both identity and agency and reducing their behavior to a function of testosterone.

State violence often depends on such dehumanization. In France during last year's riots, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy referred to the young males involved as "la racaille," a derogatory term which is worse than scum, denoting subhuman and inherently evil and criminal. Sarkozy said he planned to "karcherize" them — sand-blast, water-blast them off the face of French society. "To apply this term to young human beings and proffer it as a strategy is a verbally fascist insult and, as a policy proposed by an Interior Minister, is about as close as one can get to hollering 'ethnic cleansing' without actually saying so," writes Doug Ireland.[5] In Chechnya, meanwhile, the International Helsinki Federation has charged the Russian army of abducting and murdering young males in a deliberate process of "thinning out a population of young men."[6]

In India, many progressive activists are fighting against son preference and sex selection, and the population control policies that reinforce them, because they violate the human rights of women and girls. These policies include a 'two-child norm' implemented by ten of India's most populous states. Like China's one-child program, this vast experiment in social engineering exacts the heaviest toll on women and girls.[7]

The two-child norm is enforced through a variety of mechanisms. In some states parents with more than two children lose access to welfare programs and government jobs while those who 'accept' sterilization after two get preferential access to state resources. Third children are denied ration cards for subsidized food and access to public schooling. A more common provision is prohibiting people from contesting local elections or holding local office if they have a third child after a certain date. Since poor people tend to have more children than the rich — partly to offset high rates of infant and child mortality due to abysmal health conditions — this effectively means the rich can strengthen their hold on local power structures.[8]

Only allowed two children, many families will opt for sons rather than daughters to avoid dowry payments and to ensure old age support. "Given the ideology of son preference in the country," writes Indian community health expert Dr. Mohan Rao, "a vigorous pursuit of the two-child norm is an invitation to sex-selective abortion."[9]

The two-child norm has not gone unchallenged. Due to pressure from women's health and human rights activists, Himachal Pradesh was the first state to revoke the norm, and Madhya Pradesh is following suit. In their struggle to improve sex ratios and the lives of women and girls, these activists do not employ the dangerous rhetoric of 'bare branches' or appeal to spurious national security fears. Their struggles deserve international support and that includes openly challenging the premises of Hudson and den Boer's disturbing book.

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# Control Freaks: "Homeland Security" and "Interoperability"

by Ben Hayes and Roch Tassé

A primary consequence of government responses to 9/11 has been the development of the homeland security industry. In 2006 the global security market is expected to be worth almost $60 billion. By 2015 it is expected to grow to as much as $170-250 billion, depending of course upon levels of global insecurity. The 2007 US Department of Homeland Security budget alone is over $34 billion, two thirds of which is allocated for border security.

Growth in the industry is assured by massive government contracts and generous subsidies for homeland security research and development. The US government has earmarked $25 billion for industry and academia for the period 2006-10 while the European Union (EU) has already allocated $2 billion to its "security research program" for 2007-14 (in addition to member state subsidies). Defense contractors dominate the homeland security market place; IT giants have also been quick to capitalize. In the US, the main players include *Lockheed Martin*, *Raytheon*, *Boeing*, *Northrop Grumman*, *Ericsson, Seisint, Accenture and Unisys*. In the EU, the likes of *Thales*, *EADS*, *Finmeccanica*, *Sagem* and the defense lobby group *ASD* are among those setting the agenda. Sixty percent of the pilot projects funded under the EU security research program for 2004-6 are led by defense sector companies.

Public concern for what critics have dubbed the "security-industrial complex" has so far been muted by the manufactured demand for technology to combat a host of modern-day threats, real and imagined. Nevertheless, informed analysis of the policy frameworks across the homeland security spectrum reveals "solutions" geared more toward to the control of populations than the protection of them. At the heart of this paradox is what industry and policymakers call "interoperability": the provision of seamlessly compatible government systems.

The brief tour of homeland security and interoperability that follows only touches on tangible developments in Europe and North America. It is important to recognize that money is also being thrown at the stuff of science fiction and state secrecy (nanotechnology and microwave crowd control, for example) and that many governments in the south and east are as enthusiastic as those in the north and west.

## From the Battlefield to the Border

The EU is now "defended" from those fleeing poverty and destruction by a formidable apparatus that includes landmines placed along the Greek-Turkish border, gunboats and military aircraft patrolling the Mediterranean and the coast of West Africa, and trigger-happy border guards and barbed wire fences around the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco. A consortium led by *Dassault Aviation*, Europe's largest manufacturer of combat aircraft, is now being funded by the EU to facilitate the introduction of drone (pilot-less) surveillance planes to detect would be "illegal migrants" along its external borders.

In North America, the US Congress approved a bill just weeks prior to the November mid-term election authorizing construction of a fence along a third of the US border with Mexico. In addition, a $2.5 billion contract was allocated to *Boeing* for the deployment, over a three to six year period, of a "virtual fence" consisting of an array of sensors, motion detectors, infrared cameras, watchtowers and drone planes that will eventually stretch along both the Mexican and Canadian borders. The contract may ultimately be worth as much as $8 billion as the US moves to secure maritime borders as well. Blackhawk helicopters, Citation jet interceptors and Pilatus surveillance planes have begun patrolling strategic areas along the Canadian border and the US Coast Guard has been conducting

live-ammunition drills conducted in the Great Lakes in violation of a 90-year-old treaty that forbids weapons on the waterways.

## From Immigration Control to Social Control

Integrated border control systems are as much about internal control as external security. "Biometrics," from the two Greek words for "life" and "measure," form the basis of new identification (ID) systems and a multi-billion dollar industry, particularly in the EU where it has been agreed that from 2007 people will have to have their fingerprints taken to get a passport. Consequently, after 100 years of only fingerprinting criminals, the majority of the EU's population will have been fingerprinted within a decade (they will also be carrying a "biometric" EU ID card if the UK government gets its wish). All refugees and illegal migrants in the EU have been fingerprinted since 2000 and, following the lead of the US VISIT program, all visa applicants will be fingerprinted as well (data will be retained whether or not their visa application is successful).

The drive for "interoperability" means this information will soon be held on interconnected police databases across Europe. In 2007 the European Commission will begin development of an "automated fingerprint identification system" and an "entry-exit" system to record all travel into and out of the EU. Police and intelligence services across Europe will have access to the fingerprint data and, by linking the EU visa information and border control systems, all "overstayers" and illegal "aliens" will be the subject of automatic EU-wide "alerts" (*de facto* arrest warrants). Already, teams of police and immigration officers in the UK are equipped with handheld fingerprint scanners to detect illegal migrants; gradually, the technology will be rolled out to police forces across Europe.

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The seeds for similar systems have been sown across the world. In 2004 the International Civil Aviation Organization (a UN body) agreed on an international standard for passports with globally interoperable face recognition systems and RDIF chips in which the "biometrics" (including fingerprints) are to be stored. The US VISIT system provides the foundations for the screening of everyone entering and leaving the country and the retention of profiles on each individual for up to 40 years. This system also relies heavily on biometric identifiers and all individuals entering the US (including Canadians and Americans returning to their country) will soon be required to have biometric identifiers on one sort of travel document or another (passports, smartcards or visas). Canada is preparing to implement a parallel but interoperable system and began field trials of electronic visas with biometric features in October 2006.

Police and security agencies in the US and EU can now also access the "passenger name records" (PNR) – up to 35 categories of personal data – on air travellers prior to their departure. The PNR includes personal details, financial information and even meal choices. In many cases, US authorities have direct access to passenger reservation databases in other countries; more privacy-conscious governments are insisting they be supplied only with the data on in-bound passengers. When implemented, the UK's "e-borders" scheme will provide check-in desks with discreet "green" signal for board, "orange" for persons to be subject to security checks, and "red" for wanted persons or known security risks.

"Interoperability" is not just about the "harmonization" of government systems, it is about the globalization of control. It is no coincidence that since 2000 the US has provided the technology and funding for immigration control systems in more than 20 countries, including Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Pakistan, Tanzania and the Yemen.

## Policing the Suspect Community

In the wake of 9/11, governments have demanded more and more information on their citizens, from telephone to library records. Under EU rules, all telecommunications traffic data in Europe must now be retained by telephone and internet service providers for law enforcement access. In the UK, where the police used to need a warrant to access an individual's call records, now all they need is a phone number. In Canada, Parliament was about to adopt "lawful access" legislation when it was dissolved for the January 2006 election. The bill

called for mandatory intercept capability on the part of telecommunication service providers and for warrantless access to customer data by law enforcement agencies. Security agencies continue to call for those measures and a new bill is expected shortly.

In August 2006 a US Federal Court ruled unconstitutional the President's self-declared power to authorize the National Security Agency to spy, without warrants, on e-mails, faxes and telephone calls going into and out of the country. That ruling is presently under appeal. North of the border, the very same warrantless interception powers are granted to the Communication Security Agency by Canada's Anti-Terrorism Act. The NSA controversy followed revelations in May that the agency has been secretly collecting the phone records of tens of millions of Americans, using data provided voluntarily by *AT&T*, *Verizon* and *BellSouth*. That same month, the Attorney General and the FBI Director also called on telecom companies to store data about users' activities for two years. The US government has also just been found guilty of unlawful surveillance of "SWIFT," a global bank transfers system based in Belgium, and is formally accused of violating privacy in over 30 countries. The EU, meanwhile, is quietly funding IT companies to equip its security services to do the very same thing.

**"Inter-operability" is not just about the "harmonization" of government systems, it is about the globalization of control.**

The UK "children's index" will potentially monitor every child from birth, including schooling, contact with health and social services, and even "problem" parents. The "Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Bill," meanwhile, will mean that one third of the adult working population will be subject to ongoing criminal checks. A new UK national health database will centralize people's histories of mental illness, alcoholism, drug-taking, HIV status, pregnancy and other potentially prejudicial information. The police and security services and a host of medical professionals will have access to the database, prompting widespread fears about data security. No less alarming is the fact that everyone arrested by the UK police now has their DNA taken (even if subsequently they are not charged with any offense). The UK DNA database already covers one in every 20 people in the UK, a figure that rises to one in five black males. The EU and the G8 are both developing systems for the automated exchange and matching of DNA profiles.

Outside Europe, it is private corporations rather than governments that are at the forefront of collecting data on populations. This data is then being sold on the open market. Contracting out with data aggregating companies allows US government agencies to access and mine massive databases of personal information they would not, under privacy and other laws, be able to maintain themselves. The USA Patriot Act also gave the FBI broader access to records held by all American companies. This applies to the personal information on Canadians whose data is increasingly managed by American companies and/or their subsidiaries.

## Full-Spectrum Dominance

Another key area into which homeland security funds are being ploughed is satellite monitoring systems. The EU's "Galileo" system is being developed on the much lauded premise of providing the world with its first non-military global positioning system. However, two-thirds of the financing for the current deployment stage of the satellites has now been provided by a consortium of Europe's biggest arms and aerospace companies. They hope to recoup their investment in a market for satellite navigation applications that could grow to a staggering $350 billion by 2020.

A predictable U-turn on the restriction of the use of Galileo to non-military purposes has now been signaled by the European Commission and a plethora of applications under development. This includes the "road pricing system" much vaunted by the UK government that would replace road tax with a "pay-as-you-drive" scheme in which every car journey would then be tracked and monitored by satellite.

The US, of course, already has its eyes in the skies. Its satellite imaging capabilities have been used to support its allegations that Iraq and Iran are developing WMD while the notorious "Echelon" surveillance system monitors global satellite and communications traffic.

## In Defense of Freedom and Democracy

In the post-9/11 world, people who use the terms "police state" and "social control" are easily dismissed as conspiracy theorists. But as a "theory of conspiracy," these developments are entirely logical. In a world that takes no meaningful action

to address environmental catastrophe or the separation of the world's peoples into extremes of rich and poor, "full-spectrum dominance" over dwindling resources and resistant populations makes sense from both a risk management and a military perspective. And while governments and corporations drag their feet on climate change, their risk aversion and military strategies already stretch decades into the future.

Richard Thomas, UK Privacy Commissioner, warned recently that we need to wake up to the reality of the "surveillance society." What he did not say is what George Orwell understood perfectly well: a surveillance society is not a democratic society. In the latter, the government is accountable to the people; in the former, the people are accountable to the government.

These developments are as chilling as the fears they purport to address. But there are encouraging signs that people are waking up to the need to address the root causes of social problems, to defend their fundamental rights and take back power from governments and corporations. Just as a peaceful world would emasculate the military-industrial complex, a just one would render impotent the security-industrial complex.

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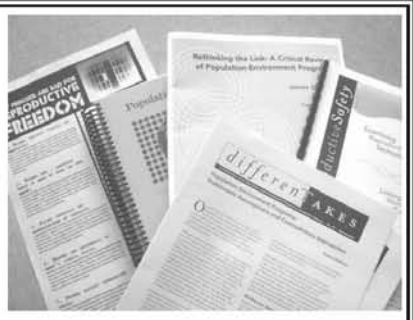


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