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“The thing to remember is that there is nothing new about the society described in ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’, except time and place. All the things I have written about were done before, more than once”

Margaret Atwood

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, the world is populated by around 7 billion people. Population, or the number of individuals living in a certain area, is the object of many different fields of study. As a matter of fact, understanding demographic dynamics is relevant to the understanding of phenomena like migrations and pandemics, but also geopolitical issues and the relation between human population and natural resources. In particular, demographers try to understand the causes of changes in population. The basic elements that scholars define when studying population are birth and mortality rates, as births and deaths are the variables that determine population growth. It is possible to detect two different categories of causes of change in demographic dynamics: forces of constraint and forces of choice. The former group includes natural elements that are given and that do not depend on human action, namely land, energy, material resources and diseases. The latter category, instead, consists in elements affecting demography that are dependent on human behaviour, like reproductive unions, procreation, degree of promotion of health, housing, migration, and so on. It is possible to observe that forces of constraint and forces of choice have influenced human population growth at different levels throughout history. In particular, forces of choice have been influencing demography increasingly more than forces of constraint. As a matter of fact, material limits of poverty of resources and lack of land to cultivate have become less and less influential, while changes in family structures have grown more important to human reproduction. The changes in the kinds of forces determining population increase have determined a faster rate of demographic growth. Another important element in population studies is the definition of demographic systems. A demographic system can be defined as a relatively stable set of interdependent demographic behaviours, influencing the direction of population change. Demographic systems adjust to external constraints, such as land and resources, but some degree of continuity in time and geographical settings is observable. In particular, in pre-industrial times, demographic systems were characterized by a low population growth rate, with high mortality and birth rates, while in modern times demographic systems came to be defined by a higher rate of growth, due to low mortality and birth rates.¹

As this thesis is focusing on the relation between population control and the state, it is important to begin with a brief overview of the history of human population. It is possible to distinguish

¹ Livi-Bacci Massimo, Demography and population, in J. R. McNeill and Kenneth Pomeranz (2015), *The Cambridge World History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 187-189.

three demographic cycles in human history: from the origins to the Neolithic, from the Neolithic to the Industrial Revolution, and from the Industrial Revolution to the contemporary period.

During the first cycle, human population growth was influenced by the shift from being nomadic hunters to sedentary farmers. Control over food production has led to a gradual and uneven demographic growth and the establishment of villages increased population density. The second cycle, instead, was characterized by small-scale migrations and by a constant growth in the size of human population. There are different ideas on the characteristics of this growth: on the one hand, the classical theory claims that such an increase in human population was due to a decrease in lower mortality rates; on the other hand, a new perspective states that, in this period, both mortality and fertility rates increased, but the latter did so at a faster pace. According to classical theorists like Gordon Childe (1892-1957), the origin of demographic growth was the decrease in mortality rates, caused by the development of agriculture and domestication, which granted access to food supplies and, thus, improved health and living standards. Supporters of the new perspectives, instead, detected an increase in both mortality and fertility rates. In their view, agriculture and domestication, together with better nutrition, have introduced new threats to the human species. In particular, the birth of villages and increased population density facilitated diffusion of diseases, domestication of animals caused transmission of parasites to humans and some agricultural practices, such as irrigation, facilitated the diffusion of malaria. Therefore, the increased number and possibility of diffusion of diseases is believed to have caused an increase in mortality rates. However, population growth was guaranteed by the greater acceleration of fertility rates. The increase in reproduction, according to supporters of the new perspective, occurred because sedentary life made it easier to provide for a large number of children, as they were no longer constituting a burden during migratory movements. Furthermore, agricultural societies require a larger labour force, thus making a higher number of children desirable. It is easier to track population changes and dynamics in medieval Europe: between 1000 and 1300 A.D., European population tripled, cities grew bigger and soil exploitation provided a fairly regular supply of food. However, during the Fourteenth century the Black Death caused a collapse in Europe's demographic growth. A series of extremely deadly epidemics of *yersinia pestis*, the plague, afflicted population for about 60 years, causing the death of one third of Europeans. During the Fifteenth century, European population started to grow again, but it was only in the 1500s that it regained the size it had reached before the Black Death epidemics. During the Early Modern Age, the major event in both Global and Population History was colonization of America. As a matter of fact, European conquest of the American continent had impressive consequences on its

demography. First, settlement of European colonizers introduced a number of new infectious diseases, most notably smallpox, which were deadly for Native people. Moreover, summary killings and introduction of coerced heavy labour systems further increased mortality rates and exponentially lowered fertility rates among indigenous people. The result of European invasion was a loss of 90 percent of native population in about one century. Another reason why colonization of America is central to the understanding of global population dynamics is its effect on African population. Because of the drop in Native population growth, colonizers turned to Africa as a supplier of forced labour force. From the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth century, between 9 and 10 million African people were brought to American colonies as slaves. Slave trade deeply modified population dynamics in the continent of origin, in the first place because of the obvious demographic loss related to forced migration, but also because it strongly affected sex ratios. Colonizers desired to purchase mainly adult male slaves, so much so that the analysis of the 1776 Angolan census highlighted a 43 to 100 sex ratio. This meant that, in the area, there were around two women per man, fact which obviously affected fertility and reproduction.² Demographers date the beginning of the third cycle to the end of Eighteenth century, with the outbreak, in Great Britain, of the Industrial Revolution. The third demographic cycle is characterized by the change in demographic system: from one characterized by slow growth, high fertility and high mortality rates, to one defined by faster growth, low mortality and low fertility rates. This gradual change from one system to the other is called “demographic transition”. In the Eighteenth century, mortality rates were still high, but fertility rates increased as well, thus initiating modern acceleration of demographic growth. However, it is important to understand that changes in demographic systems, and thus also demographic transitions, have not occurred in the same moment throughout the globe. In particular, in the Eighteenth century, the conventional starting point of demographic transition, population dynamics were different in the various geographical areas. For example, while African population stagnated or even declined, China and America experienced a higher rate of growth than Europe.³ Modern demographic transition consisted in a change from high fertility and mortality rates of the pre-industrial age to the low mortality and birth rates that today characterize most geographic areas. The demographic transition started with the decline in mortality rates caused by the better living conditions and increased scientific and medical knowledge brought by the Industrial

² Livi-Bacci Massimo (2017), *A concise history of world population – Sixth Edition*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, UK.; Thornton John, *The Slave Trade and the African Diaspora*, in Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (2015), *The Cambridge World History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

³ Livi-Bacci M., *Demography and population*, in J. R. McNeill and K. Pomeranz (2015), *The Cambridge World History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 190-193.

Revolution. The Eighteenth century, therefore, saw a raise in life expectancy in Europe, which triggered a decline in fertility rates. As a matter of fact, couples strengthened the practice of birth control, in order to reduce the number of children, both because of the decrease in infant mortality rates and because of the new social and economic structures. In industrial economies, children were less valuable as workforce than they used to be in agricultural societies, where they were able to start to contribute to family economy much earlier. Furthermore, costs of raising children increased due to urbanization and industrialization, as mothers had to give up working in the manufacturing to take care of the children. During this period, moreover, education on birth control methods started spreading in Europe, from higher to lower social classes and from urban to rural areas. Another important element in Eighteenth century European population history is migration. This century saw unprecedented long-distance migratory flows, especially to the American continent. Population growth in rural areas, economic integration and faster and cheaper transports allowed, between the beginning of the Eighteenth century and the end of the First World War, around 50 million Europeans to migrate.

In Western countries, mortality transition occurred at a relatively slow pace. It was caused by diminishing incidence of famines and related epidemics, which were originated by changes including higher productivity of agriculture, new crops and better communication and market functioning. Crises, of course, continued to happen, but with a much lower frequency. The increase in life-expectancy in Europe peaked in the Twentieth century, with an expectation of life of sixty-seven years by the 1950s. Another change in demographic system in Europe was the shift from marriage as a fertility regulator, to effective contraception. The indicator of the shift is the 10 percent decline in marital fertility with respect to previously static levels, and it occurred first in France in 1827 and last in Russia and Ireland in 1922. Since the 1980s, European birth rates have been falling under the rate of substitution, while life-expectancy has increased until about 81 years old. Therefore, the most evident effect of the demographic transition on European population is aging population.

The Global South, instead, experienced a different demographic trend, which culminated in a more than five-fold multiplication of population between the early Twentieth century and 2012. One of the reasons behind this exponential and fast demographic growth is that, while in the Global North mortality rates decreased gradually and fertility slowly adjusted, in poorer countries the main factor behind the drop in mortality rates, medical knowledge, came suddenly. The abrupt increase in population confronted so-called developing countries with the challenge of guaranteeing basic living conditions to a huge population, in an economic environment that was still fragile. In order to deal with the matter and try to contain demographic growth,

governments have devised and enforced various policies, some more successful than others.⁴ Relevant cases like China and India are going to be discussed throughout this thesis.

In general, population throughout the world has concentrated itself in urban centres along coastlines and in valleys, thus causing environmental problems and disequilibria. Nevertheless, most of the people in the world are becoming more and more free from forces of constraint, so that reproductive behaviour is generally dependent on forces of choice.

Among the factors influencing demographic growth, birth control is the most relevant to this discussion. It is one of the forces of choice that define human fertility, and nowadays it is the one that most strongly affects population growth in the majority of regions. Birth control can be defined as the set of practices and methods adopted by couples to limit the number of children, such as contraception, abstinence and abortion. It is important to realize that societies have been practicing birth control for thousands of years. As a matter of fact, there's evidence of adoption of natural contraceptives at least since 1900 B.C.: Ancient Egyptian sources testify the practice of birth control methods, especially vaginal suppository, generally based on acacia gum. This ingredient is proved to have spermicidal properties when compounded, as it produces lactic acid anhydride, which is used also in modern contraceptives such as the vaginal diaphragm. Furthermore, sources indicate that since the Seventh century B.C., Ancient Greeks, for instance, imported a large quantity of *silphium* from the colony of Thera. This plant was rare and precious, and it was highly demanded because of its contraceptive and abortive properties. *Silphium's* commerce was so lucrative, that it became extinct for excessive harvesting. However, some similar, even if less effective, plants continued to be used as contraceptives or as abortifacients. Examples include *Ferula*, as well as seeds of wild carrot, which were used for centuries by Mediterranean populations. Interestingly, modern day laboratory tests confirmed that these plants actually had contraceptive properties.⁵ Moreover, evidence suggests that contraception was practiced in Western Europe, even during the Middle Ages, despite dominant Christian morality. An interesting casing point is the sentence "*Si non caste, tamen caute* (if not caste, at least be cautious)", which has been widely encountered by scholars studying this period and which seems to suggest to adopt precautions when having intercourse. Furthermore, strong evidence of widespread prostitution supports the idea that

⁴ Livi-Bacci M., Demography and population, in J. R. McNeill and K. Pomeranz (2015), *The Cambridge World History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 196-205.

⁵ Riddle John M., Worth Estes J. and Russell Josiah C. (March/April, 1994), "*Ever since Eve... Birth control in the Ancient World*", *Archaeology* Vol. 47, No. 2, Archaeological Institute of America, pp. 29-35.

some form of contraception was practiced during the Middle Ages.⁶ Birth control, therefore, has a long history that has often been neglected, but which proves that human beings have always tried to control the number of their children. The long history of the efforts to regulate fertility constitutes, if needed, further proof that control over reproduction is an essential part of individual life.

At this point, a good question seems to be, what's the relation between population control and the state? When discussing the factors influencing demographic changes, there was no mention of the state as a factor influencing population growth. Moreover, birth control, as well as conception, occurs at the individual level. However, this thesis argues that not only does the state have a strong role in affecting demographic changes, but it also has an interest in doing so.

The political character of population and demography has primarily a practical character. As a matter of fact, in order to efficiently manage land and resources, food production, distribution and consumption, the state needs to have a clear idea of the size of its population. Especially with the birth of the modern state, between the Fifteenth and Sixteenth century, knowledge of the number of individuals living within the country's borders became crucial in order to collect taxes. Moreover, as this thesis argues, the state's interest in population control has a qualitative, as well as quantitative, character. Governments have been promoting a certain kind of ideal subject or citizen, encouraging or restricting reproduction according to certain standards that served their interests. Furthermore, policies related to demography deal with relations between population and issues like natural resources, reproductive health and migration. Thus, recognizing the importance of population policy is crucial to understand historical events as well as social dynamics.

This thesis aims at clarifying the relation between the state and population control. In particular, the various cases will focus on the economic and social matters that, according to governments and political thinkers, are affected by demography. Moreover, this thesis is going to focus on the policies governments devise in order to solve what they believe are the problems of population, and how these policies affect society. As states' interest in population control has been quite constant throughout modern history, population policies are likely to continue to influence societies around the globe.

⁶ Biller Pete (1982), "*Birth-Control in the West in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries*", Past & Present No. 94, pp. 17-18.

The discussion is going to report a variety of cases in which population and birth control practices have served the interests of the state, and how governments' beliefs and priorities were translated into population policies. In the first chapter, the roots and reasons of the bond between population and modern state will be discussed, by focusing on Foucauldian analysis of biopolitics and on mercantilist and cameralist doctrines. The second chapter is going to discuss the relation between marginalization and population control, with a particular focus on Malthusian thought, post-colonial Latin American states and finally eugenics. In the third section of this thesis, attention will concentrate on the case of the People's Republic of China, as an example of the relation between birth control and modernization. Finally, the last chapter is going to discuss the relation between state practices and reproductive rights, with a focus on India and current anti-abortion movements.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BIRTH OF POPULATION, MERCANTILISM AND CAMERALISM

Introduction

Population is considered to be a natural concept, just like the state and society. Nevertheless, precisely like state and society, the contemporary idea of population has been historically produced. As a matter of fact, it is possible to observe the strict link between population and the state starting from the Early Modern Age in Europe. In this period, the reasons for the interest in population dynamics are related to a crucial political change in Europe. As a matter of fact, it is during the Early Modern Age that the modern state was born. As described by sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920), the modern state is characterized by a unitary territory, a stable resident population, unitary state power and monopoly over internal as well as external use of force. Weber, therefore, lists population as one of the features of this new political entity: with the modern state, population acquires its current definition, that of a number of people, usually with common language and traditions, living permanently in one territory. Furthermore, many of the functions of the modern state require knowledge and control over population. For example, the main tool of the state to exercise its monopoly on internal force was the police. It is clear that police forces require a more or less precise idea of the quantity and quality of local population in order to ensure order. Moreover, the modern state was characterized by a permanent army, which is why information on the quantity of adult men among the population was valuable to state bureaucracy. Finally, another task of the modern state was tax collection. Taxation is another clear example of the importance of knowledge on population for the government. Because of the relevance of population in the modern state, many groups of political thinkers got interested in the subject.⁷

Another fundamental dynamic in Early Modern History, which is particularly relevant to this discussion, is European colonial rule in Latin America. After Cristoforo Columbus' (1451-1506) arrival in the American continent in 1492, Spain and Portugal started the conquest of the territories, regulated by the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas. The colonial empires had to face the challenge of managing their new possessions, rich in resources and labour force, thus causing debate among political thinkers on the most efficient administrative and economic practices to adopt.

⁷ Weber Max (Published in 1946), *Politics as a Vocation*, Oxford University Press.

This chapter will discuss the significance of population for the early modern state, at first by providing a brief theoretical overview of the relation between the state and its population. To this purpose, this thesis will summarise the main themes of Michael Foucault's conception of biopower. Then, the focus will shift on the role of population in two streams of thought that were particularly relevant in early modern Europe: mercantilism and cameralism. Moreover, the case of colonial empires will be used as an example of how biopower and mercantilist practices shaped modern states' policies in the Americas, while the case of Empress Catherine's Russia will exemplify the political impact of cameralism on policymakers.

The modern state and the concept of population

Demography is the study of births and deaths, and its main instruments are censuses and statistics trying to describe population trends. The term demography was first used in 1855 by the French Achille Guillard, but, as this chapter is going to argue, governments have adopted demographic instruments far earlier.⁸ According to several authors, demographic statistics have been essential in the development of national identities as well as in the creation of the concept of nationhood itself.⁹ During the Nineteenth century, the concept of the nation-state, defined by language, maps, and population statistics, emerged. Moreover, according to Benedict Anderson (1936-2015), the more a state was geographically fragmentated, the more nationhood relied on the idea of a unite population.¹⁰ However, demographic statistics were used in European states and their colonies at least one century before the era of the nations. This suggests that the concept of population had played a significant role in the formation of the modern state before it did in the nation state. Moreover, discussions on the role of the population in the welfare of the state can be detected in political treaties already in the Seventeenth century. Wilhelm Von Schröder (1640-1688), for instance, when discussing the possible ways for a ruler to exercise their power, claimed that the most effective option was reliance on common people. In his view, this was the case because they were not expensive to maintain, they represented

⁸ Bonar James (1931), *Theories of population from Raleigh to Arthur Young : lectures delivered in the Galtonian laboratory, University of London, under the Newmarch foundation, February 11 to March 18, 1929, with two additional lectures and with references to authorities*", Allen & Unwin, London, p. 12.

⁹ Axel C. Hüntelmann, Statistics, nationhood, and the state, in The Population Knowledge Network (2016), *Twentieth Century Population Thinking – A critical reader of primary sources*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 17.

¹⁰A. C. Hüntelmann, Statistics, nationhood, and the state, in The Population Knowledge Network (2016), *Twentieth Century Population Thinking – A critical reader of primary sources*, p. 12.

the real power of a country and, when they were treated well, they were obedient and loyal to the ruler.¹¹

One of the first scholars focusing on the origin of the relation between the state and its population was Michael Foucault (1926-1984). He was a French philosopher, sociologist, historian of philosophy and historian of science. One of the main themes of his research was state's control over bodies. His work is significant to this discussion, as Foucault questioned the fact that the population is a natural entity: in his course at the Collège de France 'Security, Territory, Population' (1977-78), Foucault developed the theory that population as generally intended is a feature of the modern state. According to him, the whole idea of population was created by modern state's rulers in order to exercise control over the subjects. The modern state, claims Foucault, is characterised by a form of "biopower" over its population. This kind of power is physical as well as political and it takes various forms, more or less invasive, and it works by bringing biological aspects of human life under the scope of political strategy. One of these forms of state control over the populations are demographic statistics. Data collection, in Foucault's view, is a means through which the government can acquire information to better control and manage the population. Firstly, statistics, specifically those related to male population, allowed the modern state to acknowledge the extent of its military forces in case of war. Secondly, a precise idea on the number of people residing in a country was significantly helpful in the work of tax collection.¹² Finally, data on population distribution on state's territory, population age, marital status and family structure allowed policy makers to organize the infrastructures needed for an efficient government.¹³ Foucault's work highlights the inextricable tie between population, demographic statistics and the modern state as well as to the modern conception of the nation-state. Moreover, the ideas presented by Foucault immediately create a link between the birth of population statistics and the mercantilist state.

Mercantilism and population

In the common thinking, population and birth control are considered to be a matter concerning modern day societies. However, as previously mentioned, discussions about population have been interesting political and economic thinkers since the Early Modern Age. Mercantilism, in

¹¹ Tribe Keith (1988), *Governing Economy – The Reformation of German Economic Discourse 1750-1840*, Cambridge, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, p. 10.

¹² Foucault Michel (1977-1978), *Security, Territory, Population – Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, Edited by Michel Senellart General Editors: François Ewald and Alessandro Fontana, English Series Editor: Arnold I. Davidson.

¹³ A. C. Hüntelmann, Statistics, nationhood, and the state, in *The Population Knowledge Network* (2016), *Twentieth Century Population Thinking – A critical reader of primary sources*, p. 14.

particular, can be considered as the first political and economic theory that systematically linked study and control of population to the organization of the state.

Firstly, it is necessary to have an idea about Mercantilist general assumptions and theories. Mercantilism was a political and economic current of thought extremely popular in Early Modern European states. It was a relatively long-lived doctrine, as it gained momentum in the Sixteenth century and declined only in the Eighteenth century. General thinking ascribes Mercantilism to the realm of economic theories, but this conception overlooks the fact that mercantilist ideas were applied to a variety of social problems. As a matter of fact, the fundamental concern for mercantilists was the welfare of the state, which, despite being mainly an economic concept, required changes at all levels of society, including having a big and healthy population. Moreover, mercantilist core idea was that a country had to export more than it imported, as welfare was measured in terms of the amount of gold and silver present within its borders. Therefore, states had to produce a great quantity of manufactured goods to sell abroad. In order for this to be feasible, a numerous working population was required. Moreover, mercantilists believed that a numerous population was an essential feature for a state that wanted to dominate the global arena, as having a big population meant disposing of a big army in case of war. These points clearly reflect Foucault's considerations on the reasons for the birth of population statistics. Furthermore, the centrality of population in the economic and military power of the state supports the idea that the former is not a neutral concept, as it has always been regarded by the modern state as an asset, as source of human capital.

One of the thinkers that focused a relevant part of their studies on population was Johann Joachim Becher (1635–82), an Austrian physician, who, during the 1670s, worked as head of the Viennese *Manufakturhaus* with the support of the emperor. His core idea was that, in order for a state to be prosperous, its population had to be numerous. Based on this assumption, he claimed that the state had to foster a population growth that respected the correct proportion among the three orders of society: peasants, craftsmen and merchants.¹⁴ These classes matched the three kinds of economic activities that were essential for the survival of the state. Peasants represented the primary sector, providing the state with food and raw materials, craftsmen produced manufactured goods in the secondary sector and merchants corresponded to the tertiary sector, responsible for the distribution of resources and capital. These concepts clearly suggest that according to at least some mercantilist thinkers, the state needed to intervene in the sphere of population control: not only did the government have to foster demographic increase,

¹⁴ Magnusson Lars (2015), *The Political Economy of Mercantilism*, New York: Routledge, p. 87.

it was also supposed to foster the “right” kind of growth, one which respected a proportion suitable to maintain social order. In Becher’s view, a country whose population grew in respect to this proportion would have been rich and free from problems like food scarcity. According to mercantilists, population growth was both a cause and a consequence of state’s welfare: economic prosperity was the result of a numerous working population, as supported by Becher, but it was also a consequence of the better living conditions that arose by a favourable balance of trade. ¹⁵

To further support the value attributed by mercantilist theorists to a large population, it is useful to focus on the ideas of William Petty (1623–87). His case is particularly significant because, even though some of his ideas on the welfare of the state can be considered as atypical for a mercantilist, he had the same ideas as Becher as to the desirable size of a population. Petty too, as a matter of fact, believed that higher economic welfare could be reached through more employment. Therefore, in his view, a bigger population was desirable only in so far as it was possible for all of the subjects to be employed in productive activities. Here again, as in the case of Becher, it is possible to find the idea that population growth, even though positive under certain conditions, had to be controlled in order to be profitable for the state. ¹⁶

Mercantilism, therefore, is not simply an economic doctrine, as it recommends policies and changes that affect the whole society. Moreover, mercantilist thinkers engaged in discussions related not only to the quantity of an ideal population, but also to the quality of such population. The desirable kind of population, as a matter of fact, consisted in employed individuals, who could play a role in the economic and military growth of the state.

Mercantilist logics and colonial rule

Mercantilist political and economic doctrine was extremely influential on colonial empires. In particular, Spanish and Portuguese attitudes with regard to the management of the colonies present various similarities with mercantilism. One of the core assumptions behind imperial rule in Latin America was that colonial population was a resource for the motherland, and that control over the latter was necessary for the development of an efficient empire. Moreover, mercantilist belief in the existence of a right proportion in a state’s population was translated into racial classification in the colonies. Categorization of different population strata was essential for the exploitative practices that rulers applied on the colonies, as different racial groups had different economic functions for the empire. As claimed by Mara Loveman:

¹⁵ Magnusson L. (2015), *The Political Economy of Mercantilism*, p. 109.

¹⁶ Magnusson L. (2015), *The Political Economy of Mercantilism*, p. 208.

*Official racial classification in colonial Latin America was integral to a system of imperial rule designed, in the first instance, to facilitate orderly extraction of agricultural, mineral, and fiscal resources from the colonial domains.*¹⁷

As a matter of fact, Spanish and Portuguese colonial bureaucratic infrastructures were built on racial classifications that aimed at clearly defining everchanging groups of individuals. Moreover, this classification served both as material means to define all of the relevant aspects of social life, and as symbol of the ideology of status privilege over which the colonial project was built. Race was the dominant feature in the functioning of Latin American colonial societies, as it regulated division of labour, education, marriage and any other relevant activity.

Censuses directed at racial classification in the colonies were highly influenced by the Fifteenth century experience in the motherland. As stated in the previous section, mercantilist political advisors were the main advocates of the necessity of conducting of censuses for organizational purposes. Spanish and Portuguese rulers, therefore, had gained a certain degree of experience in collecting demographic data for military and economic purposes. The same instruments were used three centuries later in Iberian colonies in order to efficiently manage human resources. The reasons behind censuses were the same in the two historical settings: data collection on military forces and economic concerns related to the quantity of labour. However, in the colonies the importance of these instruments became even more evident. Firstly, a large number of inhabitants in the colonies assured military power against invasion, in a period in which European powers were eager to extend their domains overseas. Secondly, economic concerns related to Latin American colonies were principally linked to the extraction of mineral resources and cultivation of crops. In order for these operations to be profitable, Spanish and Portuguese rulers relied on coerced labour. Therefore, access to information of the quality of labour was particularly relevant to the management of the empires: racial classification had primarily a material function, that of dividing colonial population into the categories of free and coerced labourers.¹⁸ The centrality of division of labour, together with military and fiscal concerns, in the context of colonial population statistics is the feature that best exemplify mercantilist influence on imperial policy-making: not only did censuses reflect the idea that a large population was desirable for the state as it constituted a great resource, but they also pointed out the importance of the quality of such population. As a matter of fact, because the imperial

¹⁷ Loveman Mara (2014), *National Colors – Racial classification and the state in Latin America*, Oxford University Press, p. 45

¹⁸ Loveman M. (2014), *National Colors – Racial classification and the state in Latin America*, pp. 45-50.

economy relied on the extraction of raw materials, the number of people under coerced labour had to be larger than that of people employed in other economic sectors, just like in the modern state there had to be the right proportion between peasants and manufacturers. Because of this need for coerced labourers, registers of natives that could be exploited in mineral extractions and in plantations were extremely relevant to colonial authorities, that from the 1600s started filling the shortages in the workforce through imports of African slaves.

In support to the claim that demographic data were of paramount importance for the Iberian states, there is the source of such data. As a matter of fact, state officials in the colonies were often reluctant to spend time and resources in censuses. Nevertheless, knowledge of the size and 'quality' of colonial population was so important to the Crowns, that they found other means to gather information. The most precious source of data on colonial people was the Church. Since the 13th of December 1486, when the pope granted the Spanish empire the *Patronato Real*, the king could dispose of all of the most important rights of the Catholic Church. In practical terms, papal concession allowed Spanish officials to benefit from all of the documents and information collected by priests in the colonies. As they did in Europe, parishes held registers of all of the relevant events in the lives of the community, like birth, marriage and death. Therefore, Church's bureaucracy provided colonial authorities with reliable and comprehensive information on imperial subjects.¹⁹

The case of Latin American colonies, therefore, highlights the importance of the concepts of population and demographic information in European modern states. Moreover, it provides a good measure of the extent of the influence of mercantilist logics on colonial rulers. Collection of data on population had become a core feature of the state, which needed reliable information in order to correctly and efficiently manage its resources, in particular, its human capital.

Cameralism and population

Cameralism can be defined as a German economic and political doctrine that was developed between the second half of the Seventeenth and the Nineteenth century. In this period, Prussia was becoming increasingly powerful, so much so that it was challenging the once undeniable supremacy of the Habsburg empire. Moreover, the state of Prussia was becoming extremely centralized, and, therefore, it needed a more centralized bureaucratic apparatus. As a matter of fact, administration of state institutions like the police required an efficient bureaucracy. Cameralist ideas were intended to serve the state's best interest, in particular by defining the

¹⁹ Loveman M. (2014), *National Colors – Racial classification and the state in Latin America*, pp. 52-53.

correct way of managing its resources to achieve the common good, increase the prince's income, and assure order and stability. The core assumption of this theory was that the state needed to achieve a well-planned centralisation of power over the economy and society in order to ensure its wealth and stability. Another important idea advanced by cameralists was the tie between the interests of the ruler and those of the subjects.²⁰ As they advocated for an organised society in the hands of the ruler, cameralists discussed also the role of population in the growth of the state. In particular, they argued that a great population guaranteed economic growth. Moreover, they believed that the stability of the state significantly relied on its people. Christian Wolff (1679-1754), for instance, stated that the family was the constitutive unit of the state and that its task was that of ensuring a sufficient population for the state. Moreover, the author drew an analogy between the patriarch of the household and the ruler of the state, who had to protect and ensure wellbeing to his subjects. A satisfied population, claimed Wolff, would voluntarily act in a way that was beneficial to the welfare of the whole country.

A very important example of the centrality of population in cameralist thinking is the work of Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717–1771). His importance lies also in the fact that he was actively engaged in Prussian political activity. Justi was a Prussian official and he worked as political advisor, Director of Police and in 1765 he was appointed Prussian Inspector of Mines, Glass, and Steel Work. Justi was later tried and imprisoned for misappropriation of government funds. His work was heavily influenced by his experience in policy-making, and despite the disastrous end of his career, Justi was probably the most influent cameralist and one of the main contributors to the doctrine in general. The core concept of his theories is that the aim of every state and empire is to guarantee their own happiness. For this purpose, the ruler and the subjects have to work together in harmony and produce wealth. According to Justi, the ruler had to promote the creation of a large population and safeguard its interest. He prescribed various ways to reach the objective of a number of people that could guarantee state's welfare: the attraction of foreigners, care for subjects' wellbeing and life, fostering marriages and provide education. When considering Justi's concerns on subjects' welfare, it is important to keep in mind that the ruler's duty to care for the ruled did not arise from morality, but from economic calculations. From Justi's standpoint, population was at disposal of the sovereign, who had to care for his subjects as they constituted resources that were instrumental for the welfare of the state.²¹ Joseph von Sonnenfels (1732-1817) further elaborated Justi's argument by arguing that,

²⁰ Seppel Marten and Tribe Keith (2017), *Cameralism in Practice – State Administration and Economy in Early Modern Europe*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, pp. 1- 5.

²¹ Tribe K. (1988), *Governing Economy – The Reformation of German Economic Discourse 1750-1840*, pp. 59-60.

as the happiness of the state relied on its population, the funding principle of policies had to be the latter's increase. Therefore, according to him, the quality of policy measures should have been evaluated in terms of their effects on the increase of civil society. This argument, in his view, held because a large population meant high resistance to external threats, densely populated land contributed to internal security and a greater number of men, meant higher internal production of resources. The ultimate goal of policy, therefore, was producing the increase of population, but in the respect of a right proportion between agriculture, the basis for the sustenance of the state, and manufacturing and trade. In Sonnenfels' work, it is possible to find again the idea of a right proportion that should be followed by population growth. It was the duty of the sovereign to develop policies that encouraged this optimal kind of population growth.²²

Cameralism in practice: Empress Catherine's Russia

In order to grasp the real extent of the influence of cameralist ideas in relation to population, it is useful to focus on policies outside of German reigns and Austria. Cameralist political advisors focused on the issue of promoting population growth, and they also proposed the abolition of serfdom as a possible means to that end. Although explicit references to serfdom as an inhibitor of population did not appear before the second half of the Eighteenth century, cameralist influence can be perceived in the first efforts towards the reform in areas such as Brandenburg-Prussia, the Swedish Baltic provinces, Mecklenburg and Pomerania in the period from 1680 to 1720.²³

A striking case in which cameralist ideas influenced policy-making outside Germany was eighteenth century Russia. The reign of Emperor Peter I (ruled 1696-1725) led to an opening towards European influences, which included cameralist ideas. In particular, the Emperor and his successor, Empress Catherine (ruled 1762-1796), invited in various occasions Christian Wolff to become their political advisor. Even if he did not accept the offer, he assisted Russian sovereigns in the formation of the new Academy of Sciences by helping them choosing its members. The Academy's staff, because of the presence of many German thinkers, became a centre of proliferation of cameralist ideas. Empress Catherine's reign was particularly influenced by cameralist thought, as it appears from her policies in the field of population control. In particular, the ruler shared cameralist assumptions that the wellbeing of the state

²² Tribe K. (1988), *Governing Economy – The Reformation of German Economic Discourse 1750-1840*, p. 84-85.

²³ Seppel M. and Tribe K. (2017), *Cameralism in Practice – State Administration and Economy in Early Modern Europe*, p. 13.

depended in large measure on the happiness of its inhabitants and that the magnitude of a country's population was the chief indicator of its success.²⁴ In Eighteenth century-Russia, as in other parts of Europe, concerns on perceived depopulation were extremely widespread. Ideas that governments had to actively deal with the problem of scarce population can be grouped under the umbrella term of "populationism". Examples of populationist discourse can be traced back to Peter the Great's reign, for instance in the work of Vasilii Tatishchev (1686-1750), administrator, geographer and historian, who claimed that increase of population had to be considered as the first factor of national wealth and wellbeing. However, it was at the onset of Empress Catherine's government that populationism became well established in political circles. The Empress herself declared that she opposed conversion to Catholicism of polygamous ethnic communities within her territory in order to foster population growth. Moreover, one of the most pressing concerns throughout her reign was infant mortality, which she defined as 'a loss for the state'. Encouragement of population growth was considered as a priority also in relation to agriculture. Ivan Elagin, who was in charge of Court lands in the empire, summarised the Court Chancellery's thought in this field in a memorandum for the ruler:

*The growth of the number of inhabitants is the source of enrichment of the state: for the more subjects there are, the more land is made fertile, manufactures and factories flourish, revenues multiply, and plenty abounds everywhere. [...] Therefore in all wise government, care is taken over nothing so much as over the increase of population.*²⁵

In this passage, it is possible to clearly grasp the influence of cameralist thought on Russian policy-makers in relation to population politics: the similarity between Elagin and Justi's arguments on the benefits of a large population could not be overlooked. This similarity supports Marten Seppel's (1978-) thesis that cameralism cannot be considered as a set of theoretical ideas developed by a group of scholars limited to the German context. The analysis of policies and internal documents of the Russian court, for instance, sheds light on the extent to which cameralist ideas were widespread among members of European elites.²⁶ A relevant example of the primacy of populationist ideas in Russian circles is the Empress's *Nakaz*, or

²⁴ Roger Bartlett, Cameralism in Russia: Empress Catherine II and Population Policy in Seppel M. and Tribe K. (2017), *Cameralism in Practice – State Administration and Economy in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 66-68.

²⁵ R. Bartlett, Cameralism in Russia: Empress Catherine II and Population Policy in Seppel M. and Tribe K. (2017), *Cameralism in Practice – State Administration and Economy in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 70-72.

²⁶ Seppel M. and Tribe K. (2017), *Cameralism in Practice – State Administration and Economy in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 1-2.

Instruction, which was a text meant to be developed as a legal code, but which actually remained a guideline for policy-makers.²⁷ *Nakaz*'s twelfth chapter is titled 'Of Population', and it exposes some of the ruler's main ideas on the possible ways to solve the problem of Russia's perceived underpopulation. The empress started by criticising the high taxes imposed on peasants by aristocrats, claiming that the economic burden was one of the factors that slowed down population growth in the countryside, as poverty caused infant mortality. Then, Catherine proposed some remedies to demographic stagnation, like division of cultivable lands among peasants, encouragement of marriage and economic rewards for large families. In practice, during Catherine's reign, policies related to population were limited to the improvement of Russian medical field. As a matter of fact, actions to improve population health and reduce infant mortality clearly reflected enlightenment as well as cameralist emphasis on the sovereign's duty to promote the well-being of their subjects.²⁸

The case of Catherine the Great's Russia is relevant because it well exemplifies the extent to which cameralist concerns on population have shaped political discourse and policy-making.

Conclusions

In this chapter, the analysis has started with a focus on the origins of the concept of population, in particular through the lens of Foucauldian discourse. Then, the discussion has moved towards two extremely relevant schools of thought in the discussions on population: mercantilism and cameralism. After a brief summary of their main ideas, two important case studies have been considered. First, the case of Portuguese and Spanish Latin American colonies has highlighted how colonial authorities have been influenced by mercantilist thought in their attitude towards population. Finally, a short discussion on the discourse of Russian political elites during the reign of Empress Catherine has provided an example of the extent to which cameralist concerns have shaped authorities outlook on population. In the cases presented throughout this chapter, a large population was ultimately conceived as a positive asset for the state, and therefore actions to encourage demographic growth, especially a growth which respected some kind of proportion, were developed and enacted by governments. Nevertheless, this positive conception of population increase was not universally accepted.

²⁷ Instruction of Catherine the Great (09/02/2022) < <https://www.britannica.com/event/Instruction-of-Catherine-the-Great> >

²⁸ R. Bartlett, Cameralism in Russia: Empress Catherine II and Population Policy in Seppel M. and Tribe K. (2017), *Cameralism in Practice – State Administration and Economy in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 74-75.

CHAPTER TWO

MARGINALIZATION AND POPULATION CONTROL

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the relation between nation-building processes and population has been discussed. In particular, collection of demographic data on population has been defined as a core feature of modern states' activities. Something which has emerged from the example of mercantilist practices in Latin American colonies was the element of classification of population on the basis of race linked to censuses. However, it is important to acknowledge the fact that marginalization of certain categories is inherent to governments' practices related to population control in many other settings. This chapter will focus on the relation between marginalization of certain human groups and population control. The analysis will start with the discussion of Malthusian conception of population growth among poorest strata as a problem to be dealt with by authorities. Then, the case of post-colonial states will be taken into consideration, in relation to the remaining of racial classification practices after independence. Finally, the 1930s eugenics currents in the United States will be taken into consideration, as their main arguments revolved around the definition of the unfit to reproduce.

Thomas Robert Malthus

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834) was an English clergyman, who devoted his career as a scholar to the study of political economy and population. The case of Malthus is particularly interesting in this discussion because his reflections were triggered by the fact that his parish's registers counted more births than deaths.²⁹ In the previous chapter, the deep influence of censuses on modern states' practices has been discussed, and here there is an example of a scholar whose theories could not have been developed without the instruments of collection of demographic data. Moreover, Malthusian core assumptions and concerns are based on marginalization of a particular social group, namely the poor. Another reason why this author is analysed in this chapter is the fact that his work highly influenced later thinking and the way in which some streams of thought have been regarding the problem of overpopulation.

The climax of Malthus' career as a scholar was the publication, at first in anonymous form, of the first version of 'An Essay on the Principle of Population' in 1798. His reasoning started from two basic assumptions: that food is essential to human survival and that passion between

²⁹ Robertson Thomas (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London, p. 4.

men and women is crucial to, and will remain a constant of human existence. From these core ideas, he deduced that:

*The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence of man. Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometric ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetic ratio. A slight acquaintance with numbers will show the immensity of the first power in comparison of the second.*³⁰

The idea of developing a theory on population growth was not unprecedented, as relevant thinkers had anticipated his theory of population growth. Probably the most striking example is the pamphlet by Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) ‘Observations concerning the increase of Mankind and the Peopling of Countries’ (1755). In this work, Franklin claimed that American population growth followed a geometrical path, as in 25 years it tended to double. However, Malthusian theory on population growth gained much more popularity than those of his predecessors. According to his reasoning, population can increase only in so far as there is availability of food, but the problem is, as previously mentioned, that population tends to grow at a faster pace than food supply. When population growth overcomes the point at which the hearth can produce food, demographic increase is stopped in two possible ways. The first possibility is that hunger, famines and plagues will positively put an end to population growth. The second means for control of population growth instead consists in “preventive checks”, or predictions of the problems that will make the bearing of children seem disadvantageous. Positive checks, by nature, will affect mostly lower strata of society, and any attempt to improve standards of living for the poor will be inefficient. As better living conditions will lead to an increase in population, poorer subjects will eventually face the consequences of excessive population growth: hunger and disease. Because of this phenomenon, Malthus supported the idea that there is no use in increasing wages, as higher wages will actually produce a larger and starving population. Wages should be kept at subsistence levels, in order to discourage disproportionate demographic growth. Moreover, according to Malthus, the role of poor people is to accept misery as natural human condition, as poverty has the function of keeping population under control. Despite being based on arbitrary assumptions, Malthusian theory on population provided scientific justification to the lack of state’s help to poor people. Furthermore, in the second edition of his ‘Essay’, the pastor devised also a moral reason for which the government had no obligations towards subjects from the lowest social classes. In his opinion, the poor had no right to demand for food outside of the families that had borne

³⁰ Malthus Thomas (1789), *An essay on the Principle of Population*, p. 16.

them to this world in spite of the fact that they had no means for ensuring their survival. Moreover, providing the poor with social welfare benefits had the only effect of encouraging the arrival of new poor people to feed.³¹ What emerges extremely clearly from his considerations of the lowest strata of society is his terrible consideration of poor people, whom he considered to be as another type of human. This very critical conception of the poor is reflected also in Malthus' idea that the poor could not control their sexual instincts, and that therefore they could not be trusted with birth control. The poor, in his view, lacked the discipline to resist their sexual urges and they had to be taught moral restraint.³² It is possible to argue that Malthusian conception of the poor as an impulsive and irrational mob was actually influenced by the experience of the French Revolution. While thinkers like William Wordsworth (1770-1850) were positively inspired by the revolutionary ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality, most conservative scholars and politicians were extremely concerned about the prospect of other popular upheavals. Malthus can be considered as a good example of the latter group. In his view, the poor had to blame only themselves for their misery, as they lacked the moral constraint to stop having children they could not feed. Moreover, because he envisaged misery as natural human condition, especially as population growth exceeded the limits of the earth's capacity to produce food, Malthus saw no point, other than causing conflict and death, in social upheaval. In his perspective, no social order could change the inherent poor condition of a part of the population.³³ Another very important characteristic of Malthusian thought, which contrasts one of the pillars of Enlightenment, is the lack of faith in technological progress. In the first edition of his 'Essay', Malthus claimed that humankind had no possibility to exit from the inescapable misery due to the greater power of population growth with respect to the capacity of the earth to produce food. In his view, no technological innovation could fill the gap between resources demand and supply. However, in the 1803 edition of his major work, the scholar claimed that moral restraint could help preventing the disastrous consequences of overpopulation. Thus, Malthus slightly opened his mind to the possibility of progress in human condition and human behaviour.³⁴

What is relevant to this discussion is Malthus' ideas on population and society. First of all, it is evident that the English cleric regarded population growth as something extremely undesirable.

³¹ Rao Mohan (2004), *From population control to reproductive health – Malthusian arithmetic*, SAGE Publications New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London, pp. 79-82.

³² Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, pp. 4-5.

³³ Rao M. (2004), *From population control to reproductive health – Malthusian arithmetic*, p. 83.

³⁴ Levin Samuel M. (1966), *Malthus and the Idea of Progress*, Journal of the History of Ideas, Jan. - Mar., 1966, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1966), p. 93.

Differently from the mercantilist and cameralist perspectives presented in the previous chapter, Malthusian thinkers perceive a large population not as a source of strength, but as burden instead: an increasing population meant an increasing number of poor people, plague, conflict and famine. Moreover, the fact that demographic growth was in fact due to a growth in the number of low-income people made the whole idea of a numerous population even less desirable. This is because, as previously claimed, Malthus believed that a large working class was destined to struggle to survive.

Malthusian ideas on demographic growth had strong political implications. In particular, they led to a sharp distinction between individuals in society: the majority and the poor, whose increase in number had to be kept under control by the government. The marginalization of lower economic classes in Malthusian thought can be easily detected in his critique to the Speenhamland System. This system was a set of laws adopted in Great Britain in 1795, aimed at providing economic relief to the poor. Measures of assistance consisted in raising the wages of the working class to a predefined level.³⁵ From the Malthusian point of view, the Speenhamland System would have negative effects on society for two reasons. In the first place, economic relief would lead to an increase of population without affecting food supply, thus widening the share of population living in condition of poverty. Secondly:

*The quantity of provisions consumed in work houses upon a part of the society that cannot in general be considered as the most valuable part diminishes the shares that would otherwise belong to the more industrious and more worthy members and thus in the same manner forces more to become dependent.*³⁶

In other words, Malthus claimed that the resources used to support the workhouses could have been better invested in the assistance of the “more industrious and more worthy” part of society. Moreover, taking public money away from the support of the economically active, meant that these subjects could find themselves struggling, thus increasing the number of poor people in need of assistance by the state. In short, according to Malthus, the Speenhamland System gave origin to a vicious cycle, as by trying to ameliorate the living conditions of the poor, it damaged the rest of society, thus making more people become poor.

Malthusian critique on Elizabethan policies was not limited to the Speenhamland System, it also applied to the workhouse. Workhouses had been established in Great Britain in the 1550s,

³⁵ Britannica, *Speenhamland system, British relief system* (22/06/2022) < <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Speenhamland-system> >

³⁶ Malthus T. (1789), *An essay on the Principle of Population*, p. 70.

when the government grew worried about unemployment among poor people. The first workhouse was created in London, in the former palace of Bridewell. The experiment must have been considered as a success, as this kind of institutions became widespread in the kingdom. Relevant policies in relation to this phenomenon were Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1598 and 1601, as they created a local tax to subsidize workhouses. By the time Malthus was writing his Essay, workhouses were well established social institutions, and the terrible conditions in which their inhabitants lived were of public domain. Nevertheless, according to the cleric, these institutions had to be made as unattractive as possible, in order to discourage undeserving poor people from taking advantage of public goods. Moreover, Malthus proposed the principle of “less eligibility”, according to which, people with no physical impediments could not receive an amount of financial support that could be compared to the lowest income of members of the working class.³⁷ Malthusian concerns in relation to alleged excessive appeal of workhouses for the poor was widespread among political thinkers and decision-makers, as testified by the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. Even if there is no evidence of the fact that this policy was influenced by Malthusian ideas, it is possible to consider it as their practical example. As a matter of fact, the Poor Law Amendment Act was meant to end relief to able-bodied subjects and strategies to reach this goal included practices to discourage people from entering workhouses. Such practices included for instance the fact that, for an able-bodied man to enter the institutions, his whole family had to follow him. Once in the workhouse, men, women, children, the infirm and the able-bodied were divided into separate housings. Moreover, life in the building was structured in an off-putting way, with, for instance, repetitive meals and strict rules.³⁸ All of this, aimed at preventing able-bodied individuals from benefiting from the social security system.

The case of Malthus is relevant to this discussion for evident reasons. First of all, the British parish man marks a clear turning point with regard to ideas about population, especially in comparison with mercantilism and cameralism. As a matter of fact, while the latter regarded population growth as something ultimately positive for the state, the former perceives a large population as a burden for the state. Secondly, the way in which Malthus regards the poor, opens the path to the marginalisation of the lowest strata of society. Namely, the conception of the poor as a part of the population that grows in a disproportionate way creates a distinction between the particular group and the rest of civil society. Moreover, Malthusian theory devises

³⁷ Rao M. (2004), *From population control to reproductive health – Malthusian arithmetic*, p. 82.

³⁸ The Workhouse, the history of an institution, *Introduction* (22/06/2022) < <https://www.workhouses.org.uk/intro/> >

population as something that has to be efficiently managed by the state: in his perspective, the government had to make sure that the most undesirable part of the population would not be encouraged to grow in excessive measure. Finally, Malthus deserved to be analysed throughout this discussion because his theories, despite being based on arbitrary assumptions, were extremely influential, to the extent that Neo Malthusian streams of thought emerged even in the Twentieth century, as the discussion will point out later on.

Post-colonial Latin America and racial classification

Another relevant case in the discussion on the relation between population control and marginalization is post-colonial Latin American states. In the first chapter, it was pointed out how racial classifications were crucial in the performance of colonial power in Spanish and Portuguese American territories. At the beginning of the Nineteenth century, southern American colonies gained independence after a series of social upheavals that Iberian empires could not defeat. Since the very first years, the newly independent Latin American states wanted to present themselves as completely detached from colonial rulers. One of the ideas on which government officials insisted the most was that there was no room in the new countries for racial discrimination. Mara Loveman, in her book 'National Colors' (2014), mentions several official spokesmen as examples of the anti-racist discourse that characterised governments' rhetoric. The first case the author mentions is Chilean independentist leader Bernardo O'Higgins, who, in 1818, stated that, after the sacrifices that the Chilean people had done to free themselves from colonial rule, it would be unacceptable to use formulas that had been devised and used in that context. Moreover, O'Higgins declared that in the new country the distinction between Indians and Spaniards, which was the core of imperial policies in the colonies, would have been illegal. Similarly, Peruvian liberator José de San Martín decreed that every citizen of Peru could only be called Peruvian, as the state was not interested in any distinction among its people. Venezuelan and Argentinian Constitutions proclaimed the equality of Indians with respect to the other citizens. Mexican catholic priest and leader José María Morelos claimed in the 1814 Constitution that slavery and any other racial distinction and discrimination were abolished in Mexico. What emerges from this brief overview is that the new republics in Latin America officially repealed racial distinctions among their nationals.

Despite anti-racist discourses, colonial legacy with respect to racialization of certain categories was not that easy to dismiss. As a matter of fact, ethno-racial categories remained a central feature of local administrative practices in the new republics. Probably the most astonishing example is the endurance of the distinction between "slave" and "free", as slavery remained a legal practice in early Latin American republics. However, because of the growth in free black

population, the distinction between free and enslaved did not precisely coincide with racial categories.³⁹ At national level, political discourse continued to dismiss colonial legacy in administrative practices, even if almost every census conducted in Latin American states included a question about race. The relevance of the heritage of imperial period is particularly evident when considering the fact that, at the international level, guidelines on censuses not including ethno-racial distinctions had been developed by International Statistical Congress (ISC). States, including former Iberian colonies, applied these new standards, in order to demonstrate to be modern nations. Nevertheless, Latin American countries persisted in the practice of including questions on race in their demographic enquiries. The significance of colonial practices in the new republics can be explained, among other factors, by the education of new governmental official. As a matter of fact, revolutions had been guided by creole elites, who had been educated in Spanish tradition and culture and who had benefited throughout the end of the colonial period by their being Spaniards. Therefore, despite publicly distancing themselves from colonial practices, the idea of a society hierarchically ordered on the ground of ethno-racial characteristics had been interiorised by the new national leaders. Another interesting fact related to marginalisation of ethnic groups is the way in which Creole elites managed to maintain their white privilege without explicitly recurring to the colonial criterion of race. A quite common practice to this end was the introduction of highly exclusive property and literacy requirements for political participation, which actually left out the majority of population, de facto maintaining power in the hands of rich creoles.⁴⁰

The points discussed up to this moment are aspects shared throughout Latin American newly independent countries, while from now on the discussion will focus on the Brazilian case. Brazil was a Portuguese colony from 1500 until 1815, when it was turned into a kingdom in union to Portugal, as the United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and Algarves. In 1822, it started the path to become an independent state, when Portuguese prince Pedro I, under the pressure of Brazilian nationalists, declared his intention not to go back to Lisbon after the period in which the royal family had spent in Brazil to escape Napoleonic invasion (1807-1821). Pedro I declared himself Constitutional Emperor and remained in power until 1831.⁴¹ After three years of civil war, the Treaty of Rio de Janeiro, between Portugal and Brazil, formally recognised the former's

³⁹ Loveman M. (2014), *National Colors – Racial classification and the state in Latin America*, pp. 79-80.

⁴⁰ Loveman M. (2014), *National Colors – Racial classification and the state in Latin America*, pp. 83-84.

⁴¹ Bértola Luis and Williamson Jeffrey (2017), *Has Latin American Inequality Changed Direction? Looking over the long run*, Springer Open, p. 118.

independence as a monarchy. During the colonial period, Brazil was one of the main producers of cotton and sugar in Latin America, and such production heavily depended on the exploitation of African slaves and natives. Because of the economic function of the colony, Brazilian population was for the major part composed of people of colour, mostly black and mulattos. The composition of the population as mainly of African origins depended heavily on the change in attitude of the Church and Empires towards ethnic groups in the Sixteenth century. In the 1540s Spanish and Portuguese monarchs forbode enslavement of Natives on the grounds of the fact that inquisition believed that they had a soul, while Africans had not. Because of this, Brazilian plantations workforce became almost exclusively black by the beginning of the Seventeenth century. Another relevant feature of the population of this particular Latin American country is its highly mixed nature. As a matter of fact, most Portuguese settlers were men and they often married Native or African women, thus giving birth to children who did not belong to any of the three most clearly defined “races”. However, interracial unions should not mislead us towards the idea that Brazilian society was not based on racist constructions. Categories to define ethnic groups were devised in order to deal with the mixed character of Brazilian population. In 1776, Portuguese authorities issued a census based on age and sex, but some officials included questions on race, defining three or four groups: whites, brancos; mulattos, pardos; blacks, pretos; Christian Indians, indios. In following censuses, alternative terms were applied, like caboclos, which referred to Indians or mestiços. It is important to remember that race is an entirely arbitrary construct, as there is no biological difference that justifies the establishment of a hierarchy among ethnic groups. Nevertheless, this artificial characterization played a crucial role in the colonial period and it continued to heavily influence society in post-colonial times. As a matter of fact, Brazil, like the other newly independent countries in South America, adopted a colour-blind discourse, claiming that the new legal apparatus did not differentiate among citizens based on their race. Nevertheless, racial discrimination persisted in new Brazil. One obvious element in support to this thesis is the fact that the new monarchy was the last country in the western hemisphere to abolish slavery in 1888. Another puzzling feature for a formally colour-blind state, is the fact that, even after independence, censuses continued to include racial categories, namely branco, pardo, preto, indígena and finally amarelo, which defined people of Asian origin.⁴²

The persistence of racial categories in official demographic instruments is an indicator of the endurance of discrimination on ethnic grounds in Brazil. Marginalisation of discriminated

⁴² Bértola L. and Williamson J. (2017), *Has Latin American Inequality Changed Direction? Looking over the long run*, pp. 172-174.

groups took various forms. Firstly, there is the fact that political power remained in the hands of creoles, even after the fall of the monarchy and the instauration of the Republic in 1889. As supported by sociology professor Sarah Lempp, the mainstream discourse of Brazil as a country characterised by *miscigenação* (miscegenation) was a means for Brazilian white elites to hide the racist character of social structures and to retain power. In support to her claim, Lempp states that advocates of *miscigenação* mainly referred to the whitening of the population as an indicator of the positivity of the mixing of population. Finally, interracial unions were not at all encouraged in an absolute sense, as they were only allowed in the case of a white man marrying a Black or Indigene woman.⁴³

It may be claimed that harsh critiques of racializing practices in Brazil are misplaced, as Republican Constitution was liberal and did not include limitations on the basis of race. As a matter of fact, the new system was characterised by an increased number of elective positions and by an expansion of suffrage with respect to the period of the Empire, as all literate males older than 21 years old could vote. Nevertheless, when considering the degree of effective political participation of marginalised racialised groups, the Constitution does not seem to have brought about relevant changes. Scholars as Joseph L. Love and Victor Nunes Leal have investigated the reasons for this lack of concrete change in political participation, and they claim that the main cause of continued racial divide was Brazilian socio-economic structure. One of the main targets of their analysis of the First Republic is *coronelismo*, which was defined by Leal as the outcome of the combination of the representative political system and an inadequate social and economic structure. It was, in other terms, the result of the application of the new liberal political system on the socio-economic structure, still heavily influenced by colonial power hierarchies favouring landowners. It is important to remember that Brazilian First Republic was an agrarian society, where local owners of lands were extremely influential, and ultimately exercised more power than central authorities. In this framework, it is evident that those who possessed agrarian resources, the heirs of creole elites, were the ones who de facto exercised political power, in spite of the liberal 1891 Constitution.⁴⁴ Therefore, because of the very structure of the Brazilian state, it is clear that racial marginalisation was one of the main characteristics of the First Republic.

⁴³ Lempp Sarah (2014), “Whitening” and Whitewashing: Postcolonial Brazil is not an Egalitarian “Rainbow Nation”, The Postcolonialist < <http://postcolonialist.com/culture/whitening-whitewashing-postcolonial-brazil-means-egalitarian-rainbow-nation/> >

⁴⁴ Bértola L. and Williamson J. (2017), *Has Latin American Inequality Changed Direction? Looking over the long run*, pp. 126-127.

To conclude, the experience of post-colonial Brazil is an example of the persistence of racial discrimination and marginalization of certain ethnic groups in the newly independent states in Latin America. This case is particularly significant because, despite the large number of people of colour and the alleged *miscigenação* of Brazilian population, political and economic power remained in the hands of white people of Portuguese descent. In the words of the *Movimento Negro Unificado*, the United Black Movement, quoted by Lempp, the alleged mixture and harmony of different ethnic groups in Brazil “was not only a manipulation of the reality, but also an instrument of political domination that disguises black people’s subordination”.⁴⁵

The early eugenicist movement

The last part of this chapter on population control and marginalization will focus on the 1930s eugenicist movement in the United States. The case study of eugenics is particularly interesting, as it is probably the most straightforward example of the ways in which modern states devised repressive population policies targeting marginalized groups, based on the assumption that population growth had to follow a qualitative pattern. This qualitative approach to demography is particularly relevant to this discussion, as it can be traced back to the mercantilist and cameralist perspectives, which were presented in the first chapter. Moreover, many of the assumptions of the eugenicist movement are clearly influenced by Malthusianism, thus highlighting the relevance of the British clergy man even in the Twentieth century population thought. This section will firstly present an overview of the history of eugenicist thought in the United States and then the discussion will shift on the case of eugenics in the feminist movement.

In the first decades of the Twentieth century, eugenicist thought spread among population thinkers and politicians across the world. This worldwide success was mainly caused by the popularity that the movement gained in the last decade of the Nineteenth century in the United States, in a context of increasing immigration and concern for the increasingly mixed character of the American population. The origins of the eugenics movement can be traced back to the work of Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), who applied Charles Darwin’s theory on natural selection to the human species. Galton claimed that the human race could be improved by promoting the reproduction of the “most suitable races”, while discouraging or preventing

⁴⁵ Lempp S. (2014), “Whitening” and Whitewashing: Postcolonial Brazil is not an Egalitarian “Rainbow Nation”.

undesirable groups to pass their genetic legacy on.⁴⁶ From the end of the Nineteenth century, this movement grew more and more popular among American elites and scholars, and it became a widespread doctrine in American society. The success of this theory is due to various reasons, but the main cause was the wave of immigrants reaching American shores at the end of the Nineteenth century. The increasing number of immigrants led to the widening of cities' slums and to the popularisation of socialist ideals, which appeared as a threat to the traditional white elite governing the country. At the same time, academics were looking for reasons explaining why social reforms aiming at dealing with increasing criminality continued to fail. Both of these groups found the answer to their problems in the study of geneticists, who supported the idea that it was the genes, not the environment, that determined the behaviour of an individual. The success of this theory owes much to its logics, which promised rational and intuitive solutions to the widespread social problems of violence and criminality. The enthusiastic adoption of eugenics by the political and cultural elites of the United States allowed its entrance in the universities and public debate: at the beginning of the Twentieth century, most American universities had courses of eugenics, and eugenicist assumptions were popularised among the middle class by newspapers. American eugenicists organised themselves in the American Breeders Association, which, in 1906, created the first Eugenicist Commission, whose aim was the investigation of the hereditary characteristics of the human species and to emphasise the value of "superior" genes.⁴⁷ Among the strategies supported by eugenicists, there were education campaigns for lower social classes, in which marginalized groups were taught how to resist their sexual drives and on how to adopt measures of birth control and family planning. However, as the goal was that of encouraging qualitative population growth, those who were considered unfit to build a good society should have been prevented from reproducing: according to eugenicists, people with mental issues, physical handicaps, alcoholics and criminals should not be allowed the right to pass their undesirable genes on. Therefore, the main instrument to serve eugenicist purposes was sterilization.⁴⁸ In 1907, Indiana was the first American state to introduce a law prescribing forced sterilization of feeble-minded, repeat criminals and other marginalized groups. Between 1907 and the First World War, following Indiana's example, fifteen American states introduced legislation allowing, and in some cases encouraging, sterilization of the carriers of undesirable genes. Another important instrument for

⁴⁶ Rifkin Jeremy (1998), *Il secolo Biotech*, Baldini&Castoldi s.r.l., Milano, pp. 195-196; Roberts Dorothy (1999), *Killing the black body – Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*, Vintage Books A Division of Random House, Inc. New York, p.85.

⁴⁷ Rifkin J. (1998), *Il secolo Biotech*, pp. 197-199.

⁴⁸ A. C. Hüntelmann, Statistics, nationhood, and the state, in *The Population Knowledge Network* (2016), *Twentieth Century Population Thinking – A critical reader of primary sources*, p. 25.

the eugenicist battle was immigration law. In 1924, a law on immigration created on the basis of eugenicist criteria entered into force. This legislation aimed at shaping the ethno-racial composition of the United States according to the preferences of eugenicist policy-makers. It is not a case that such a success for the promoters of eugenics arrived after the First World War. As a matter of fact, the years after the war were marked, in the United States as in Europe, by the rise of nationalism and isolationism, thus bringing new strength to strict approaches to migration-policy. In this framework, eugenicists published works pointing out the alleged genetical inferiority of immigrants with respect to (white) Americans, thus fuelling xenophobia and racism in the population.⁴⁹ The year 1924 can be considered as the peak of the eugenicist movement, whose popularity strongly declined with the 1929 economic crash, which produced poverty among all American social and ethnic groups, thus discrediting the idea of any form of biological superiority. Interestingly, the increasing popularity of eugenicist thought in Europe, most notably in Nazi Germany, contributed to the decline in its appeal in the United States. As a matter of fact, American elites wanted to distance themselves from Hitler's regime, while Nazi officials were using American sterilization laws as a model for their own eugenicist policies.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, eugenics remained so successful that, throughout the 1930s, governments in Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden passed eugenic sterilization laws.⁵¹

The history of the eugenicist movement in the United States shows how population policies at the beginning of the Twentieth century intertwined with racist and classist ideas. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of theoretical currents in legitimizing political and legislative activities: it was the pseudo-scientific doctrine of eugenics which allowed the American government to force sterilization on marginalized groups.

It is in this cultural and social context that the American feminist movement developed. The eugenicist movement, because of its very premises, is tied to the oppression of marginalized groups. Therefore, the link between eugenics and feminism, which is supposed to fight for the rights of the oppressed, may be unexpected. Nevertheless, many early feminist activists in the United States, most notably Margaret Sanger (1879-1966), passionately supported eugenicist ideas. As a matter of fact, it is important to acknowledge that, at first, feminist activists were only fighting for white women's rights. Actually, Sanger and other feminists were fierce defenders of white superiority, and supported the idea that marginalized groups should not have

⁴⁹ Rifkin J. (1998), *Il secolo Biotech*, pp. 204-205.

⁵⁰ Rifkin J. (1998), *Il secolo Biotech*, pp. 208-209.

⁵¹ Connelly Matthew (2008), *Fatal Misconception – The Struggle to Control World Population*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press Cambridge, Massachusetts / London, England, p. 80.

been granted the right to reproduce. As supported by Dorothy Roberts, racism was instrumental into creating the idea that birth control could solve social problems allegedly caused by marginalized groups, especially black people.⁵² Pioneers of white women's reproductive rights were heavily influenced in their thought by Malthusian ideas: they believed that the world was overpopulated, and that the crisis of resources foreseen by Malthus was approaching. Because of the need to reduce population growth, feminists believed that legalisation of contraception and abortions were in the interest of the state.⁵³

Even though she was not the only leader of the feminist movement, Sanger can be considered as the embodiment of early feminist beliefs and concerns. Therefore, analysing her career as a birth control activist is a good way of understanding the relation between feminism and eugenics. At the beginning of her activity as a promoter of birth control, an expression that Sanger created herself, the American social worker was only moved by concerns on women's condition. As she was working as a public health nurse in New York in the first decade of the Twentieth century, Sanger was shocked by the terrible conditions in which women bearing multiple unwanted pregnancies lived and by the fact that many risked their lives because of self-induced abortions. As a consequence of her experience, Sanger started her crusade for women's right to decide on their own bodies: she claimed that female emancipation depended on their possibility to choose whether or not to become a mother. To promote women's access to birth control, in 1916 Sanger founded the first contraceptive clinic in the United States, where she distributed diaphragms. As contraception was illegal in the United States, and remained such until 1965, the activist was arrested together with her sister Ether Byrne, the clinic's nurse.⁵⁴ After the First World War Sanger came to believe that, not only did birth control serve women's emancipation, but it was also crucial to prevent the incidence of unfit births. From her point of view, therefore, birth control was a duty for the poor, feeble-minded, and black people. These categories of women had the moral obligation to avoid pregnancies, as their children were going to be biologically defective and cause of social problems.⁵⁵

In the interwar period, Sanger's motivations shifted away from women's emancipation towards population control and family-planning.⁵⁶ In 1921, the feminist leader founded the American

⁵² Roberts D. (1999), *Killing the black body – Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*, p. 81.

⁵³ Ferdinand Ursula and Overath Petra, Organizations and networks of population thinking in the first half of the twentieth century, in *The Population Knowledge Network (2016), Twentieth Century Population Thinking – A critical reader of primary sources*, p. 69.

⁵⁴ Roberts D. (1999), *Killing the black body – Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*, pp. 82-83.

⁵⁵ Roberts D. (1999), *Killing the black body – Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*, pp. 103-104.

⁵⁶ Roberts D. (1999), *Killing the black body – Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*, p. 84.

Birth Control League, which was the organiser of the first World Population Conference in 1927.⁵⁷ One of the main reasons behind Sanger being the originator of the 1927 Geneva Conference was her hope in the possibility of bringing to the world's attention the concerns of the International Federation of Neo-Malthusians and the Birth Control League. However, because of the pro-natalist attitude of many in the League of Nations, the matter of birth control was not discussed at the Geneva Conference, and Sanger was not included in any formal meeting. One of the products of the Conference, nevertheless, was the Birth Control International Information Centre, which was actually chaired by Margaret Sanger.⁵⁸ The fact that, after the Second World War, Neo-Malthusianism became the guiding ideology of the feminist activist is reflected in her declaration: "The big question before the world today is overpopulation, [not] sex education, marriage guidance, etc.,". It is important to notice that, according to Sanger as well as to many Neo-Malthusians, alleged overpopulation regarded the so-called developing countries.⁵⁹ Therefore, it is evident that racist and eugenicist components clearly influenced the outlook of Margaret Sanger, as well as many international policy-makers, with regard to family-planning: those peoples that were considered to be too numerous and "too fertile" had to be educated to birth-control methods, because, by having too many children, they threatened the international social order.

In conclusion, the discussion of the case of Margaret Sanger was useful to this discussion because it provided an example of how the feminist movement was influenced by eugenicist ideas. Birth control had a different meaning for different people: on the one hand, birth control was a privilege, an instrument of empowerment for white women, while on the other hand, it was a duty for the "undesirable" categories of women.

Conclusions

To conclude, this chapter has presented cases highlighting the strength of the link between population control and discrimination of marginalized groups. In the case of Malthus, poor people were considered as a plague for the state, which is why he encouraged the government to devise policies to limit the growth in number of the lowest social strata. In post-colonial

⁵⁷ Argast Regula, Unger Corinna R., and Widmer Alexandra, Twentieth century population thinking An introduction, in The Population Knowledge Network (2016), *Twentieth Century Population Thinking – A critical reader of primary sources*, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Ferdinand U., and Overath P., Organizations and networks of population thinking in the first half of the twentieth century, in, The Population Knowledge Network (2016), *Twentieth Century Population Thinking – A critical reader of primary sources*, p. 66.

⁵⁹ Ferdinand U., and Overath P., Organizations and networks of population thinking in the first half of the twentieth century, in The Population Knowledge Network (2016), *Twentieth Century Population Thinking – A critical reader of primary sources*, p. 70.

states, socio-political marginalization targeted racialized groups, in spite of the formally colour-blind attitude of the new governments. Finally, the eugenicist movement in the 1920s and 1930s pushed the government of the United States, as well as some international institutions, to adopt sterilizing campaigns against those groups who possessed “undesirable” genes. This overview showed the huge extent to which marginalized groups have been targeted by population control policies as well as the relevance of discriminating theories in shaping society’s and government’s outlook over population.

CHAPTER THREE

BIRTH CONTROL AND MODERNIZATION, THE CASE OF CHINA

Introduction

This discussion has pointed out that the ability of a state to control its population has in many cases been regarded as fundamental to its economic and political development. Moreover, it has already been highlighted that population thinking has been significantly shaped by Malthusian legacy. This chapter explores one of the most evident cases in which the state has exercised its biopower to control the so-called “population problem” as a central part of its modernization and development strategy.

First, it is important to understand the concept of development. There are different definitions and conceptions of development, but what all these definitions have in common is that it is associated to economic growth and industrialization. After the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union invested a large part of their resources in promoting development projects in Third World countries, with the aim of including them in their spheres of influence.
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Second, Western conception of development was strongly associated to birth control. In particular, most of the projects carried out by the United Nations in so-called developing countries included birth control as a measure to prevent problems related to “underdevelopment”. According to most population thinkers, poverty, diseases and famines in Third World countries were due to the fact that the demographic transition had not occurred yet. In their view, which was clearly influenced by Malthusian thought, economic progress was held back by population’s pressure on resources. One of the first cases in which First World countries encouraged and supported policies aiming at reducing fertility was India. Already in the 1950s, Swedish and Norwegian NGOs launched birth control and eugenicist programs in the Indian territory, which was also the recipient of American birth control projects in the following decades.⁶¹ The Soviet Union, on the other hand, did not consider birth control to be relevant to development. On the contrary, Marxist ideology believed that a large population meant a large labour force, which was crucial to industrialization, the core of development and modernization.⁶²

⁶⁰ Unger Corinna R. (2018), *International Development – A Postwar History*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, United Kingdom, p. 8

⁶¹ Unger C. (2018), *International Development – A Postwar History*, pp. 120-123.

⁶² Greenhalgh Susan and Winckler Edwin A. (2005), *Governing China’s Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, p. 62.

This chapter is going to focus on the case of the People's Republic of China for a number of reasons. Firstly, the history of debate on population is particularly interesting, because, at least at the beginning, Chinese leaders did not agree on whether it was desirable to have a large or a smaller population, but they did agree on the fact that population played a role in the quest for modernization. Secondly, the fact that a strict birth control policy was applied to a communist country is peculiar, as the PRC detached itself from the Marxist population ideology, which was pro-natalist. Finally, the One Child Policy has been widely studied and discussed, thus providing valid sources to provide a comprehensive picture of PRC's population policy.

A short history of birth control in the People's Republic of China

From 1949 to 1976, the People's Republic of China's was led by party chairman Mao Zedong (1893-1976).⁶³ Before 1949, reproduction and population were not considered to be a priority by the Chinese Communist Party, as the establishment of the new regime was facing many difficulties, including Japanese invasion and Nationalist attacks. Once the PRC had been successfully instituted, the party leadership had to face the question of whether a large population was desirable or not. In the 1950s, Chinese government started economic planning, and, in this framework, endorsed birth control, or, as Mao defined it, "birth planning". During the first decades of existence of the PRC, birth planning was considered to be a crucial aspect in the improvement of Chinese population, in particular, of its health. As a matter of fact, Mao's party wanted to grant both urban and rural women with modern reproductive health care, in order to improve not only the health conditions of mothers and children, but also the education and employment of the communities later on. In order to reach this goal, the government planned on providing the population with knowledge and technologies of modern contraceptive methods. Nevertheless, Mao was aware that, besides contraceptives, what China needed in order to reduce its fertility rate was a change in mentality. He understood that a cultural change required time and that education could speed the process up only in limited measure. However, the faster the mentality changed with regard to contraception, the easier would it be for the government to reduce population growth without adopting coercive methods. In relation to this last point, it is interesting to notice that, during the Mao era, reduction of fertility relied on voluntary adoption of contraceptive methods by Chinese couples: it was therefore very different from the coercive practices adopted later on in the framework of the One Child Policy.⁶⁴ During the Mao period, the official party line with regard to population was still in line with Marxian

⁶³ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 48.

⁶⁴ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 55-57.

idea that a country could always benefit from more workforce, thus denying the pessimistic forecasts of Malthusians. Nevertheless, the Chinese Communist Party soon discovered that socialist institutions could not provide for the number of births they encouraged. Because of the contrast between official ideology and effective capacity of the regime, Mao's birth planning was not consistent between the 1950s and 1970s. In order to reconcile the practical necessity of the regime to reduce the number of births with socialist optimism, Mao claimed that planning births was the scientific and rational thing to do, thus avoiding the problem of admitting that the socialist regime could not provide for its people. As a matter of fact, the idea of planning births and thus families and communities, fitted perfectly into Mao's idea of a nation whose every aspect was rationally planned. However, an effective and consistent planning of births was developed and established only in 1973. One may say that the main contribution of Mao's government to birth control was the development of the technologies to ensure reproductive health care: contraceptives, abortion clinics and techniques as well as the beginning of a system to spread information on birth control.

In the early years of the PRC, the idea of birth control had two main obstacles: the pronatalist and anticontraceptive Chinese tradition and Marxist idea on population. As a matter of fact, Marx claimed that communist societies were characterized by the fact that population would always be a valuable resource. At the same time, one of the main points in the Chinese Communist Party's agenda was the liberation of women from traditional oppression. Therefore, as soon as 1950, the Marriage Law entered into force: this legislative instrument aimed at increasing the minimum age for marriage to 18 for women and 20 for men. The age minimum remained lower than many party members had hoped for, but this law is extremely relevant to the current discussion, as it was the first legal basis for the intervention of the government in family life. Moreover, the Marriage Law aimed at slowing population growth by delaying marriage as well as benefiting the health of spouses. As a matter of fact, this law prescribed a premarital medical check-up, in order to prevent the spread of diseases in the newly born families. However, this last provision had to be abandoned, as population opposed such an intrusion in their private lives.⁶⁵ As previously stated, in 1949, when the PRC had not completely established itself yet, contraception was not considered to be a priority by the government. Therefore, the issue of birth control was left in the hands of the health ministry, which consisted in communist military doctors. The latter were generally pronatalist, and they restricted access to contraception through strict legislations, in particular with respect to

⁶⁵Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 59-63.

sterilization and abortion, and through restrictions on imports of contraceptives. Things started to change after the 1953 call on women to join the labour force. Party leadership realized that, in order to foster economic growth, Chinese women had to be employed in the new state-led economy. To encourage their participation in the labour force, the party understood that they had to promote a reduction in the number of children per family, thus reducing the workload inside the house. Therefore, the State Council gave instruction to the health ministry to facilitate access to contraception and the state commerce bureau broadened availability of contraceptives by transferring the control over their imports from doctors to stores. Despite the apparent consensus among party members on the question of birth control, it was only in 1956 that the organs of propaganda started promoting contraception, and looser regulations on abortion and sterilization were issued for the first time in 1957.⁶⁶ The crucial event that brought birth planning to the attention of the government was the First Five-Year Plan (1953-1957), which required an accurate census of the population. The census presented the pace at which Chinese population was growing, and pointed out that the regime could not grant employment to all of its people. At this point, several party members, including future leader Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) and senior economist Ma Yinchu (1882-1982), became increasingly worried about the alleged population problem of their country: party leaders turned from approving birth control to actively promoting it. In 1956, Mao publicly acknowledged the merits of birth planning, by declaring that, while society's production had become planned, humankind's reproduction remained in a state of anarchy: "Why can't we also implement planned reproduction of mankind itself?"⁶⁷ However, the situation soon changed. With the launching of the Great Leap Forward between 1957 and 1958, Mao claimed that a large population was still desirable for the modernization of the country and stopped advocating birth control. He also stated that rural families were not yet ready to reduce the number of children, because they relied on them for agricultural production, which was essential to the PRC, as well as because of traditional values. For this reason, Mao claimed that he was still in favour of birth control, but that contraception was a private choice of the couples. Besides, he believed that Chinese people, once the Great Leap Forward had modernized the country, would have increased their level of education and spontaneously reduced the number of their children. During the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961), the issue of birth control was no longer a priority in the government's agenda. However, starting from 1962, a new emphasis was put on the issue of birth control. For instance, the health

⁶⁶Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 65-66.

⁶⁷Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 68-72.

system was instructed by *Health Daily*, the official organ of the health ministry, to encourage birth planning.

Targets were set at the beginning of the 1960s: by 1965, urban growth should fall to under 2 percent, to under 1.5 percent by the end of the Third Five-Year Plan (1966–1970), and to under one percent by the end of the Fourth Five-Year Plan (1971–1975). The Third Five-Year Plan was the first to set a quantitative goal for Chinese population as a whole, namely 800 million by 1970. In the mid-1960s, the formula adopted by the government with regard to childbearing was “later, longer, fewer”. This strategy to reduce population growth was based on later marriage, a longer spacing between births and a reduced number of children. In 1963, Zhou Enlai (1898-1979), head of the government during the Mao period, proposed a propaganda campaign supporting the two-children family model. Compliance to the model should be voluntary, and coercion should have been avoided, but Zhou called for measures to encourage adherence to it, such as preferential treatment in the fields of wages and housing. As a consequence of the importance of family planning in the modernization efforts of the PRC, in 1964 a Birth Planning Commission was established. It was supposed to be independent of the health ministry, but it actually relied on its experience and resources. One of the tasks of the commission was the reduction or, where possible, eradication of costs related to reproductive healthcare. Efforts to reduce birth control, moreover, were no longer limited to cities, as in the mid-1960s they spread to rural areas. At the end of the 1960s, Mao’s government changed direction again. In order to reinforce his leadership, Mao adopted again Revolutionary Mobilization, purging the party and giving more power to the military coalition, which was generally pro-natalist. However, in spite of important setbacks in birth planning, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) contributed to the spread of medical practices, including some degree of contraception, in the countryside.⁶⁸

In the 1970s the PRC started entertaining stronger relations with Western countries. In this period, slowing population growth to facilitate economic development reappeared on the Party’s agenda. “It is no coincidence that the country’s birth planning policy took shape precisely as hysteria around population was mounting in the West”.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, China could not benefit from any form of assistance from the First World, and the international arena

⁶⁸ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China’s Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, 74-83.

⁶⁹ Hvistendahl Mara (2011), *Unnatural Selection – Choosing boys over girls, and the consequences of a world full of men*, Public Affairs, New York, p. 57.

could not provide cheap and effective contraceptive methods.⁷⁰ In the first half of the 1970s, birth policy started making some progress at the national level, and in the meanwhile some party leaders worked on a Marxist theory to legitimize birth control. In this framework, the government announced the population policy aimed at reducing the number of children per family through late marriage, long spacing between births, and fewer children.⁷¹ The interest in promoting birth control grew after Mao's death in 1976, and practicing birth control became one of the ideal characteristics of the Mobilization model.⁷²

Attention to the history of birth planning during the Mao period is particularly significant to this discussion. As a matter of fact, a close look to the first decades of existence of the PRC shows that, even if the link between economic modernization and birth control in communist China is often taken for granted, party leaders had different, and often contrasting, opinions on the matter. What all outlooks on the matter had in common, however, is the assumption that population plays a crucial role in a country's modernization. On the one hand, pro-natalists believed that a large labour force could ensure economic development, while, on the other hand, advocates of birth control believed that a numerous population to provide for could only slow modernization down. In the years following Mao's death, the position of the PRC's government became clearly in favour of birth planning.

During the period in which the PRC was led by Deng Xiaoping, the issue of birth planning became more important than it was during the previous decades. Between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, the party was committed to cultural and economic modernization of China, which was possible, according to them, only through a strict limitation of the number of children per family. It is evident, therefore, that the idea that a large population was a brake for modernization won in the debate between Chinese policymakers. With the reduction of population size as a central point on political agenda, the One Child Policy was devised in 1979 and it entered into PRC's constitution in 1982. This policy caused significant tensions between the masses and the CCP. Nevertheless, Deng's government pursued such a strict approach and by the end of the decade reached what they believed to be a necessary and effective formula. Government's faith in the policy is evident in the fact that it remained in place until 2015.

⁷⁰Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 84.

⁷¹ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 88-89.

⁷² Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 91.

A very important aspect of population policy during the Deng period was the increased focus on quality of population. This qualitative approach to population included some eugenicist aspect, in relation to race, but for the most part consisted in attention to skills and education, or “human capital”. This new character of Chinese population policy is evident in the fact that its guiding formula became “controlling population quantity and raising population quality”.⁷³ Moreover, eugenicist restrictions were added to the new, revised version of the Marriage Law.⁷⁴ According to advocates of this population doctrine, having fewer children would increase the chances of them becoming good-quality citizens. Moreover, increased resources due to the reduction in the number of children to care for would improve maternal and child care and health. Even if Deng administration remained mainly focused on the reduction in number of babies, some measures aimed at discouraging individuals with hereditary diseases from reproducing.

The One Child Policy was deemed necessary because new studies aiming at providing a strategy of modernization pointed out the necessity to slow down population growth rates, to contain the size of population and to raise per capita income. In order to attain these objectives, the only solution appeared to be committing to the rule of one child per couple. Permission to have two children should be limited to families in the countryside who had had a daughter and who wanted to try again for a son. The main justification for the strong intrusion of the state in the population’s family lives was the idea that, as resources and goods grow slowly, a way to raise consumption per capita was reducing population growth.⁷⁵ A clear marker of the commitment of party leaders to birth control is the inclusion of the One Child Policy in the 1982 constitution, which prescribed the duty to practice birth planning, and thus justified enforcement of limits to births. In spite of all of the steps towards the establishment of a strict population policy, until the 2000s, birth laws were left to the scrutiny of provincial authorities, under some guidelines by the central government. Nevertheless, between 1979 and mid-1980s, the PRC’s policy shifted from advocating one child but allowing two, to allowing only one except for very limited exceptional cases. The new one-child family became a rule gradually, both in terms of categories of people and of geographic areas. At first, the rule was applied to regime personnel, then to people who lived in urban areas and finally to residents of the countryside. Enforcement at the national level was attempted in 1983, but the state did not possess the necessary

⁷³ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China’s Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 93-94.

⁷⁴ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China’s Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 104

⁷⁵ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China’s Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 94-98.

instruments for implementation. This effort to impose the One Child Policy had terrible consequences, both on women's health and rights and on the relations between the party and population.⁷⁶ In particular, in 1983, sterilization campaigns and forced abortions became extremely widespread. It is important to understand that abortions were often performed around the ninth month of pregnancy, often inducing labour and killing the baby after it was born. In this year, infanticides of infant girls also became widespread. Families who wanted to have a son, but were bound by the One Child Policy often killed their daughters in order to try again for a boy.⁷⁷ Among the instruments that had been devised by Deng's leadership there were preferential treatments for only children and their families, who were issued a "one-child certificate" granting them a number of benefits. At the same time, the government started applying important economic disincentives for families with more than one child, including fines and denial of state services to unauthorized children.⁷⁸ In the years following 1983, party leadership recognised the tragic consequences of its hard-line population policy. Discussions and meetings to solve the conflicting needs of reducing the "population problem" and of making the solution more sustainable for Chinese families. PRC's policymakers reached the conclusion that, in order for a population policy to be effective in the long-run, people needed a stable and more relaxed approach. In particular, they devised a new rule, which allowed requests for permission to have a second child if the first born was a daughter. Permission should have been granted, provided that couples waited for an appropriate time period.⁷⁹ Between the end of the 1980s and 1991, debate between supporters of a soft line and of a harder approach among party members continued. In the end, a compromise was reached between these two standpoints: the rule allowing for a second child in case of a first-born daughter remained in place, while propaganda and sterilizations were firmly established as routine state practices.⁸⁰

In order to enforce these regulations, the Deng administration combined persuasion through propaganda with coercion and economic disincentives and incentives. In particular, the government added to Mao's strategy of propaganda and education fines for every extra child as well as legal and administrative measures. During the Deng period, furthermore,

⁷⁶ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 104-105.

⁷⁷ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 112; Wang Nanfu, Zhang Jialing (2019), *One Child Nation*, produced by Next Generation, ITVS, WDR/Arte, Motto Pictures, Pumpnickel Films, distributed by Amazon Studios.

⁷⁸ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 105-106.

⁷⁹ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 119.

⁸⁰ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 127-128.

institutionalization of technical work and standardization of legal procedures became important parts of the strategy to limit population growth.⁸¹ In order to understand the ways in which the government enforced the One Child Policy, a useful instrument is the 2019 documentary “One Child Nation”, directed by Nanfu Wang e Jialing Zhang. This documentary is an interesting source, as it collects interviews of different people whose lives were heavily influenced by the Policy. Nanfu Wang was born in China in 1985, when Chinese huge population was perceived as a pressing problem all around the world. Her parents received permission to have a second child, as they wanted a son, provided that they would wait for 5 years, because they were living in the countryside, in Wang village, Jiangxi province. Nanfu claims that, when she went to middle-school in the city, all of the children had no siblings, and that she felt embarrassed for having a brother. The fact that middle-school students were surprised by a family having two children testifies the pervasiveness of propaganda supporting the One Child Policy: children were taught about the policy since kindergarten, propaganda formulas and images were printed on playing cards, and posters publicizing the benefits of respecting the Policy were present in every city and village. An instrument of social pressure recalled by Nanfu was the assignment of one star in the plaques of commitment to communist values, if the family had only one child. In the documentary, both witnesses and perpetrators claim that one of the measures adopted by local authorities in order to punish transgressors was tearing down their homes.⁸²

During the 1980s, the party leadership improved their capacity to prepare mandatory population plans, despite the limits in the ability to make accurate forecasts. The necessity to enforce quantitative limits on population growth led to the reinforcement of government’s capacity to exercise biopower over its population: during the Deng period, the structure to enforce state intervention was reinforced and made it possible to have effective control over birth limits.⁸³ As a matter of fact, every village had midwives and family planning workers, and each year the government would punish them or reward them, depending on how many babies were born in their territory. Family planning workers who made sure that few babies were born in their territories were given awards in public ceremonies and were defined as “the most admirable people in this new era”. Nanfu interviewed Shuqin Jiang, who worked as a family planning worker for 30 years, and who was awarded the National Distinguished Worker award, the Excellent Labour Award, the Model Worker Certificate from the 16th National People’s

⁸¹ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China’s Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 95.

⁸² Wang N., Zhang J. (2019), *One Child Nation*.

⁸³ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China’s Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 96.

Congress, the National Model Worker award, The Most Admirable Person of the New Era Award and the National Outstanding Worker for Children's Affairs. As part of the propaganda in favour of the One Child Policy, Shuqin's story was told and celebrated repeatedly on national TV. She said that, if she could go back in time, she would do this work again because the Policy was "absolutely correct" and national leaders were "prophetic". She believed that, without this Policy, China would have perished. Shuqin started working at 19, and at first, she believed that forcing abortions was an atrocity and she wanted to leave the job several times. In the end, she was persuaded that of the Policy was correct. The family-planning worker said that many of the aborted fetuses were eight or nine months along in the pregnancy and that often, after the abortion procedures, they were still alive, so doctors and nurses had to kill them. Sometimes pregnant women tried to run away and they were chased and captured by government officials. Shuqin claimed that she had to put national interest above her personal feelings, as in that period it was like fighting a war. As a matter of fact, one of the slogans of the One Child Policy was "we are fighting a population war". In order to provide a picture of the form taken by this "population war", the interview to Huaru Yuan is particularly useful. Huaru was a midwife, who, when asked, claimed that she did not know how many babies she had delivered, but that she knew that she had performed between 50,000 and 60,000 sterilizations and abortions. She confirmed that many abortions were actually induced births of fetuses far along in the pregnancy that were born alive and killed afterwards. Huaru claimed that midwives and local doctors were forced by the Policy to act in this way. The medical team was organized at the county level and the retired midwife said that she and her team travelled the country performing around 20 sterilizations per day, as well as abortions. Despite the alleged relaxation of the post-1983 enforcement measures, Huaru stated that women were abducted by government officials, tied up and forced to undergo abortion and sterilization procedures. She said that, even if she had no choice but to obey orders, she felt extremely guilty and that, after she retired, she only treated patients with infertility.⁸⁴

During the Deng period, another crucial point for Chinese population policy was the change in attitude of the international community. Even if they were not a substantial part of PRC's expenditure for birth control, international funds started to be available for the country. In particular, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) made it possible to conduct China's first modern census in the 1980s.⁸⁵ Even if this census did not convey any shocking information with respect to population size, it surprised the Chinese government as it

⁸⁴Wang N., Zhang J. (2019), *One Child Nation*.

⁸⁵ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 97.

found out that, after years of decline in birth rates, in 1981 demographic increase had raised significantly.⁸⁶ Another important development due to international interest on Chinese population is that UNFPA resources improved the quality and safety of contraceptives, thus preventing women from undergoing abortions when it was not necessary.

The Deng administration was the one which affected the most birth planning in China, as it shaped the direction of population policy for two decades. During the ten years that followed, Jiang Zemin, continued on the path designed by his predecessor. As a matter of fact, during Jiang's administration, which lasted from 1993 to 2003, demographic control remained a very important point in PRC's policymakers' agenda. During the 1990s, policies of birth control that had been developed during the Deng period remained in place and the efforts to consolidate birth control practices were not aimed at relaxing existing practices, as they were mainly focused on perfecting them and improving positive measures to encourage compliance.⁸⁷ One of the main targets of perfecting existing practices was corruption. In the effort to eradicate corruption among all of the activities of the party, the Jiang administration found that birth control system, both at central and local level, was heavily corrupted.⁸⁸ Moreover, programs regarding population in general started to be developed. Not only was the government competent in birth control, it also started to be concerned with more reproductive health services, social plans regarding birth planning and correction of population unbalance: the sex ratio had been altered by years of sex selective practices, so much so that there were many more men than women in China. Another relevant aspect of PRC's government in this period was the configuration of an effective decentralized system. In particular, the Jiang period stabilized a system in which the central government formulated general standards and methods, while local authorities had to adapt these guidelines to their circumstances and provided the necessary resources. Consolidation of birth planning practices was successful, and by the end of the 1990s Chinese demographic growth was characterized by low fertility. In quantitative terms, by the turn of the millennium, the small family norm was well established in China, both because of the severe reproductive laws and because of the economic transition that had occurred in the country. From the qualitative point of view, Chinese population was healthier and better educated than it used to be, but it was also characterized by a distorted sex ratio. Another significant effect of birth planning was the problem of aging population. The elderly were much

⁸⁶ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 110.

⁸⁷ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 131.

⁸⁸ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 139-140.

more numerous than younger generations. These problems were important parts of the government's plans with respect to birth control and population. It is important to understand that, at this point, after decades of propaganda and coercion, Chinese couples were generally convinced of the validity of the one-child model. As a matter of fact, the modernization of China had occurred in parallel with the establishment of the small-family norm, thus reinforcing the idea that the recently reached level of economic wellbeing had only been possible thanks to birth planning and low fertility. On the other hand, the extremely rapid economic growth experienced by China between the 1980s and the 1990s changed the understanding of the relation between population and development among policymakers: they started to perceive development as a brake to population growth rather than the contrary. With this new understanding in mind, lawmakers started to consider strategies to make birth control more effective, especially in poorer areas where the state still struggled with the imposition of the One Child Policy. In some cases, poor people could benefit from state assistance services, provided that they respected birth planning policies.⁸⁹

During Jiang leadership, the process of internationalization already under way since the period following Mao's death continued. In particular, the international concerns related to sustainability and human pressure on limited natural resources provided a new justifying discourse inside the PRC. According to party leaders, the limits of planet's resources was a valid reason not to relax limits to reproduction. Moreover, organizations such as UNFPA provided support to the PRC in its efforts to maintain low fertility rates and encouraged the government to adopt a voluntaristic approach to birth control, rather than mandatory birth limits. During the 1990s, China also entered into stronger contacts with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).⁹⁰

The Jiang era was characterized by a shift of focus from population quantity to population quality. The One Child Policy was not subject to relaxation, on the contrary, it remained well established. Nevertheless, the government became more and more interested in the quality of its population, thus reinforcing its birth policy to the point that it could be defined as population policy.

Hu Jintao's presidency lasted from 2003 to 2013, and his administration was characterized by the struggle to become more democratic and transparent in all of the administrative areas. With

⁸⁹ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 131-136.

⁹⁰ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 146-147.

respect to birth planning, the new leadership followed the path of Jiang, in particular in the field of population planning. At least for the first years of the 2000s, the idea of abandoning the One Child Policy did not have much support among party members. The only exception was the Shanghai province, which was experiencing a negative demographic tendency, with the rate of deaths exceeding the rate of births. Here, in 2004, a law allowing two children without spacing was passed.⁹¹ As the assumption that gave origin to the one-child policy was that birth control was necessary to modernization, one may argue that by the 2000s China did not need it anymore, considering that it was one of the biggest economies in the world. However, also due to the spreading of a number of public health problems, like SARS epidemics and the threat of HIV/AIDS, the concept of population security emerged.

*So-called population security (renkou anquan) means that a country's overall power and national security [should] not suffer harm because of population problems, [that the country] be able to avoid or resolve either partial or comprehensive crises in the population domain. [The concept's] main content is that in a particular country during a particular period such factors as the quantity, quality, structure, distribution, and movement of a country's population mutually coordinate with the level of economic and social development and with the demands of [further] development. [...] Population security is a country's most basic and most important security question.*⁹²

Because of the idea of population security, PRC's government was believed to have the right, as well as the duty, to exert control over population, in order to grant stability and security to Chinese citizens. This concern for the overall quality of Chinese population had a lot in common with eugenicist ideas and policies. As a matter of fact, since the 1980s, PRC leaders had been interested in devising measures to prevent births of children with abnormalities, in order to "defend society". Some of the measures developed by policymakers were premarital exams and registrations, screenings during pregnancies as well as experimentations to treat problems during the pregnancies. The propaganda was so successful that between 2001 and 2004, around two thirds of pregnant women accepted screenings aimed at detecting abnormalities in their foetuses. The fact that, with economic development, PRC's leaders did not relinquish control over birth control, but added to their programs more comprehensive concerns on population is evident in the new plan to achieve development. Firstly, in 2003 Hu devised a new "scientific concept of development", which was characterized by attention to social development as well

⁹¹ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 168.

⁹² Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China's Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, p. 170.

as economic growth. According to this approach, development should be “human-centred, comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable”. Assuming that fertility should be kept at a low level, the tasks of this new development strategy were: research and planning for regional development; establishment of a social security system to compensate and reward old couples whose security had been compromised by respecting birth planning; special measures to reduce the problem of skewed sex-ratios.⁹³ Another important point in Hu’s approach to population policy was the fight against coercive methods to ensure compliance, which traditionally included destruction and impounding of their properties. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the PRC fought against unlawful punishments enacted by local authorities, for example by having fines paid directly to the central government.⁹⁴

Hu’s mandate ended in 2013, and his successor Xi Jinping, current president of the PRC, marked a turning point in Chinese birth planning policy. Faced with the unresolved problems of aging population and gender imbalance, the PRC’s government reconsidered the terms of the One Child Policy. Firstly, in 2013, policymakers passed a law allowing couples to have a second child if one of the parents did not have any siblings. Then, in 2015, the PRC announced the abandonment of the Policy that had shaped Chinese families since 1978.⁹⁵ Now, all of the traces of the One Child Policy are being erased, propaganda is advertising the new policy, which encourages families to have two children.⁹⁶

Most recently, Chinese government modified again its population policy. As a matter of fact, in 2021 PRC’s president Xi Jinping approved the proposal of Communist party officials to allow Chinese couples to have up to three children. The change in attitude is mainly due to latest data evidencing an excessive decline in birth rates, both due to decades of propaganda praising smaller families and to the rising cost of growing children in the cities. Moreover, as it was previously stated, the government is worried about aging population and the consequent imbalance between the elderly and retired, and the young and economically productive. The PRC announced that the government was going to provide social assistance services to ease the burden of a greater number of children. Particular attention is to be paid to access to education, housing costs and maternity leaves. Even if the government did not make any precise commitment, attention to women’s rights and careers was declared. However, based on the

⁹³ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China’s Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 170-172.

⁹⁴ Greenhalgh S. and Winckler E. (2005), *Governing China’s Population – From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, pp. 191-192.

⁹⁵ Abrahamson Peter (2016), *End of an Era? China’s One Child Policy and its unintended consequences*, *Asian Social Work and Policy Review* 10 (2016), p. 331.

⁹⁶ Wang N., Zhang J. (2019), *One Child Nation*.

effects of the 2016 policy allowing two children per family, it is believed that permission to have three children will not significantly alter Chinese demographic dynamics. The previous regulation, as a matter of fact, boosted population growth for a couple of years, but then fertility rates continued to decline. Furthermore, costs of raising children in Chinese cities are significantly high, thus preventing Chinese couples from having additional children. Economic constraints are expected to be more effective than a change in family-planning policy in shaping individual reproductive behaviour. Therefore, families are unlikely to become larger, despite the relaxation of official population policy.⁹⁷

The One Child Policy may have been suspended, but its effects on society and on individuals are going to last for a long time. In particular, gender imbalance in China is producing, and will continue to produce, significant effects on Chinese population. Moreover, the phenomenon of sex selection is significant to the discussion on the relation between the state and birth control because it was caused by mechanisms put in place by the state. Therefore, this issue deserves a closer look.

Sex selection and birth control in China

Demographers found that in Asia there is an impressive gap between the number of men and women. The reasons for this imbalance are cultural, economic and social and they are very difficult to determine precisely. This is because, despite being limited to so-called developing countries, disproportionate sex ratios are evident in different settings (different countries, different religions, different economies...). Nevertheless, a common point is that sex selection has occurred together with spreading of birth control technologies and practices. In particular, prenatal screenings have provided parents with the information they needed in order to decide whether to have their baby or to terminate the pregnancy. In China, sex determination was, and still is, illegal, but, because of the widespread corruption among doctors, many parents resorted to ultrasound and other medical tests to determine the sex of the foetus. In a country where couples were allowed to have one child only and where traditionally families desired sons instead of daughters, sex determination was crucial in the decision to have the baby or to undergo abortion. Findings highlight that in rural areas, where families usually had permission

⁹⁷ “China allows three children in a major policy shift” (May 31, 2021), *BBC* < <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57303592> > ; Chipman Koty Alexander (8 June, 2021), “*Why China Has Amended its Population Policy and What it Means for the Economy*”, China Briefing < <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/chinas-three-child-policy-what-it-means-for-the-economy/#:~:text=China%27s%20Three%20Child%20Policy%20allows%20couples%20to%20have,r edress%20demographic%20imbalances%20underscored%20by%20the%20Census%202021> >

to have two children, sex selection was not particularly widespread among first births, while it was common practice during the second pregnancy.⁹⁸

During the 1980s and 1990s, it was also common to practice sex selection after birth. While interviewing her family members, Nanfu found out that she had at least two missing cousins. As a matter of fact, she discovered that some members of her family gave their daughters up, as they wished for a son and, because of the One Child Policy, they could not try for another child. Nanfu's mother stated that she had helped her brother to leave his daughter on the market table, hoping for someone to take her. The baby died after two days, because nobody wanted girls. Baby girls' abandonment was so common that groups of smugglers specialized in collecting them from the street or from their families and in bringing them to orphanages where they were later adopted, and paid for, by foreign adopters. Nanfu discovered that her own aunt had given her daughter to a smuggler, because she wanted her to live even if she could not keep her.⁹⁹ This kind of practice has been so common in China, and in Asia in general, that it produced the phenomenon that demographers define as "surplus men". This category consists in the large number of men that could not find a female spouse in the hypothesis that all individuals get married to a person of the opposite sex. The phenomenon of surplus men has caused a number gender-based problems, like increased female vulnerability to sex trafficking, forced marriages and bride buying.¹⁰⁰ In particular, stories of women kidnapped from neighbour countries and sold in China have been circulating widely. Moreover, waves of infections of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV are to be imputed, in a considerable measure, to the fact that for many men prostitution is the only way to have sexual intercourse.

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Even if sex selection occurred at the family level, the reasons why parents decided to keep their sons and to get rid of their daughters were shaped by the socio-political environment. This is because, even if indirectly, state policy produced an ideal of the perfect citizen: one, healthy, educated and male. Moreover, individual choice to practice sex selection had a substantial impact on society as a whole, to the point that the government had to exercise its biopower to correct its population's sex ratio.

⁹⁸Hvistendahl M. (2011), *Unnatural Selection – Choosing boys over girls, and the consequences of a world full of men*, pp. 42-43.

⁹⁹ Wang N., Zhang J. (2019), *One Child Nation*.

¹⁰⁰ Hvistendahl M. (2011), *Unnatural Selection – Choosing boys over girls, and the consequences of a world full of men*, pp. 19-34.

¹⁰¹ Abrahamson P. (2016), *End of an Era? China's One Child Policy and its unintended consequences*, p. 326.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the case of the People's Republic of China is relevant to this discussion because it represents one of the clearest examples of the relation between birth control and modernization. In particular, it shows the extent to which Malthusian ideas on population shaped government's understanding of the role of population in development. What is particularly interesting is that one of the most compelling examples of a state embracing and imposing family planning practices is a communist country, which detached itself from pro-natalist Marxism. Moreover, studying the history of the debate on population shows how, even in the country of the One Child Policy, different outlooks on the subject existed.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND BIRTH CONTROL

Introduction

Women's emancipation, as Margaret Sanger strongly supported, is heavily dependent on birth control. As a matter of fact, reproductive rights are crucial to women's self-determination, because access to contraception is essential to one's control over their own body. Feminists have been fighting for women's reproductive rights since the Nineteenth century, and, in many cases, their fight is continuing today. This is because legislation on contraception and abortion has the strongest impact on women's lives, which are revolutionized by unwanted pregnancies. As a matter of fact, even if conception requires the contribution of the man just as much as that of the woman, a pregnancy affects differently the two parents. In the past, as paternity tests did not exist, men could easily deny to be the father of the baby, leaving the woman to deal with the situation, in social environments where generally pregnancies outside the wedlock were condemned. Nowadays, even if it is much more difficult for biological fathers to deny the involvement with the baby, women are still the most affected by the birth of a child. Firstly, this is due to the obvious effects of pregnancy and labour on female bodies. Secondly, women are more affected than men by the birth of a baby because, generally, the labour market is much more hostile to mothers than it is to fathers. Therefore, it would seem natural that women could decide whether or not to get pregnant. However, it is the state, which is historically led by men, that defines laws granting or denying reproductive rights to women. For this reason, the issue of female control over their own bodies is one of the clearest examples of the strong link between the state and birth control: "women's control over their bodies, over reproduction, is an issue of power, both between the sexes and among various layers of society" states Mohan Rao, in his book *From Population control to Reproductive Health* (2004).¹⁰² Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that a state can only regulate legal contraceptive and abortive practices, and that people have been practicing family planning for centuries. Therefore, the fact that birth control is banned by the state does not mean that contraception and abortion do not exist, it only means that couples find alternative, often unsafe, ways to practice family-planning.

This chapter is going to explore the relation between state practices related to birth control and women's rights. In particular, in the first part, the discussion will focus on birth control in so-

¹⁰² Rao M. (2004), *From population control to reproductive health – Malthusian arithmetic*, p. 185.

called developing countries. The second part of the chapter, instead, will concentrate on reproductive rights in Western countries, in particular on current anti-abortion movements.

Reproductive rights in India

Laws on contraception and abortion are shaped by governments' beliefs and concerns. Therefore, depending on policymakers' priorities and ideas, access to reproductive rights can be more or less easy and safe. The fact that state leaders' concerns shape legislations on birth control is particularly evident in the comparison between reproductive rights in so-called developing countries and industrialized countries. As a matter of fact, contraception has been encouraged by national and international authorities way earlier in countries like India than in Western countries, where birth control remained illegal far longer.

The idea that Indian population size was responsible for poverty in the country became popular during the Nineteenth century. Malthusian arguments were adopted in order to explain why India was experiencing economic difficulty, claiming that they were due to alleged uncontrolled population growth. In 1938, the National Planning Committee was established, together with various subcommittees, including the Sub-Committee on Health, which took an interest in children's and maternal health. In particular, this Sub-Committee connected individual and family practices to national well-being. This organ recommended contraception as well as "self-control" on the basis of eugenicist concerns, which were popular among Indian elites. In this same period, when Indian independence was approaching, the role of women in India became a topic of discussion. In particular, elites thought that the modern Indian woman had to be a good wife and mother, who should contribute to the nation-building process by raising children. In the debate on birth control, one of the main contributors was Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), who fiercely opposed the idea that contraception was the answer to Indian "population problem". In his view, sexual drives were to be dominated by will and moral strength, while birth control techniques would lead Indian people to self-indulgence. Another relevant point of view in the Indian discussion was Periyar (1879-1973). He rejected eugenics and Neo-Malthusianism, but he was a strong advocate of birth control. Periyar supported the idea that women had the right to control their own bodies, in order to fight the oppression of the patriarchy and of the caste system. However, even if their cases are relevant examples of the different outlooks on population control, neither of these very important figures actually influenced Indian policy with respect to birth control. As a matter of fact, population policy was shaped by two concerns: the alleged economic benefit of limiting population growth and women's health. It is important to realize that efforts to promote women's health did not depend on a genuine concern over women's conditions, but they depended on the willingness to reduce

maternal and infant mortality rates, which were seen as problematic in the quest for development.

Eugenics has played an important role in Indian population policy discourse. For instance, the Health Survey and Development Committee, established in 1943, when analysing Indian so-called population problem, suggested that “the classes which possess many of these undesirable characteristics are known to be generally improvident and prolific”. The idea that poor classes were irresponsible in their reproductive behaviour, moreover, was clearly influenced by Malthusian ideas. Therefore, the very premises of Indian population policy show that legalising contraception and abortion did not aim at increasing people’s freedom, as they were seen as remedies to the incapacity of poor individuals to control themselves.

The First Five-Year Plan (1951-1956) tried to address the issue of population growth by devising a “clinic approach”. In 1952, India was the first country in the world to develop an official programme of family-planning. The programme assumed that there was a demand for birth control methods to which the state needed to respond. Moreover, an important part of the plan consisted in education on family-planning. Population control and family-planning continued to constitute an important part of the Second Five-Year Plan (1956-60). Policymakers maintained that a change in traditions and values, together with income increase, would reduce demographic growth. The Second Plan marked a change with respect to the outlook on the relation between development and population increase. As a matter of fact, lawmakers recognized that the issue was complex and that it could not be dismissed by adopting Malthusian arguments only. In 1956, the Central Family-Planning Board, directed by the Minister of Health, was founded. The Second Plan had a big impact on Indian health system, as 1,079 rural and 421 urban clinics were created. Moreover, research on contraception was encouraged and funded more generously. Both the First and the Second Plan were influenced by the international planned parenthood movement, as it is reflected by the approach adopted by clinics, which assumed that it was desirable for parents to control the number of their children, and thus adopted a person-to-person education approach. When policymakers were devising the Third Five-Year Plan (1961-1965), they were unhappy with the results of previous family-planning programmes, as they believed that Indian economic growth was held back by the slowness of progress in the field of birth control. Advisers, who had filed the Report on previous Plans, suggested, with a certain degree of urgency, to implement measures such as removal of supplemented income tax for unmarried people, limiting to three the number of children per family who could benefit from state services, and abortions on socio-economic grounds. Following the Report’s recommendations, family-planning was a high priority in the

Third Plan document, which presented the issue as a central feature in Indian development strategy. The Third Plan recognized the shortcomings of the clinic approach, and tried to solve them by adopting a strategy based on extended education and increased supply of contraceptives. The clinic approach was traded with an extension approach to community development. In this Plan, new targets were set, such as reduction in birth rates from more than 40 to 25 per 1,000. Even if this goal was to be reached by 1973, such a reduction has not taken place to this day. The Plan set three basic goals of its actions: collective acceptance of the small family model, personal knowledge of contraceptive methods and easy access to birth control services and supplies. In 1965, the United Nations Advisory Mission, in visit to India, suggested to reinforce the Third Plan with an additional programme aiming at reducing population growth. This parallel plan included promotion of the use of condoms as well as wider sterilization campaigns. Western influence on Indian population policy was extremely strong and affected policymakers in a disproportionate measure with respect to the extent of foreign donations and fundings. With the Annual Plans adopted between 1966 and 1969 instead of a new Five-Year Plan, because of the massive economic crisis afflicting India in this period, allocations of economic resources to family-planning continued to increase. Because of UN Advisory Mission's suggestions, in 1966, Maternal and Child Health activities were disconnected from family-planning, in order to favour fieldwork on birth control. This decision is particularly interesting, as birth control had originally been justified as an instrument to guarantee and enhance women's health. Nevertheless, because of the panic over the issue of Indian alleged population bomb among policymakers, both inside and outside the country, family-planning became a goal and a priority in itself, thus relegating women's health to a secondary position. The Fourth Five-Year Plan (1968-1974) acknowledged that previous programmes had not been effective, as population was continuing to grow. Therefore, the number of sterilizations and intra-uterine contraceptive device (IUCD) insertions had to be increased and adoption of oral and injectable contraceptives was to be encouraged. Because of technical shortcomings, IUCD insertions were not efficient enough to keep pace with the new accelerated Plan, and thus vasectomy became the favourite method of authorities to ensure birth control. The new approach was welcomed by the World Bank, the UNFPA and Swedish International Development Agency, which supported the new direction taken by Indian family-planning with generous donations. Because of the new strategy adopted by the Fourth Plan, sterilizations in India between 1972 and 1973 were 3.1 million, more than those performed in previous years. This figure was possible because, in these years, Indian government adopted a camp approach, which consisted in creating medical camps in rural areas, where technical personnel performed sterilizations and where knowledge on birth control was spread. This approach was later

abandoned because of financial limitations. Another crucial event for Indian family-planning was the passing, in 1971, of the act on Medical Termination of Pregnancy, which included failure of contraceptive methods among the grounds of eligibility for abortion. The fact that, at this point, termination of pregnancy was accessible on demand for Indian women is extremely relevant to this discussion. As a matter of fact, the right to access to abortion was achieved in Western countries after strenuous fights by women's movements, while in India it was granted without the intervention of society. The importance of controlling population size is to be imputed as the main responsible for this difference. This contrasting experience is even more striking if we consider that there was no religious opposition to the Act in India, while in the West, religious authorities have been campaigning to restrict, or even ban, legal abortions. In the meantime, international observers were noticing how imposition of birth control on population was not solving the problem of poverty. On the contrary, they advocated for a stronger development approach, which would have improved economic conditions of Indian poor people, encouraging them to adopt family-planning techniques. The Fifth Five-Year Plan (1975-1980) acknowledged the impossibility to reduce birth rates in the measure envisaged by the Fourth Plan and set more feasible targets. The strategy adopted by this Plan was the integration of birth control procedures and practices with those of health. However, the most relevant event in Indian family-planning policy was, in 1975, the proclamation of Emergency, which suspended all regular democratic mechanisms and rules. The state of Emergency enabled the government to pass the National Population Policy, which recognized that the main obstacle to slowing birth rates down was poverty, but which claimed that it was necessary to devise and enforce strict anti-natalist measures, together with actions to promote development. In particular, this Policy stressed the importance of female education, health and nutrition. Here, again, it is interesting to notice how emphasis on women's rights was not due to a sincere concern over female condition, but to the fact that they were instrumental to the priority goal of reducing demographic growth. Together with raising marital age, economic incentives and disincentives, promotion of the small-family norm was crucial to Indian birth control policy.

¹⁰³ Already in 1966, the Indian government had started implementing an educational campaign advertising the family of four members. This campaign created images of happy families of four members, which became omnipresent in public spaces as well as on commodities such as calendars and shopping bags. The aim of the project was legitimation of the new family model, as part of the development efforts towards a new and modern India. ¹⁰⁴ After the entrance into

¹⁰³ Rao M. (2004), *From population control to reproductive health – Malthusian arithmetic*, pp. 19-47.

¹⁰⁴ Unger Corinna R. (2015), *The Making of the Small Family Norm*, *Contemporanea*, Vol. 18, No. 3, *Food Security in the Contemporary World* (July-September 2015), pp. 483-488.

force of the National Population Policy, however, the small family norm started to be imposed on certain categories of people. In particular, the new regulations enabled the government to provide economic bonuses to employees who had undergone sterilization after the birth of the second child. Moreover, government's employees were expected to respect the small-family norm. Together with propagandizing the family of four, the Indian government reinforced the use of coercive measures, such as forced sterilizations. Namely, access to public services like credit and fertilizers was made conditional to possession of a sterilization certificate. In 1976, legislators of the Indian state of Maharashtra had the *Maharashtra Family (Restriction on size) Bill* passed. This legislative instrument mandated compulsory sterilization after the birth of the third child. It is particularly interesting to notice how birth control, which, at first, was thought of as a way to counter women's oppression, became an instrument of oppression itself, through mandatory sterilization and thus control over citizens' bodies. At first, there was no public popular opposition to the Bill, as well as to other family-planning policies. However, people were fleeing or attacking vehicles involved in birth control campaigns, or avoiding health clinics because they feared forced sterilizations. In 1976, there was a violent riot in Muzaffarnagar, in Uttar Pradesh, where between 50 and 150 deaths were estimated. Following this event, as well as international concerns over the estimates of 7 million coerced sterilizations, Indian population policy took a softer tone. As a matter of fact, one of the relevant changes was a shift from sterilizing men to sterilize women. It was perceived as an easy way to reduce the risk of popular discontent, as women were considered to be more inclined to silently accept what was believed to be desirable for the welfare of the family. Moreover, policymakers re-emphasized the importance of promoting female education and health as aspects to reduce demographic growth and to favour development. Both targeting women with sterilization and promoting education and health were core components of the Sixth Five-Year Plan's population policy (1980-1985). In particular, the Plan promoted the inclusion of family-planning in India's efforts towards development. Policymakers claimed that education among women and reduction in the rates of infant and maternal mortality were extremely important in the struggle against population growth and poverty. Here, again, it is possible to notice how welfare of women as well as of children is made a priority only in so far as it is useful to control population growth. Another interesting fact is that policymakers saw Indian people as responsible of their own poverty, namely because of their uncontrolled reproduction. The Sixth Plan respected previous recommendations to target women with sterilizations, as it was less politically costly. Moreover, new technologies developed in the West made it possible for Indian population policymakers to introduce new contraceptive techniques for women. In particular, family-planners encouraged trials of injectable contraceptives, like Net En, and implants, such as

Norplant. However, women's rights were not promoted or even safeguarded by this interest in female contraception, as both Net En and Norplant were found to be mutagenic and potentially cancerogenic in Western countries. Nevertheless, trials of these contraceptives were initiated in India, often involving women unaware of taking part to a medical trial. These experimentations produced a great number of health problems to participants, and eventually Net En was granted permission only for private marketing, while Norplant implants were abandoned. The Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985-1990) realized that the strategy previously adopted had failed. Therefore, it set new targets to reduce demographic growth and in order to reach the new objectives, policymakers announced the 1986 National Population Policy. The statement presenting the policy announced its objective to promote the establishment of a voluntary two children per family norm. In order to encourage parents to stop at two children, population experts claimed that it was necessary to reduce infant mortality rates. To do so, the state health system had to become more effective, especially with respect to living conditions of poor women, who became the objectives of reforms in the health sector. International funds, both from NGOs and from the World Bank, were crucial in the building process of a new, modern health care system in India. Because of internal political upheavals, the Eight Five-Year Plan was launched only in 1992. The Plan did not set any numerical target and focused on promotion of female health and literacy, as well as continuing the work for the reduction in infant mortality rates. Another crucial feature of this plan is that, in line with political changes occurring in the country, the health sector was increasingly privatized. Therefore, family-planning measures were set and implemented by private actors and foreign NGOs. The decentralization of birth control practices, however, did not necessarily translate into its relaxation. As a matter of fact, a famous scandal erupted when it was discovered that around 100,000 Indian women had been sterilized with quinacrine by a group of NGOs and some private practitioners, most notably Dr Elton Kessel of the International Federation of Family Health (IFFH) and Dr Stephen Mumford of the Centre for Research on Population and Security (CRPS), NGOs in the USA. The two doctors, in particular, were worried about the so-called population bomb in Third World countries and the alleged non-white migration waves due to overpopulation and, thus, decided to sterilize women with quinacrine, which had been declared illegal on the grounds of carcinogenicity and mutagenicity. After the Eighth Five-Year Plan, privatization continued to be a trend in India, both in the case of the market and in health and family-planning.¹⁰⁵ To this day, there has not been a great change in Indian population policy: concerns over limiting demographic growth are still central in political debate. The current Indian programme in

¹⁰⁵ Rao M. (2004), *From population control to reproductive health – Malthusian arithmetic*, pp. 47-70.

relation to population control is the National Population Policy 2000, which set short-term objectives for 2010 and the long-term aim of stabilizing population by 2045. The central elements of this policy are, as it was in previous plans, limiting demographic growth and reducing poverty. The means to reach these goals are education and easy access to contraception, with a particular emphasis on the voluntary character of birth control practices.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, various sources state that a not-so-voluntary element in family-planning practices is still present: poor women are being paid to undergo sterilization. Moreover, sterilization procedures are not always conducted in a safe way, as in 2014 eleven women have died in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, practices of birth control in India were, and in some cases still are, more oppressive than they are emancipating. It is important, in conclusion, not to confuse granting of reproductive rights with imposition of birth control practices, as forced contraception is not less coercive than forced pregnancy.

This short overview of the history of contraception and abortion in India has shown how legalisation of contraception and abortion, which has often paved the way to oppression and coercion, has not been the result of fights and requests by women's movements. Instead, it occurred in a top-down direction, with the government being worried about population growth and finding in contraception a way to counter this issue. Little or no interest was paid to women's rights, which were often violated through the imposition of those practices that, in theory, should have emancipated them.

Reproductive rights in Western countries and current anti-abortion movements

In so-called developed countries of the West, instead, the rights to contraception and abortion were conquered after decades-long fights. In the second chapter, the history of Margaret Sanger's work as a feminist activist has been summarized. It has been pointed out how, in 1916, Sanger opened a contraceptive clinic, because of which she was arrested. However, feminist movements' demands for legalization of contraception and abortion were not limited to the United States. As a matter of fact, in the United Kingdom, the Women's Cooperative Guild passed a resolution demanding the decriminalisation of abortion in 1934 and, two years later, the Abortion Law Reform Association was created. Despite these important events, abortion and contraceptives in the West became less central in political debate with the Great Depression and the Second World War. Governments, faced with the terrible economic crisis which

¹⁰⁶ National Population Policy (2000) < <http://www.iapsmgc.org/userfiles/NationalPopulation-Policy2000-2.pdf> >

¹⁰⁷ Pokharel Sugam and Udas Sumnima (November 12, 2014), "India: 11 women die after being paid to be sterilized", CNN < <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/11/world/asia/india-sterilization-deaths/index.html> >

followed the 1940s, became openly and consistently pro-natalist. As it had been mentioned in the chapter on eugenics, in the United States, contraception remained illegal until 1965. Just by noticing this fact, the difference between the US and India is evident: on the one hand, American policymakers kept contraception illegal until the second half of the 1960s, while Indian government, supported by the international community including the US themselves, by this time had already launched a set of openly pro-birth control policies. The Sixties were a decade of sexual revolution in Western countries, especially thanks to the development of a new contraceptive method, the pill. The contraceptive pill, Enovid, was approved by the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1960, when the Comstock laws, which made contraception a federal crime, were still in place. The invention of this contraceptive method was revolutionary for many reasons, most importantly because it was meant for women, who became responsible of their own contraception. The pill gave new impetus to feminist movements, as they were hoping that it would allow a shift away from the patriarchy and Victorian morality, which saw women as asexual beings.¹⁰⁸ The introduction of the pill, which in a short period of time had grown extremely popular among American women, generated a lively debate, especially inside the Catholic Church. It is, as a matter of fact, in response to the popularization of the Pill that Pope Paul VI published his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, where he confirmed traditional catholic dogmas refusing contraception.¹⁰⁹ To this day, conservative politicians in the US are spreading fake information on contraception and birth control, in order to serve the interests of pro-life groups. An example is the fact that Marjorie Taylor Greene, who is a far-right politician and conspiracy theorist and who served as a state representative for Georgia since 2021, has made declarations that the so-called Plan B Pill is an abortifacient that “kills babies in the womb”. The assertion has no scientific foundation, as this pill does not cause pregnancy termination, because it is successful only in so far as it prevents ovulation, thus preventing insemination and therefore the pregnancy.¹¹⁰

Contraception was itself a sensitive topic, but the most problematic issue in relation to reproductive rights has always been abortion. Most Western countries legalized abortion between the 1960s and 1970s, after protests by feminist movements. Particularly significant were, in 1971, self-accusations of hundreds of women, both in France and in Germany, who

¹⁰⁸ Rao M. (2004), *From population control to reproductive health – Malthusian arithmetic*, pp. 159-162.

¹⁰⁹ Turoldo Fabrizio (2016), *A Short History of Bioethics*, Linea Edizioni, Padova, pp. 112-113.

¹¹⁰ OB/GYN Explains Abortion to Marjorie Taylor Greene (June 31, 2020), NowThis News, Available: <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=marjorie+taylor+greene+on+plan+b+pill&docid=608004104963122231&mid=5EB942C7BBE2DCDC4C215EB942C7BBE2DCDC4C21&view=detail&FORM=VIRE> [Accessed: 23/08/2022]

stated that they had had an illegal abortion. In the United Kingdom voluntary termination of pregnancy was legalized in 1967, in the United States, the Supreme Court legalized abortion with the 1973 *Roe versus Wade case*, while in Italy the right to safe abortion was conquered only in 1978.¹¹¹ The difference between countries like China or India and so-called developed countries is evident. What is even more astonishing is that countries like the United States, where contraception and abortion remained illegal until the Sixties and Seventies, were encouraging Chinese and Indian leaders in their efforts to control population growth. This contradictory stance with respect to abortion can be explained by referring to worries over the “population bomb” of the Third World during the Cold War. As a matter of fact, many Western observers considered the huge populations of so-called developing countries as threatening to First World lifestyle. Fear of communist expansion alone can be considered as an explanation for Western panic over population growth in so-called developing countries. In particular, the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 fuelled fears that the Indian giant could decide to enter into the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the capitalist block fiercely competed against the USSR in the efforts to promote development in the country, in order to prevent it from adhering to communist ideology, and, as it was stated in the previous chapter, according to Western development models, a large population was a brake to modernization. Moreover, the size of Indian population was feared because, in case of Indian alliance with the Soviet Union, it would have outnumbered the Western block. Together with this very simplified explanation of the historical roots of the difference in the United States’ outlook on birth control internally and externally, it is important to keep in mind the racist idea behind it. In the second chapter, it had already been highlighted how birth control was used to prevent reproduction among the black community. Moreover, in the discussion over Indian history of birth control, the case of Dr Kessel and Dr Mumford, who feared non-white migration to the US, has been brought up. Therefore, it can be said that neither support to birth control practices in India, nor restriction on reproductive rights in the US, were caused by some forms of concerns over women’s rights and health.

It is important to focus on current anti-abortion movements, and to acknowledge that reproductive rights are under attack in many so-called developed countries. Firstly, in Italy access abortion is formally available on demand during the first trimester of the pregnancy. However, since 1978, the law has allowed doctors to refrain from performing abortions on the grounds of “*obiezione di coscienza*” (conscientious objection). This means that, if doctors do not approve abortion for moral concerns, they are allowed to refrain from performing it.

¹¹¹ Turoldo F. (2016), *A Short History of Bioethics*, pp. 114-120.

However, this means that access to safe abortion is not guaranteed, as in many hospitals the large majority of gynaecologists are conscientious objectors: 2018 estimates state that 69% of Italian doctors do not perform interruptions of pregnancy on moral grounds and that, in some regions, figures reach 80%, thus making it particularly difficult for people who desire to undergo an abortion to do it in safe structures.¹¹² However, even if, from the practical point of view, it is difficult to do so, at least in Italy abortion is protected by law. Poland, where interruption of pregnancy had been legalized between the 1960s and 1970s, has banned abortion under every circumstance. Access to legal abortion in Poland had already been restricted to cases of rape, incest, severe malformations of the foetus and risk for the life and health of the mother. Under the far-right government of Andrzej Duda, restrictions went even further, criminalizing abortions under nearly any circumstances. This is because, in October 2020, Polish Supreme Court ruled interruption of pregnancy on the grounds of foetal abnormalities unconstitutional, as it allegedly contradicted the principle of non-discrimination. Therefore, under Polish law, all abortions, including spontaneous ones, are criminalised, and women can face up to five years of imprisonment and doctors performing a termination of pregnancy are passible to imprisonment as well.¹¹³ According to Polish Courts, a foetus acquires human rights from the moment of conception. This understanding causes conflicts with the rights of the pregnant woman, especially because threats to the mother's life are not considered as sufficient grounds to perform an abortion. A relevant event to this discussion is the death of Izabela, a Polish woman whose waters broke during her 22nd week of pregnancy. She died of septic shock after doctors waited for the foetus' heart to stop beating before performing a caesarean. The foetus had been found to have a foetal defect, but, under the new abortion law, doctors could not legally perform a procedure that would have resulted in an interruption of pregnancy. Izabela was the first woman to die because of criminalization of abortion, event to which activists have reacted with protests, which did not result in any change to the legislation, as it is not appealable.¹¹⁴ The European Union, despite recognizing that legislation on abortion is under the competence of the state, criticized Polish nearly total ban on abortion, by claiming

¹¹² Ministero della Salute (2018), *Relazione del Ministro della Salute sulla attuazione della legge contenente norme per la tutela sociale della maternità e per l'interruzione volontaria di gravidanza (LEGGE 194/78)* < https://www.salute.gov.it/imgs/C_17_pubblicazioni_2924_allegato.pdf >

¹¹³ Poland rules abortion due to foetal defects unconstitutional (October 22, 2020), *The Guardian*, < <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/22/poland-rules-abortion-due-to-foetal-defects-unconstitutional> > ;

Pronczuk, M. (November 4, 2020), "Poland court ruling effectively bans legal abortions", *The New York Times*, < <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/22/world/europe/poland-tribunal-abortion.html> >

¹¹⁴ Reuters (November 7, 2021), "Death of pregnant woman ignites debate about abortion ban in Poland", *CNN* < <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/07/europe/poland-abortion-ban-march-intl/index.html> >

that it caused failure of international obligations on human rights.¹¹⁵ In November 2020, the European Parliament passed a resolution urging Poland to refrain from restrictions to termination of pregnancy, as current legislation infringes women's right to dignity, which is protected by several international conventions and declarations, including the European Charter on Human Rights (ECHR).¹¹⁶ Moreover, after Izabela's death, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) voted, in June 2020, to include access to abortion among internationally protected human rights.¹¹⁷ Despite these attempts to influence Polish laws on reproductive rights, abortion in Poland is still criminalized in nearly all circumstances.

A very recent, and highly unsettling as well as not surprising, case of abortion ban is American Supreme Court's reversal of the *Roe Versus Wade case*. The 1973 judgement dealt with the case of Norma Leah McCorvey, whose legal pseudonym was Jane Roe. In 1971, Norma was living in precarious conditions, when she got pregnant for the third time. The woman tried to undergo an abortion on the basis of rape, which constituted a legal ground for termination of pregnancy in Texas, but she had to give birth to her baby and give her up for adoption due to lack of evidence that a rape had occurred. Norma's attorney Sarah Ragle Weddington brought the case in front of the Supreme Court, which ruled that abortion was a right based on the principle of respect for family privacy, and that the foetus was not a person with constitutional rights.¹¹⁸ However, the right to safe abortion has been under attack in the United States for a long time. Already in the 1980s and 1990s, Christian fundamentalism has been promoting the politics of the rights of the foetus, which were to be preferred to the rights of the woman carrying it. Measures such as prohibition of federal funding to abortion clinics have always been undermining the right to terminate a pregnancy in a safe way, affecting in particular black women and other ethnic minorities that are traditionally economically marginalized. Moreover, ethical concerns related to reproduction became more and more widespread because of new technologies in the field, such as, for instance, in vitro fertilization.¹¹⁹ During the 1980s, debate on abortion was extremely lively in the international arena, and a certain degree of coherence was reached with the 1986 Cairo Conference, which was actually based on an agenda developed

¹¹⁵ EU criticises Poland's abortion ban as it reminds member states to "respect fundamental rights" (February 25, 2021), *Euronews* < <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2021/02/24/eu-criticises-poland-s-abortion-ban-as-it-reminds-member-states-to-respect-fundamental-rig> >

¹¹⁶ European Parliament (November 26, 2020), *European Parliament resolution of 26 November 2020 on the de facto ban on the right to abortion in Poland (2020/2876(RSP))* < https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0336_EN.html >

¹¹⁷ Martuscelli Carlo (November 9, 2021), "European Parliament set to condemn Poland's abortion rules", *Politico* < <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliament-poland-abortion-ban/> >

¹¹⁸ Turoldo F. (2016), *A Short History of Bioethics*, pp. 120-121.

¹¹⁹ Rao M. (2004), *From population control to reproductive health – Malthusian arithmetic*, pp. 179-180.

by the American feminist movement. The Conference produced a declaration, which recognized that every individual, regardless of their gender, should be able to dispose of their sexual lives as they pleased, and that they should be able to choose whether and when to reproduce.¹²⁰ The case of the Cairo Conference is particularly interesting when considering that its agenda was promoted by American reproductive rights activists: in this period, birth control practices were under discussion inside US borders, while they were forced on Indian women with the support of American government. Another fascinating example to understand the level to which rights were under discussion in the United States was the 1985 book 'The Handmaid's Tale' by Margaret Atwood. This book is about a fundamentalist state taking over the United States in the near future, and establishing a strictly Puritan and patriarchal regime, called Gilead, where the only role of fertile women was that of giving birth to children, in order to ensure heirs to their masters, the commanders. Atwood claims that, even if her book is a futuristic dystopian novel, the willingness to take control of women's bodies away from them was present in the United States. In particular, she justified her statement by saying that every event that she set in Gilead had already happened somewhere and sometime in history. Moreover, in more recent interviews, Atwood claimed that the United States are moving towards Gilead, because conservative political groups have been trying, and eventually succeeded, to take body-autonomy away from women.¹²¹ Atwood's forecasts seem to be more accurate now than they have ever been. On the 24th of June 2022, the Supreme Court of the United States of America overturned the Roe vs Wade judgment. This event is an extremely important event in the history of reproductive rights in the US, as the 1973 case was the legal basis of the federal constitutional right to abortion. Therefore, overturning the judgement, means that now every individual state has the power to enforce its own laws on abortion. In some states, such as Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma, so-called trigger laws, put in place before the reversal of Roe v. Wade, have already banned abortion. Around ten more states, including for instance Missouri and North Dakota, are in the process of making voluntary termination of pregnancy illegal through trigger laws.¹²² In some American states, votes on anti-abortion

¹²⁰ Rao M. (2004), *From population control to reproductive health – Malthusian arithmetic*, pp. 183-189.

¹²¹ "Atwood Margaret and Tate Andrew" (2010), Available: <https://highprofiles.info/interview/margaret-atwood/> [Accessed: 23/08/2022] ; "Margaret Atwood on *The Handmaid's Tale*, Bill Moyers Faith and Reason" (July 28, 2006), Available: <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=interviews+to+margaret+atwood&docid=607999530825368822&mid=636795F5019D588EAF87636795F5019D588EAF87&view=detail&FORM=VIRE> [Accessed: 23/08/2022]

¹²² Messerly Megan (June 24, 2022), "Abortion laws by state: Where abortions are illegal after Roe v. Wade Overturned", Politico < <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/06/24/abortion-laws-by-state-roe-v-wade-00037695> >

amendments to state constitution are already under way. Kansas, for instance, was the first state to vote on the issue after the reversal of the *Roe v. Wade* case, and the large majority of voters expressed themselves against abortion ban.¹²³ Abortion is expected to remain legal in 27 American states, but it will take time before the situation stabilizes itself. Women's rights activists, including the Democratic politician Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, have been protesting against the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, and feminist organizations are making efforts to find means to make abortion accessible to people in need.¹²⁴

The cases of Poland and of the United States are relevant to this discussion for several reasons. Firstly, because they show how, once reproductive rights are conquered, they can be taken away. Secondly, the American case, in particular, represents an example of the possible different positions that governments can take inside their borders and abroad. Finally, these cases highlight how the relation among the state, population and birth control is strong today as it has always been and how the government can influence individual reproductive behaviours.

Conclusions

In her 2019 documentary on Chinese One Child Policy, Nanfu Wang stated:

*"I'm struck by the irony that I left a country where the government forced women to abort, and I moved to another country, where governments restrict abortions. On the surface, they seem opposites, but both are about taking away women's control of their own bodies".*¹²⁵

This quote summarizes how seemingly opposite policies, namely coerced abortions and abortion bans, are expressions of the same problem: governments' belief that they have the authority to control women's bodies. On the one hand, countries like China and India have been using persuasion and coercion to prevent people from having children, often violating

¹²³ Noor Poppy (August 3, 2022), "*Kansas votes to protect abortion rights in state constitution*", The Guardian < <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/aug/03/kansas-abortion-vote-state-constitution> > ; Astor Maggie (August 22, 2022), "*Partial Recount in Kansas Affirms Vote on Abortion Rights*", The New York Times < <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/22/us/politics/kansas-election-recount-abortion.html> >

¹²⁴ Elamroussi Aya (June 25, 2022), "*Roe v. Wade: More protests expected this weekend amid fury and anguish over the Supreme Court's abortion ruling*", CNN < <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/25/us/supreme-court-overturns-roe-v-wade-saturday/index.html> > ; Doovere Edward-Isaac (July 20, 2022), "*Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar and other Democrats arrested in abortion rights protest*", CNNPolitics < <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/07/19/politics/congress-members-arrested-abortion-protest-supreme-court/index.html> >

¹²⁵ Wang Nanfu, Zhang Jialing (2019), *One Child Nation*.

individual bodies through forced sterilizations and abortions. On the other hand, in the United States, Poland, and other countries that have not been mentioned, fetuses' rights are preferred to those of the women who are carrying them. Therefore, to conclude, this discussion has presented the various ways through which a state can influence women's lives through legislations forcing or banning contraception and abortion.

CHAPTER FIVE

POPULATION CONTROL AND ENVIRONMENTALISM

Introduction

In the previous chapters, Western concern over population growth in the Global South has been mentioned in relation to international support to family-planning programmes in China and India. However, the environmentalist features of this concern have not been properly discussed.

The origins of the panic about population growth spread in Western societies as a cultural change, which started at the academic level, and later became widespread in society. Popularization of environmental Malthusian thought was mainly due to the publication of a set works that identified the cause of environmental crisis in excessive population pressure: 1968 'The Population Bomb' by university professor Paul R. Ehrlich, 'The Tragedy of the Commons' by Garrett Hardin, and the 1972 report by the Club of Rome 'The Limits to Growth'.

Furthermore, concerns over population growth were due to the context in which scholars like Ehrlich got their education. As a matter of fact, in the academia, the 1950s and 1960s were known as the period of the so-called Darwinian Synthesis, because natural selection, thanks to the work of biologists and geneticists, became recognised as one of the core factors behind evolution. Therefore, scholars started taking in a renewed consideration the concept of natural constraints and scarcity, as deeply significant to human reproduction. Furthermore, the recognition of the influence that nature had on human society had other effects on cultural elites. First, it recognized that humans, as most animal species, had a strong sexual drive. It is not coincidental that this change in mentality occurred during the Sixties, when the sexual revolution was leading to a greater acceptance of sexuality in society. Secondly, the new outlook on the relation between natural constraints and human evolution made it clear that there was no separation between our society and the natural world, as the human species is dependent on planet's resources, just like any other animal. Lastly, it became clear that, behind human evolution, there was no providential design, as the process had been shaped by the same natural forces that had caused the evolution of the other animal species. A significant declaration by Ehrlich, particularly suited to summarize his thought on human evolution, stated that there is not: "a shred of evidence [...] that man is the ultimate goal of evolution".¹²⁶ It is in the After

¹²⁶ Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, pp. 128-129.

War period, therefore, that the overlapping between evolutionary biology and environmentalism reached its climax.

Moreover, the 1960s and 1970s were a period of cultural revolution in the United States, both because of social movements such as the feminist one, and because of the discontent towards the Vietnam War. These decades, therefore, were characterized by a high degree of civil society's involvement in public debates. Which is why, it comes with no big surprise that popularization of Malthusian environmentalist forecasts of an approaching disastrous future caused a strong reaction among American citizens. The public interest on population as primary cause of environmental degradation influenced the beliefs on most policymakers, who came to regard the population problem as a priority on their agenda.

This chapter will first shortly present the major works supporting Malthusian environmentalism, then it will move towards an overview of the role of population policy in the United States in the 1970s. Finally, this discussion will shortly summarize the change in the role of population dynamics in the environmentalist discourse.

The scientific foundation of Malthusian environmentalism

Probably the most famous book popularizing Malthusian environmentalism was 'The Population Bomb', published in 1968 by biologist Paul Ehrlich. Besides the previously mentioned Darwinian Synthesis, another important factor that characterized Ehrlich's thought and work was his involvement in the debate on racial justice. The author was particularly influenced by the 1960s social movement on racial discrimination in the first place because he was Jewish, then because, as a biologist, he contested the scientific value of categorization of species in biology. Ehrlich claimed that plants and animals do not fall under well-defined groups easily, and that definition into groups was in many cases forced by biologists. Moreover, in his book 'A Biological View of Race' (1964), the scholar rejected the division of the human species into groups, stating that there was no scientific basis for such a distinction, which was completely artificial.¹²⁷ Furthermore, as in the 1960s Ehrlich was living and teaching at Stanford University, where many ecologists and population biologists had their headquarters, he was strongly influenced by environmentalist concerns. From their point of view, the effects of overpopulation were observable all around the world, including in California, where exponential growth of urban areas threatened ecosystems and available natural resources. Following the example of Rachel Carson's (1907-1964) 1962 book 'Silent Spring', Ehrlich

¹²⁷ Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, pp. 129-131.

decided to take position publicly to expose his ideas on the environmental crisis. In 1965, in his speech 'Biological Revolution', given in Stanford, he declared that the worst enemy of the environment was agricultural innovation. In his view, the response of governments to population growth, the exports of pesticides and agricultural technologies to poor countries, also known as green revolution, was causing tremendous damage to the environment and was not the solution to improve food supply. First, Ehrlich claimed that any new pesticide was eventually going to become useless, because insects adapted to them, as he had observed in relation to fruit flies that had evolved to survive to DDT. Secondly, he downplayed the threat of famines, as the biologist stated that improvements in transports and health services were much more useful than unchecked agricultural innovations in the fight to hunger.¹²⁸ However, the mid-1960s Indian food crisis changed his perspective. Furthermore, social upheavals inside the United States made Ehrlich hopeless with respect to political debate focusing spontaneously on the environmental crisis. This is why he decided to publish his main work in 1968: the author wanted to encourage political debate on demographic growth in preparation of the US presidential elections that November.¹²⁹

In the first part of 'The Population Bomb', Ehrlich identified the problems of global population: doubling of world population had occurred in 80 years, while previous doubling had taken two hundred years and the one before occurred throughout a thousand years. The growth was even more dramatic in so-called underdeveloped countries. For example, in Kenya, the doubling in the size of population had occurred in 24 years. According to the author, overpopulation also led to riots and social unrest, due to competition over resources as well as to deterioration of "psychic environment". Ehrlich imputed population explosion to human sexual drive, which had been the basis of human evolution, and to medical innovation, which had exponentially decreased death rates. To prove his point, the biologist brought the example of the introduction of DDT, which had caused a striking population growth in Ceylon, by halving mortality rates. Furthermore, Ehrlich stressed the difficulties in food supply due to the impressive increase in population size in the Global South and he forecasted the persistence or even worsening of famines in the following decades. Ehrlich concluded the part of his book dealing with the problems caused by overpopulation by bringing attention to an issue generally overlooked by Malthusians: environmental degradation. He warned readers about the dreadful effects on ecosystems caused by pesticides, whose use was likely to increase in order to respond to the

¹²⁸ Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, pp. 133-135.

¹²⁹ Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, pp. 137-140.

needs of a growing population. Ehrlich feared that soil erosion was going to worsen due to intensive agriculture, and the consequent deterioration of natural ecosystems crucial to human survival. He also identified pollution and climate change as aspects of the environmental crisis related to population growth. The link between population growth, food scarcity and environmental degradation was not widely recognized or discussed. It is interesting to notice that, despite bringing attention to encourage action with respect to the environmental crisis, the strategy adopted by Ehrlich in his book avoided traditionally conservationist arguments on nature and non-human species. The biologist adopted a human-centred, even American-centred perspective, bringing forward cases that appealed to the American public. For instance, he used the argument that demographic pressure caused wars in a period in which debate in the United States revolved mainly around the Vietnam War.

After a second chapter in which he described a looming future of death and famines, Ehrlich focused the third section of 'The Population Bomb' to 'What is being done'. Here, the author discussed governments' actions aimed at dealing with overpopulation. The author described strategies adopted at the time as inefficient: he stated that family-planning policies in so-called developing countries were pointless, as spacing would not change population dynamics. In his view, even couples practicing spacing and birth control desired large families, and planning births was not effectively reducing the final number of children. Furthermore, Ehrlich contested the validity of technological innovations aimed at improving the management of natural resources. To prove his point, the biologist listed a large number of cases in which technologies became either inefficient or damaging to the environment. Then, in the fourth chapter, Ehrlich started recommending what he believed were the actions most likely to reduce population growth. He first addressed the United States, claiming that the government should start adopting measure to discourage reproduction. According to Ehrlich, taxes on children and prizes to childless couples would be useful to encourage American couples to avoid having babies, or at least reduce their number. The author criticized many establishments, in particular the Catholic Church, as they continued to obstacle contraceptive methods. In his view, traditional religious values were preventing the necessary detachment of sex from reproduction in common discourse. As a matter of fact, in the years of the sexual revolution, Ehrlich was encouraging, through scientific and environmentalist argument, the conceptual separation of sexual life from reproductive functions. This is because, as previously stated, sexual drives could not be eradicated, while reproduction was to be limited at all costs. In this chapter, the author also addressed the question of the advisable actions in so-called undeveloped countries. Ehrlich supported the idea proposed in 'Famine 1975!' by William Paddock. In their view, countries of

the Global South that, because of their huge populations, were beyond help should not receive any aid from the United States. This reasoning was applied to a scenario of food shortages, which, in the case of poor countries took the form of famines. In relation to population control international programmes, Ehrlich supported a differentiated approach for each region of the world. From his standpoint, the main point was to create groups of research defining the best agricultural practices and the optimal population goals for each area. Furthermore, in order to set long-term targets for population policy, extensive research should be funded to define the correct number of individuals living on the planet. The main point behind Ehrlich's reasoning is that uncontrolled population growth is like a cancer consuming natural resources. In his view, human reproduction should be subject to careful programming, and not left to chance.¹³⁰

'The Population Bomb' poses various problems. First of all, it does not take into account social, political and economic factors behind poverty. As expressed in this book, the only reason for humanity's problems was overpopulation. This argument was questioned and criticized as simplistic. Moreover, Ehrlich's attitude towards poor population presented the typical flaws of Malthusian thought: it blamed the poor for being poor and it was highly discriminating. As a matter of fact, Ehrlich's masterpiece draws a clear line between the rational, and capable of being educated to birth control, Westerns and the individuals living in the Global South, whose reproductive behaviour was beyond correction. This discriminatory discourse is particularly interesting, as Ehrlich was involved in the social movement for racial justice inside the United States.

In December 1968, a few months after the publication of Ehrlich's 'The Population Bomb', another major work connected environmental crisis to population growth. Biologist Garrett Hardin (1915-2003) released his article 'The Tragedy of the Commons' in the *Science* magazine, which became one of the most relevant Malthusian publications in this period. Already during the Second World War, when he was studying algae as a nutrition source, Hardin came to believe that the best solution to food scarcity was population control. His concerns over demographic growth were influenced by eugenics, as the biologist believed that granting contraception and abortion rights to the poor would have prevented their "overbreeding", considered as damaging to society. In 'The Tragedy of the Commons', Hardin stated that American government and society had a tendency to avoid dealing with complex social problems and to rely too much on technology. The author detected this tendency also in relation to environmental problems. In Hardin's perspective, problems related to scarcity of

¹³⁰Ehrlich Paul R. (1968), *The Population Bomb*, Ballantine Books, New York, pp. 1-157.

resources were due to issues of distribution, therefore any technological innovation would ultimately prove to be useless. According to the biologist, the answer to the distribution problem was social reform. In the article, the biologist identifies some environmental problems which could be explained through his logic, such as tourist visits to national parks or fishing in the oceans. Hardin explains his ideas through the image of a pasture open to all herders. In this scenario, every herd owner is pushed to maximize their profits, without any encouragement to limit the size of their herd. Therefore, herds will grow increasingly more, while the pasture is a limited space. The consequences of the uncontrolled growth of herds are destined to be disastrous, as limitless growth clashes with the limited quantity of available resources. According to Hardin, this image depicts the imminent tragedy of individuals, encouraged to seek profit, in a social environment believing in the “freedom of the commons”. The biologist suggests two possible solutions to the problem of the commons: privatizing or regulating. Adopting the example of national parks, the solutions proposed by Harding would be either privatizing the parks or devising some rules regulating the access. The author, however, favours the second option. This is because, from his standpoint, Adam Smith’s assumption that what is best for individuals is best for society is flawed. Therefore, in relation to population growth, Hardin advocates governmental intervention through well-reasoned rules. Hardin agreed with Ehrlich on the idea that, when addressing the population problem, technological innovations and voluntary birth control were not sufficient, as the problematic factor was the social dynamics of the reproductive commons. This is because, regardless of birth control practices, each family would maximize their own reproductive interests, and, in the end, population size would still be greater than what is collectively desirable. Moreover, Hardin claimed that genetics did not play in favour of demographic control. He stated that irresponsible individuals were reproducing more than those with public conscience. The biologist also believed that the welfare state was to blame for this, as people bearing many children were rewarded by the social security system, instead of being punished for the burden they imposed on society. According to Hardin, coercive measures had to be practiced in order to avoid total ruin. Therefore, he criticized the inclusion of the right to have children among human rights by the United Nations in 1967. This is because the author rejected the idea that the decision to have children should be left to the scrutiny of families alone, as he advocated for a strong government’s control over reproduction.¹³¹

¹³¹ Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, pp. 1-155.

Finally, another major work which significantly influenced public debate over environmental issues is the report by the Club of Rome ‘The Limits to Growth’ (1972). The Club of Rome is a non-profit organization of scientists and business leaders whose goal is to spread information over pressing global issues. It was born in 1968 in Rome, Italy, and four years later it published a report on the imminent clash between demographic and economic growth and limited natural resources. ‘The Limits to Growth’ consisted in a computer analysis that forecasted the collapse of society within a century, as a consequence of population growth and excessive resource consumption.¹³² The analysis was based on data on the factors that affect and limit growth, namely population, agricultural production, depletion of non-renewable resources, industrial production and generation of pollution.¹³³ The book became a cultural phenomenon in the 1970s, and it was widely used by environmentalists, including Ehrlich, to criticize American consumption society. However, blaming overconsumption significantly harmed environmentalism’s popularity inside American middle-class.¹³⁴ This report was so influential that the expression “limits-to-growth” is still used to define approaches and policies that seek to limit consumption on the basis of the reduced quantity of available natural resources.

The population problem in American society and political debate

The debate on the responsibility of population growth for the environmental crisis was so lively that, between 1968, when ‘The Population Bomb’ was published, and 1970, American society’s attitude towards environmental problems significantly changed. In these two years, many different stimuli contributed to making environmental concerns an extremely widespread discussion topic. A relevant factor contributing to this new attitude was the rising concerns, both at the national and at the international level, over demographic growth. The reasons behind the attention to increase in population size include previously mentioned works such as Ehrlich’s book, ‘The Tragedy of the Commons’ and the 1968 ‘*Humanae Vitae*’. Furthermore, women’s movements in favour of birth control contributed to making population and contraception a topic of debate. The link between population growth and environmental degradation was emphasised by ecologists. Thus, it became a common assumption that population growth, especially in Third World countries, was to blame for the ecologic crisis.

¹³² Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, p. 180.

¹³³ Meadows Donella H. et al. (1972), *The Limits to Growth*, Universe Books, New York, pp. 11-12.

¹³⁴ Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, p. 181.

Moreover, in this period, education at all levels was organizing projects and programmes aimed at raising awareness on ecological problems related to alleged overpopulation.¹³⁵

In this context, a whole generation, that of the Baby Boomers, perceived demographic increase as an imminent threat, comparable to the fear experienced during the Cuban missile crisis. Young people born in the 1950s in the United States had grown up constantly hearing about how exceptional their number was. For instance, California had to open a school weekly throughout the Fifties. Therefore, the Baby Boomers had an extremely developed sense of identity as a generation. Furthermore, many of them were students of Malthusian ecologists such as Ehrlich, and they were extremely influenced by the publication of works such as ‘The Population Bomb’. An example of the spirit of a part of this generation is bioregionalist and activist Stephanie Mills, who, at her graduation in 1969, claimed that the biggest contribution she could provide to the human species was not to have children. Mills, as well as many others, were harshly criticizing authorities for making access to contraception difficult, and the Catholic Church for demonizing birth control as unnatural. Moreover, Mills mixed Malthusianism with feminism, by stating that one of the most influential instruments to reduce population growth would be to encourage women’s involvement in activities other than bearing and raising children. However, Mills softened the tone adopted by Ehrlich and Hardin, for instance by claiming that demographic growth was worsening problems such as hunger and war, but it was not their ultimate cause. Finally, Mills countered the argument stating that measures aimed at controlling demography were not likely to produce authoritarian regimes, as there were greater chances that an extremely large population would cause the government to become more authoritarian. According to Mills, repression was probable in cases where individuals were not controlling reproduction, on the grounds that, eventually, it would have been the government to acquire power to control individuals’ reproductive behaviour.¹³⁶

In this context, 1970 massive participation to Earth Day comes with little surprise. Earth Day consisted in a day of marches and speeches bringing public attention to environmental problems. The demonstration was organized by Democrat Senator Gaylord Nelson, who had been engaged in raising the establishment’s awareness of environmental problems for years. For example, in 1963, Nelson had convinced President Kennedy to go on a tour to acknowledge the problems related to the environmental crisis. According to Nelson, one of the main causes leading to nature’s degradation was overpopulation. He was so in line with Malthusian

¹³⁵ Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, pp. 152-153, 167.

¹³⁶ Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, pp. 160-163.

ecologists, that the committee the Senator put in place to direct Earth Day there was Ehrlich as well as other like minds. Earth Day-related press releases and articles stressed the importance of fighting demographic growth in the efforts to reduce human impact on the environment. Following this trend, speakers highlighted the role of population growth in increasing the incidence of wars and famines, and encouraged individuals and governments to take action to promote birth control. According to speakers, the dreadful effects of overpopulation were observable at the local, national and international level, and action was to be taken in order to avoid the looming future of famines and scarcity that was approaching.

However, despite public opinion's attention to demographic growth as the cause of environmental degradation had been in large part due to Ehrlich's 'The Population Bomb', the author was changing his discourse by the 1960s. As a matter of fact, the biologist had been the object of many criticisms, especially by the black community, as he had maintained that population control was colour blind. In the United States, there was a history of white control over black reproduction dating back to the slavery period. Therefore, racialized groups were legitimately worried about the new wave of pro-population planning discourse that was becoming so popular both among scholars and public opinion. In order to respond to these heavy critiques, Ehrlich started shifting his attention away from population control, towards reshaping of American consumption habits. In particular, he started pointing to white-middle-class overconsumption as a crucial cause of resource depletion. Moreover, Ehrlich changed his attitude towards the environmental impact of population of Third World countries, and, in 1970, he stated in an interview to *Time* that the impact on natural resources of one American child was fifty times bigger than that of a child born in India. In the same year, the author of 'The Population Bomb' pointed out that a white child from a wealthy family had a much bigger impact on the environment than a black one born in a low-income family. As Ehrlich, many other environmentalists started to blame environmental crisis on consumerism, rather than on overpopulation.¹³⁷ It is particularly interesting to notice that, in a very short period of time, Ehrlich detached himself from one of the main pillars of Malthusianism, which is that the growth of poor population was to blame for the problems afflicting society.

The argument that population control was crucial to preserve the environment became so widely accepted, that, between the 1960s and the 1970s, both the Democratic and the Republican Party in the United States agreed on the urgency to implement birth control programs. An interesting example of the relevance of population control matters in American political arena was the

¹³⁷ Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, pp. 166-174.

creation, in 1969, of the “Young Republicans for the environment”, headed by George Bush (1924-2018), who also led a Republican Task Force on Hearth Resources and Population. The Task Force, whose findings were made public by Bush himself in various occasions, focused on bringing light to the link between demographic increase, limited natural resources and environmental crisis. Bush also attributed social problems, like alcoholism and criminality, to overpopulation, and went so far as defining population growth as a threat to national security. Therefore, in his view, population planning had to become a priority in American political agenda. Another striking case, which encompasses various topics discussed throughout this thesis, is that of Richard Nixon (1913-1994). In 1969, he had mentioned environmental problems in a discourse, but his attention to the issue was soon abandoned. What Nixon remained responsive to, however, was the issue of population growth. As a matter of fact, the politician was influenced by Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1927-2003), his advisor on urban affairs, who convinced him of the importance of birth planning. Moynihan’s main argument was that reproduction rates were much higher in poor groups and in the black community than in the white-middle-class. Therefore, according to Moynihan, addressing the problem of population was crucial to solve social problems in the United States. Moreover, support to birth control programs was politically valuable, as it was a sensitive topic both for racists and for race progressivists. Following the advice of Moynihan, Nixon made population planning programmes a priority both inside the United States and abroad. Another reason behind Nixon’s attention to population control and environmental degradation was that international aid aimed at reducing demographic growth in Third World countries seemed to be a neutral issue, on which both public opinion and governments agreed. This point was particularly relevant in a period in which the Western and Eastern blocks were engaged in efforts towards *détente*, the relaxation of the tension during the ongoing Cold War. In 1970, during Nixon’s mandate, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) became a law, recognizing human responsibility over environmental degradation, and emphasizing the role of demographic growth in resource depletion.¹³⁸

The hold of concerns over the environment and population growth was still strong in the mid-1970s, when Jimmy Carter became the President of the United States. Carter was a well-known environmentalist democrat, who, throughout his presidency, continued to support the “limits-to-growth” perspective. In his view, which was unprecedented even in the Democratic Party, the United States had to abandon the idea of limitless growth, as natural resources were

¹³⁸ Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, pp. 160-167.

approaching exhaustion. However, acknowledging the existence of environmental problems was not the same as understanding how to deal with them, especially in a period of economic crisis. As a matter of fact, the 1973 Oil Crisis had tremendous effects on worldwide economy, as well as on the perception of the exhaustion of natural resources as imminent. At the international level, Carter called for the creation of a commission to assess the environmental situation in 1977, which, three years later, produced 'The Global 2000 Report to the President: Entering the Twenty-First Century'. The report concluded, on the basis of current trends, that in the year 2000, environmental problems such as pollution and resource depletion would have worsened. However, public opinion started to be disappointed by Malthusian pessimism, and started doubting the urgency of population and environmental problems.

This change in public opinion on Malthusian environmentalism is reflected by Ronald Reagan's (1911-2004) shift in attitude towards population policy. During the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the member of the Republican party was alternatively expressing himself against population growth and criticizing Malthusian claims for interfering in individual family-life. Reagan's rejection of Malthusian environmentalism is probably best explained in a speech to the American Petroleum Institute in 1971, in which he harshly criticized the pessimism of what he called the "doomsday crowd". In particular, Reagan rejected the anti-Americanism inherent to Malthusian environmentalism. The politician brought attention to the impressive progress that the United States underwent in a few decades. Therefore, Reagan claimed, he doubted that the limitedness of resources was so threatening that it could not be overcome by American ingenuity. However, the point Reagan mostly criticized was the idea of overpopulation. He claimed that there was "still some room" for population growth, and that, therefore, environmentalist calls for zero-growth was pointless. Furthermore, Reagan, despite acknowledging environmental problems, claimed that development could not be stopped, and, that, therefore, Malthusian pessimism was not a viable political ideology.¹³⁹

It is important to take into account also that part of society that had always felt disappointed, and even outraged, by Malthusian environmentalists. Despite common points such as distrust in progress and despise towards consumerism, conservatives, especially Catholics, were disturbed by the growing popularity of Malthusianism. The point where they disagreed the most was population. In particular, Ehrlich's and Hardin's support to sex education, birth control and abortion was not compatible with conservative outlook on sexuality. Moreover, environmentalist closeness to feminist movements, especially with respect to the re-evaluation

¹³⁹ Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, pp. 203-211.

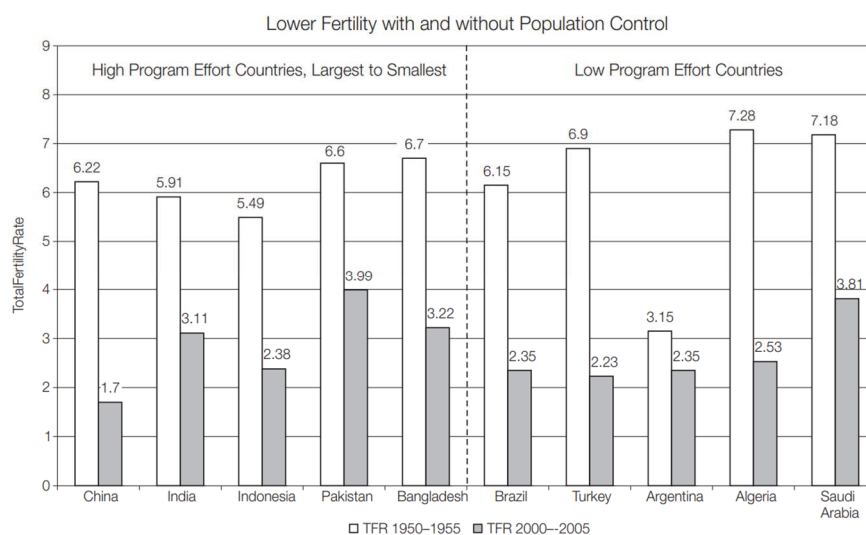
of children's centrality in women's life, increased the gap between the two streams of thought. Finally, the fact that evolution was a pillar of ecologism clearly clashed with Catholic creationism. Relevant leaders of the New Right, such as Paul Michael Weyrich (1942-2008) and Reverend Jerry Falwell (1933-2007), openly criticized general acceptance, including within the Republican Party, of the necessity to limit population growth and of the promotion of birth control. However, towards the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, cultural conservatives became strong supporters of the Republican Party. Another important brand of opposition to Malthusian environmentalism is that of economic conservatives. Most notably, the key figure among them is Julian Simon (1932-1998), professor of business administration and economist, who turned away from Malthusianism towards the end of the 1960s. In Simon's view, demographic growth was not problematic. On the contrary, it was desirable, as a larger group of human beings meant a greater potential for innovation to overcome resource limitation. Furthermore, Simon believed that it was morally wrong to prevent births on the ground of alleged overpopulation.

The 1980 elections became the stage of the confrontation between Carter's "limits-to-growth" approach and Reagan's idea that environmental preservation was not to be preferred to economic growth. The election of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States clearly displayed American discontent with the Malthusian environmentalism as political guideline.¹⁴⁰

Climate change and population

In the last few decades, population growth has consistently reduced its pace. The looming future forecasted by Malthusians has not occurred yet. Supporters of family planning programmes emphasize their role in preventing the explosion of the "population bomb", but some doubts are being raised about the extent of their effective impact on stabilization of demographic increase. For instance, in the figure, it is possible to observe a decrease in fertility, between 1950 and 2000, both in so-called developing countries, which had been targeted by population planning projects, and in countries where population policy was not trying to reduce the number of births.

¹⁴⁰ Robertson T. (2012), *The Malthusian Moment – Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, pp. 211-220.



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The future of global population is now uncertain. Experts disagree on forecasts on demographic growth, and recognize possibilities ranging from a new population explosion to a shrinking population. This is because, with most continents experiencing stagnation or even reduction in fertility rates, African population growth in the future can follow two different paths. In order to understand the various possibilities, it is important to remind that a crucial determinant of demography is female literacy. Women's education and involvement in the labour market has proved to be the most effective brake to population growth. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that, in the event of a speeding up of economic development, African states will experience an increase in the level of female education, thus slowing fertility rates in a measure comparable to that of so-called developed countries. On the other hand, if the African continent is afflicted by war, poverty and violence, experience suggests that women's literacy level will proceed at a slow pace, thus alimenting demographic growth.¹⁴²

However, with the ongoing climate crisis, the debate on human responsibility for environmental degradation is livelier than ever. The discussion on population size, however, has changed its focus. The main point is that, as emphasized by Ehrlich during the 1970s, the most problematic issue with respect to the impact of population on the environment is consumption of goods. Therefore, environmentalists' attention has now shifted from individual reproductive behaviour towards individual behaviour as consumers. Furthermore, environmentalists are growing more concerned of distribution of resources among populations, especially in devising strategy to

¹⁴¹ Connelly M. (2008), *Fatal Misconception – The Struggle to Control World Population*, pp. 370-374.

¹⁴² Rampini Federico (August 29, 2022), "Cina, dietro il cambio del finale di 'Minions' c'è la paura del calo delle nascite", *Corriere della Sera* < https://www.corriere.it/oriente-occidente-federico-rampini/22_agosto_29/cina-l-ossessione-il-calco-nascite-dimenticando-malthus-d9f44d0c-27a3-11ed-83db-919b375d30ef.shtml >

cope with Climate Change. For instance, while Malthusians considered overpopulation as a cause of conflict, contemporary environmentalists tend to consider resource scarcity as a factor that could potentially lead to conflict and migration.¹⁴³ It is also particularly interesting to notice that limitation of demographic growth is not one of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which constitute the basic guideline of international action to face Climate Change. Nevertheless, the discussion has pointed out that raising the level of female education, which is one of the SDGs, is the most effective ways to reduce fertility. Therefore, it is possible to argue that development efforts are actually, at least indirectly, affecting population dynamics. One may say that environmentalists today are no longer considering the possibility of reducing population growth, as the interest is now turned towards ways to adjust to Climate Change, which is no longer seen as avoidable. One of the most prominent questions of Malthusian ecologists, namely food supply, is still considered as a problem by contemporary environmentalists. In particular, even if at a much slower pace, global population is continuing to grow, and traditional nutrition models, especially the Western one, are not environmentally sustainable. In particular, intensive farming is an important cause of environmental degradation, and many experts agree on the impossibility to feed a growing population through conventional methods. Therefore, more and more scholars have been trying to devise new models of diet, capable of feeding global population in a climate crisis scenario. In general, the point over which most experts agree on is that nutrition needs to become increasingly plant-based in order to be environmentally sustainable.¹⁴⁴

It is fair to say, therefore, that nowadays' environmentalist discourse is no longer focusing on ways to reduce population growth, as experts are considering ways to adjust to existent, and inevitable, conditions. However, it is interesting to notice that the impact of demographic growth on environmental resources is still an undenied assumption among scholars, and that recognition of this period as Anthropocene, an era in which human activity has significantly modified the natural environment and its climate, is widespread.

¹⁴³ Raleigh Clionadh and Urdal Henrik (2008-2009), *Climate Change, Demography, Environmental Degradation, and Armed Conflict*, Environmental Change and Security Program Report 13, Wilson Centre < https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/ECSPReport13_RaleighUrdal.pdf > p. 27.

¹⁴⁴ Willett Walter et al. (February 02, 2019), *Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems*, The Lancet Commissions, Volume 393, Issue 10170 < [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)31788-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)31788-4/fulltext) >

Conclusions

In conclusion, concern over population growth has been extremely significant in environmental policymaking, especially in the 1970s. This chapter has explored the cultural and social events that have raised questions over the link between demographic growth and environmental crisis. In particular, Malthusian environmentalism has been explored through the works of Paul Ehrlich, Garrett Hardin and the Club of Rome. Then, this discussion has pointed out how American society has reacted to the attention towards environmental crisis as well as how different political leaders in the United States have addressed the so-called population problem in the 1970s. Finally, a short outlook on the role of population in contemporary environmentalist thought has been provided. In this chapter, the role of the state in shaping population policy appeared to be less important than in the previous parts of this discussion. This can be explained by two main reasons. The first one is that, in most cases, environmental problems have not been, and are not yet, a priority on states' agendas. The second one is that the 1960s and 1970s saw, especially in the United States, an unprecedented involvement of civil society in public debate, which was the real cause behind governments' attention towards environmental matters.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis was to highlight the relevance of the relation between population control and the state, by providing an overview of significant cases. The discussion started with an overview of Early Modern economic and political doctrines linking the size and quality of population to the state's welfare. In particular, the cases of mercantilism in colonial empires and of cameralism in Catherine the Great's Russia were considered. In the second chapter, the relation between population control and marginalization was taken into consideration. The first section was particularly interesting, as it discussed Thomas Malthus' theory on population, which created the basis for social and political marginalization of poor groups, whose reproduction was seen as undesirable and threatening to social wellbeing. Then, the focus moved to racial marginalization in post-colonial countries and to eugenics in the United States. The third chapter dealt with one of the most famous realities in the history of population policy, the People's Republic of China. This case-study is a relevant example of the importance governments attributed to the role of population in development strategies after the Second World War. Finally, the last chapter discussed the relation between reproductive rights and birth control. In particular, the cases of India and of anti-abortion movements were taken into consideration. The aim of this last chapter was to highlight the crucial role played by legislation over birth control in individual reproductive rights. Moreover, the considered cases showed how so-called developing countries and industrialized states have a different outlook on birth control.

Clearly, the proposed overview does not aim at being in any way comprehensive. However, it brings light to the influence of demographic concerns over national policies. It is important to understand that demographic dynamics are still influencing state action. For instance, the discussion of pronatalism, provided throughout this thesis, is useful to understand current debates. Having an idea of the roots of pronatalist thought, namely mercantilist and cameralist connection of a large population with state welfare, is interesting when considering the recent announcement made by the Kremlin. As a matter of fact, Russian leader Vladimir Putin has declared the revival of the Stalinist "Mother Heroine" award. This prize, which during the Soviet period consisted in a medal, is a monetary award of 1 million rubles to Russian mothers who are raising more than ten children. The "Mother Heroine Award", together with efforts to restrict access to legal abortion, constitute a part of Putin's strategy to deal with Russian alleged depopulation problem, which contributes to the nationalist agenda aiming at reconstructing

Russian military might.¹⁴⁵ What, interestingly, emerges from the linking of the previous discussion with this case is the fact that pronatalism was a feature of cameralism, forefather of capitalism, and ended up being a crucial point of Marxist tradition.

Furthermore, other countries, including Italy and Hungary, are recently discussing policies to counter demographic stagnation. Therefore, concerns over population dynamics are popular today as they have been since the birth of the modern states. Moreover, the idea that states require a large population for economic purposes is reviving as well. In the case of Hungary, for instance, conservative President Viktor Orbán has been pushing a strongly pro-natalist policy, in order to increase fertility rates and to defend the traditional family model. Measures introduced by Hungarian government in 2019 include: exemption from income taxes for mothers taking care of at least four children; specific loans for families with at least two children, in order to help them buying a house; parental leave for grandparents; increase in number of public preschools. Furthermore, the Hungarian Constitution was modified in order to define family specifically as one woman as mother and one man as father. This change has the effect of preventing adoptions of same-sex parents and making them more difficult for single people.¹⁴⁶ The Hungarian model has been praised as effective by Italian conservative politicians, such as Matteo Salvini, who are particularly worried about aging population in Italy. It is important to remember, as it was pointed out in the fourth chapter, that pronatalist policies tend to go hand in hand with limitations of women's rights. This is why the recent study conducted by experts close to President Orbán is particularly concerning. As a matter of fact, the document, produced by a group of Hungarian scholars states, that female education has negative effects on demographic growth, as observations suggest that it reduces fertility rates. Moreover, alleged feminization of Hungarian universities would be damaging men and holding back development.¹⁴⁷ In Italy, as previously mentioned, the Hungarian model is appealing to

¹⁴⁵ Suliman Adela (August 17, 2022), "Putin revives Soviet 'Mother Heroine' for women who have 10 children", The Washington Post < <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/17/russia-ukraine-putin-mother-heroine-award-children/> > ; "Putin orders Government to Improve Abortion Prevention Efforts" (October 27, 2020), *The Moscow Times* < <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/10/27/putin-orders-government-to-improve-abortion-prevention-efforts-a71865> >

¹⁴⁶ Ricci Sargentini Monica (August 25, 2022), "Famiglia, che cosa prevede il modello Ungherese sostenuto da Salvini", Corriere della Sera < https://www.corriere.it/esteri/22_agosto_25/ungheria-misure-decise-orban-famiglia-natalita-ed6be77c-2443-11ed-9477-8142972fc587.shtml >

¹⁴⁷ "Ungheria, gli studiosi vicino a Orban: 'Troppe donne all'Università, un rischio per i maschi e per la natalità'" (August 28, 2022), *La Repubblica* < https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2022/08/28/news/orban_universita_troppe_donne_rischio_maschi-363236931/?ref=search >

conservative politicians. As a matter of fact, the debate on population in Italy is all but inactive. Italian population is characterized by negative growth rates and increasing average age, with figures indicating 47 years old at the beginning 2021, and concerns over the future are widespread.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, with conservative parties governing several regions, the right to abortion has been subject to limitations in various circumstances. The most notorious case, is that of Umbria, where the regional government rejected national guidelines on abortifacient pill in order to encourage demographic growth and to prevent “ethnic substitutions” from immigrant families.¹⁴⁹

These last cases, therefore, provide further evidence to the main points of this thesis, namely that there is a strong link between governments’ considerations and population policy and that the strong relation between the state and population control is likely to persist.

¹⁴⁸ Istat (May 3, 2021), “*Indicatori demografici anno 2020*” < https://www.istat.it/it/files/2021/05/REPORT_INDICATORI-DEMOGRAFICI-2020.pdf >

¹⁴⁹ Nardinocchi Chiara (January 27, 2021), “*Fdi nelle Marche su posizioni antiabortiste. Il capogruppo Ciccio: ‘Combattere per l’aborto è retroguardia’*”, La Repubblica < https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2021/01/27/news/regione_marche_aborto-284498739/ >

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RIASSUNTO IN ITALIANO

L'introduzione consiste in primo luogo nella breve sintesi della storia della popolazione mondiale e del controllo delle nascite. Per quanto riguarda la storia della popolazione, vengono brevemente spiegati i fattori che determinano la crescita demografica, i fattori di limitazione, come per esempio la terra e le risorse, e i fattori di scelta, come unioni riproduttive e migrazioni. Dalla tipologia di fattori che regolano la crescita della popolazione dipende il sistema demografico di riferimento: la prevalenza di fattori di limitazione comporta un sistema demografico caratterizzato da alti tassi di natalità e di mortalità e da un lento tasso di crescita, mentre un sistema demografico influenzato prevalentemente da fattori di scelta è caratterizzato da bassi tassi di mortalità e di natalità e da una rapida crescita. Dopodiché, l'introduzione fornisce una breve storia della popolazione mondiale, basandosi sulla divisione in tre cicli, quello dalle origini della specie umana al Neolitico, quello dal Neolitico alla rivoluzione industriale e infine quello dalla rivoluzione industriale all'epoca contemporanea. In secondo luogo, viene presentata una breve storia della contraccezione, in particolare vengono presentati i casi dell'Antico Egitto, dell'Antica Grecia e del Medioevo, al fine di dimostrare che gli esseri umani hanno da sempre cercato di controllare il numero dei loro figli. Infine viene presentato l'argomento della tesi, ossia la relazione tra stato e controllo della popolazione, sostenendo che il primo eserciti un alto livello di influenza sul secondo, al fine di promuovere una crescita demografica che rispecchi i suoi interessi.

Il primo capitolo tratta dell'importanza della popolazione per lo stato moderno. Si sostiene, infatti, che con la nascita dello stato moderno, il governo avesse necessità e interesse nella conoscenza e gestione della popolazione. Nella prima sezione, si discute il concetto di popolazione in relazione allo stato, principalmente attraverso il concetto di "biopotere" elaborato dal filosofo Michael Foucault. Dopodiché, l'attenzione si sposta su due correnti di pensiero economico e politico popolari in Europa tra il Sedicesimo e Diciannovesimo secolo, il mercantilismo e il cameralismo. Entrambi vengono trattati in relazione all'importanza che attribuiscono al controllo da parte dello stato sulla dimensione e qualità della popolazione. Per quanto riguarda il mercantilismo, sono analizzate principalmente le teorie di Joachim Becher e William Petty, prima di concentrarsi sul caso delle politiche mercantiliste applicate alle colonie degli imperi spagnolo e portoghese in America Latina. Nel caso del cameralismo, invece, si tengono in considerazione gli autori prussiani Christian Wolff, Gottlob von Justi e Joseph von Sonnenfels. Infine, si analizza l'influenza del pensiero cameralista sulle politiche di Caterina la Grande di Russia.

Il secondo capitolo, tratta della relazione tra controllo della popolazione e la marginalizzazione di determinati gruppi da parte dello stato. In primo luogo, la discussione verte sul pensiero di Thomas Robert Malthus, che riteneva l'eccessiva crescita demografica tra le classi più povere la causa delle difficoltà economiche e sociali dello stato. Secondo Malthus, pertanto, una parte importante del lavoro del governo dovrebbe vertere attorno alla limitazione della riproduzione dei poveri, che risultano perciò discriminati e marginalizzati. Nella seconda sezione, invece, il capitolo si concentra sulla marginalizzazione razziale nei paesi dell'America Latina dopo l'indipendenza dagli imperi coloniali iberici. In particolare, l'attenzione si rivolge al fatto che, nonostante formalmente lo stato non facesse distinzioni su base etnica tra i propri cittadini, i censimenti e la distribuzione di potere economico e politico di fatto continuassero a perpetrare diverse forme di discriminazione razziale. Infine, questo capitolo si focalizza sul movimento eugenetico negli Stati Uniti, e su come questo abbia influenzato le élite culturali e politiche del Paese. Inizialmente, la discussione consiste in una breve sintesi delle origini del pensiero eugenetico, secondo cui determinati gruppi, quali criminali, alcolisti ed etnie diverse da quella bianca, dovessero essere scoraggiati dal riprodursi, al fine di limitare la trasmissione di patrimoni genetici considerati indesiderati. Infine, viene evidenziata la forte influenza dell'eugenetica sul pensiero delle prime femministe, come per esempio Margaret Sanger, e come questa influenza si traduca in una forte discriminazione delle donne nere nell'ambito della lotta per i diritti riproduttivi.

Il terzo capitolo, dopo una breve introduzione al concetto di sviluppo promosso dai blocchi occidentale e orientale durante la Guerra Fredda, si concentra sul caso delle politiche di controllo della popolazione nella Repubblica Popolare Cinese. Al fine di produrre una visione dell'insieme piuttosto completa, l'analisi prende la forma di una sintesi dei momenti più rilevanti della politica cinese nei confronti del controllo delle nascite. La discussione prende in considerazione gli strumenti legislativi, di propaganda e di coercizione utilizzati dalle varie amministrazioni per promuovere il modello familiare del figlio unico. Questo tipo di struttura socio-familiare, infatti, risulta vincente nel dibattito interno al partito sulle strategie migliori per la promozione della crescita e dello sviluppo economico della Repubblica Popolare Cinese. Particolare attenzione viene prestata ai mutamenti nella determinazione e nella severità del governo nell'implementazione delle politiche di controllo delle nascite. Tramite le testimonianze raccolte nel documentario "*One Child Nation*" (2019), inoltre, una parte importante di questo capitolo si concentra sulla violenza e la coercizione utilizzate dallo stato cinese al fine di imporre la politica del figlio unico alla popolazione. Infine, viene considerata la significativa dimensione di discriminazione di genere derivante dallo scontro tra i valori

tradizionali cinesi che privilegiavano i figli maschi e la politica che limitava a uno il numero di figli consentiti dalla legge.

Il quarto capitolo di questa tesi, invece, considera la relazione tra lo stato e i diritti riproduttivi. Innanzitutto, l'analisi parte dal presupposto che le donne siano più influenzate rispetto agli uomini dalle politiche che facilitano od ostacolano l'accesso alla contraccezione e all'aborto. Dopodiché la discussione mette a confronto il caso dell'India, in cui, nell'ambito degli sforzi per promuovere lo sviluppo socioeconomico incoraggiato dagli stati occidentali e dalle organizzazioni internazionali, i governi abbiano incoraggiato e, a tratti, imposto, la limitazione delle nascite, in modo da ridurre la pressione della popolazione sulle risorse statali. L'analisi si concentra su come, nei progetti di politica internazionale, paesi del nord globale come gli Stati Uniti abbiano promosso programmi di educazione alla contraccezione e di sterilizzazioni, volontarie e non, in India, mentre la loro politica interna era tendenzialmente contraria al controllo delle nascite. A questo proposito, vengono prese in considerazione il dibattito sulla contraccezione in America e i movimenti antiabortisti in altri paesi industrializzati. Il concetto che prevalentemente viene sottolineato in questo capitolo è come, sia nel caso dei paesi cosiddetti in via di sviluppo, sia nel nord globale, i diritti riproduttivi delle donne siano stati, e siano tuttora, oggetto di limitazione e oppressione. Nel caso dell'India, in particolare, la contraccezione era accessibile e incoraggiata, ma lo stato imponeva sterilizzazioni e aborti; in Italia, Polonia e Stati Uniti, invece, il diritto all'aborto è limitato o addirittura negato.

Il quinto capitolo, infine, tratta della relazione tra controllo delle nascite e ambientalismo. Per prima cosa, l'introduzione spiega brevemente il contesto culturale degli Stati Uniti degli anni '60 e '70 del Novecento. In particolare, si evidenzia come l'affermarsi definitivo delle teorie evolutive darwiniane, tramite la corrente scientifica chiamata Sintesi Darwiniana, abbia influenzato accademici ambientalisti come Paul Ehrlich. Dopodiché, vengono menzionati brevemente i temi principali su cui ruotavano i movimenti di protesta in questo periodo, in particolare la rivoluzione sessuale e la guerra in Vietnam. A questo punto, vengono riassunti i testi che principalmente hanno influenzato l'opinione pubblica in merito alla cosiddetta "esplosione demografica", ossia: il testo di Paul Ehrlich, "The Population Bomb", l'articolo di Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons", e infine il report del Club di Roma, "The Limits to Growth". Questi testi rappresentano la base scientifica dell'ambientalismo malthusiano, sempre più popolare in quegli anni, secondo il quale la crisi ambientale era attribuibile quasi totalmente all'esponenziale crescita demografica degli ultimi decenni. Nella sezione seguente, la discussione mette in luce quanto la preoccupazione malthusiana nei confronti della crescita demografica abbia scosso la società americana, e come, di conseguenza,

abbia influenzato il dibattito politico negli Stati Uniti. In particolare, si evidenzia come la preoccupazione nei confronti della crescita demografica fosse condivisa dal partito democratico e da quello repubblicano. Infine, il capitolo tratta i nuovi sviluppi in relazione alla preoccupazione verso la crescita demografica e di come questa non giochi più un tema preponderante nel dibattito sul cambiamento climatico. Si evidenzia, infatti, come l'ambientalismo contemporaneo si concentri sullo studio di metodi per affrontare la crisi climatica, piuttosto che su misure per prevenirla.

Le conclusioni, dopo una breve ricapitolazione dei contenuti trattati nei vari capitoli, riportano i casi della Russia di Putin, dell'Ungheria di Orban e del dibattito sulla demografia in Italia, al fine di ribadire la rilevanza della politica demografica per lo stato moderno anche in epoca contemporanea. Per quanto riguarda la politica sulla popolazione in Russia, questa prevede un premio in denaro devoluto alle madri che crescono più di dieci figli, in modo da incoraggiare la crescita demografica. In Ungheria, invece, recenti misure a favore dell'aumento della natalità, includono prestiti e premi in denaro alle famiglie con più di due figli. Inoltre, il caso ungherese viene preso a esempio della minaccia che politiche pro-natali tendono ad avere sui diritti delle donne, in quanto un recente studio attribuisce all'educazione delle donne la stagnazione in termini di fertilità. Secondo gli esperti vicini a Orban, infatti, l'istruzione universitaria femminile metterebbe a rischio il mantenimento dei ruoli di genere tradizionali, fondamentali per la crescita demografica. Infine, il caso italiano viene brevemente accennato, in quanto sempre più politici si esprimono in merito al rallentamento della curva demografica italiana. Inoltre, politiche restrittive sulla contraccezione d'emergenza mettono a rischio, in almeno una regione italiana, l'accesso alla terminazione volontaria di gravidanza. Tramite questi casi, si sostiene che l'influenza dello stato sulla popolazione sia destinata a rimanere rilevante.