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Abstract

The history of the population control movement is one replete with controversies and where narratives about coercive population control policies and programs abound. Questionable practices such as the wide sterilization campaigns as took place in India during its state of emergency period in the 1970s or the use of contraceptives in developing world already banned from Western markets contributed in casting a shadow over the population control movement for years. It is in this context that we need to understand the Cairo International conference on Population and Development of 1994, which, many claimed was an important paradigm shift that served to re-define the population issue and change the course of the population debate. The Program of Action firmly established the primacy of human welfare needs over a “simple” concern with demographic targets and goals. For activists and commentators alike, the Cairo conference offered the international population movement a much needed escape from its troubled past. However, this has led to the misconceived assumption that the debate on overpopulation is now “dead and buried”. Hence, some authors argue that the public and global interest in the issue of overpopulation has for some time been on decline (Brigham, 2012). The current paper argues that through a closer attention to the language and discourse on population contained within a selected number of pages of the Program of Action, it is important to see the Program of Action not as a complete break from the population control movement but as a continuation of the same discourse albeit in a changed political context.

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Introduction

The present paper concerns itself with the politics of population control, and more precisely the very discourses that problematize the reproductive behaviors of some and construct population growth as a threat to the wellbeing of humanity and survival of our planet. Through a historical reading of the population control movement, I look at the discursive processes through which measures to restrict the right to reproduction of some became legitimized. It is also through a historical reading that it also becomes possible to look at the moment of discursive change.

In *Gender and Nation*, Nira Yuval-Davis identifies three types of discourses that tend to dominate public debates on population control; the “people as power” discourse, the eugenicist discourse and the Malthusian discourse (1997). At any given time in history, one or more of these three discourses have dominated the public debate on population control.

The issue that is facing the current population control movement and that has always been source of concern is how to legitimize the sometimes morally questionable measures that are, as suggested, indispensable in the service of humanity. Such measures have among others included forced sterilization campaigns, or conscious efforts to cut off famine relief to countries deemed “overpopulated”.(Zubrin, 2012).

Underlying the current debate on population control is the belief by the proponents of population control that many of today’s problems facing the world are directly linked to overpopulation; problems as various as environmental degradation and climate change, hunger and famines, the underdevelopment of Third World countries, and migration. On the other side of the debate are those that doubt whether the world is really facing a “population crisis” and whether the sometimes stringent measures to curb continuous population growth really are warranted. But, it is also worth noting that those that have opposed the population movement have often done so for divergent reasons. To date, no consensus has so far been reached and most of the arguments proposed by the protagonists of the population control movement, as in the predictions of Thomas Malthus made as early as in the late 1800’s or those of his successor Paul Ehrlich in *The Population Bomb*, have not held the test of time.

Statement of Purpose

The general interest of this paper is with the processes through which political measures are undertaken to influence the shape, size and quality of populations. The more delimited aim

is to do a historical reading of the discursive trajectory of the population control movement combined with an empirical analysis of the Cairo's International Conference on Population and Development's Program of Action. The aim is to show the continuing presence and relevance of the population control discourse in the Cairo's text. This is carried out through a critical discourse analysis of the Program of Action and more exactly through an intertextual analysis that is useful in establishing important links between texts and their social and historical context.

Methods and Material

Critical discourse analysis (hereafter referred to as CDA) is the chosen method of this research. More specifically, the focus of this paper is on an intertextual analysis. There are different approaches to discourse analysis and each presupposes its own theoretical points of departure and methodological tools. However, the chosen discourse analysis method of this paper is premised upon the principles and insights of critical discourse analysis, but with a special focus on Norman Fairclough's own version of CDA. As with any other approach to discourse analysis, CDA is more than simply a method for data analysis, but is rather to be viewed and used as both a theory and a method. Hence, the researcher must comply with the philosophical (the ontological and epistemological) principles of CDA to be able to use it as one's method of empirical study (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002:4). By doing this I'm consciously taking a distance from what Bourdieu and Wacquant have termed "methodologism"; the tendency to view "method as a theory-free means of achieving results" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999: 16).

By choosing CDA, I acknowledge the sorts of epistemic influences that have inspired the development of CDA as a method of text and discourse analysis. Here I'm referring to the method's indebtedness to post-structuralist theory, particularly Foucault's theory on "discourse". This is especially true for CDA's view on the relation between discourse and social practice. However, CDA diverges from post-structuralism's tendency to reduce the whole of social life to discourse (as is the case in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory). Furthermore, CDA positions itself against post-structuralism's so called "judgmental relativism". In *Discourse in Late Modernity*, Chouliaraki and Fairclough argue that "although epistemic relativism must be accepted – that all discourses are socially constructed relative to the social positions people are in – this does not entail accepting judgmental relativism – that all discourses are equally good." (1999: 8) The underlying assumption is that unequal power

relations and injustice are continually reproduced and legitimized through language and discourse. Hence, CDA does not promise to be politically neutral.

For Fairclough, the whole of social life is constituted of practices, and people, through practices, produce and reproduce their social world. But, while Laclau and Mouffe's theory entails a view of discourse as wholly constitutive of social reality, CDA views discourse as just one among many "moments" of any social practice. In other words, every social practice is made up of both discursive and non-discursive elements, where each element is determined by the other but is nevertheless not reducible to it. Rather than simply an individualized act or a result of some situational variables, discourse is a "form of social practice" (1989:63). This then generates a view of discourse as historical and contextual and where discourses can only be understood with reference to their context.

Methodological Framework

But since CDA is more than just a method but rather a theoretical package with its own ontological and epistemological presuppositions, CDA will here be used as both method and theory.

How is the relationship between language and reality to be conceived? Is language to be viewed as a window to social reality? This question brings to the fore one important methodological problem; whether one can truly separate language from reality and whether we can accept the proposition that language is a sort of transparent medium through which thought can be transmitted. And if we accept that proposition, it would also imply that it is somewhat possible to find a neutral observation-language through which reality can be studied and talked about. The underlying premise of this paper is however that language does not just reflect or represent "reality", but language helps construct and constitute that reality (Fairclough, 1992:3). As has been argued elsewhere, we cannot in a meaningful way talk about reality without language playing the role of some kind of "constructing lens" (Bengström och Boréus, 2005: 23). Moreover, as Fairclough has argued, 'language serves to confirm and consolidate the organizations which shape it' (1992: 26).

To reiterate, CDA doesn't promise to be politically neutral. Fairclough describes his particular approach to text and discourse analysis as a critical approach because a critical analysis of discourse, as he argues, doesn't merely describe the discursive practice under study but, more importantly than that, it purports to scrutinize how discourse can be and is shaped by relations

of power and ideologies. His approach is marked by an interest in social change and the rectification of inequality and injustice. Text is therefore not simply viewed as a “window to the “real” object of study”. And, the task of a critical discourse analysis is not to reveal and clarify what the text “really” mean, but, rather, the aim is to show in what political and socio-cultural context the text is situated and how the text through the mediation of discourse is shaped and helps shape relations of power (Fairclough, 1992). A critical approach to discourse analysis should, according to Fairclough, look at “the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants.” (Ibid: 12)

The overarching argument regarding the choice of discourse analysis as the method of this research is that texts in a substantive way can tell us something about society and societal structures. Hence, a critical discourse analysis means a critical interpretation of texts in the light of their wider social contexts. As Fairclough has noted; “the values of textual features only become real, socially operative, if they are embedded in social interaction” (1989:141). The purpose of this research is then of course to show the social significance of texts by showing how certain features of texts are associated through discourse with social values and thus become involved in particular power relations by either reproducing those power relations or in a creative way contributing in changing them. This implies that to achieve this goal, one needs to go beyond a simple text analysis, a mere description of texts and their elements.

One important influence on CDA’s understanding of discourse is found in Foucault’s discourse theory. Foucault views discourses as systems of representation which construct objects of knowledge. For Foucault discourse is “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about - i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic” (Hall, 1992: 201). When statements about a particular object of knowledge or a particular topic are established in discourse, it makes it possible to talk and reason about the topic in a certain way, thus excluding other discourses and ways of relating to the topic. Hence, discourse determines the “conditions of possibility” by structuring areas of knowledge. Discourse structures what can be said and respectively cannot be said, what counts as true and what does not, what counts as knowledge and what does not. It is by constraining what can be thought and known that discourse constraints and dictates action. Foucault’s view on institutions as sites for discursive power is also worth noting. It is this understanding of discourse that informs CDA’s own conceptualization of discourse.

When Fairclough uses the term discourse in his works, he uses it in mainly two ways. First, discourse is used in an abstract sense to refer to the actual instance of language use, to actual talk or writing. Discourse here is referring to the semiotic elements of social life as opposed to other non-semiotic elements. In a second sense, discourse refers to particular ways of representing and giving meaning to social practice (Fairclough, 1989). Hence, when I use *discourse* throughout this paper, I'm mostly referring to the second sense of the term.

Another aspect of Foucault's discourse theory that has influenced CDA is the primacy given to the relationship between discourse and power in his theory. From Foucault's archaeological and genealogical work, some points can be retained that have been of particular importance to CDA. More than just representing and reflecting social entities, Foucault argues, discourse (discursive practices) constructs and constitutes knowledge, "objects" of knowledge, social subjects and social relations (Fairclough, 1992: 56-7). Through constituting knowledge discourse is directly linked to power and power is linked to knowledge, and knowledge to the rise of institutions, to what Foucault calls the rise of "regimes of truth" and to the emergence of experts. Accordingly, discourse becomes both a site and a stake in power struggles.

Foucault proposed that more than being merely coercive, concentrated and possessed by a certain group or embodied in a certain institution, power should be viewed first and foremost as discursive and productive – productive of knowledge and of subjects. This prescribes a view of power as diffuse, embodied in "regimes of truth", hence, as existing in discourse. Foucault speaks of the "[o]mnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere." (Foucault, 1990: 93). It is especially this position on the relationship between discourse and power that is taken up in CDA.

Given the centrality of the relationship between power and discourse in CDA, the analysis of this paper is permeated by a consideration of power, a concern with how power constraints the discourses and discursive practices around the issue of overpopulation. According to Fairclough, power constraints discourse in three ways: by constraining content which is, in other words, a constraint on what is and what can be said, and what is and what can be done; by constraining the social relations that can be entered into in discourse; and finally, by constraining the sorts of subject positions that can be occupied by people in discourses.

Hence, discourse helps construct systems of knowledge and belief, social identities and social relations (1989: 105). Discourses thus fulfil three functions; an ideational, an identity and a relational function. The current research's interest lies principally with the ideational function of discourse, namely, the power to constrain content and thereby knowledge and beliefs, the power to favour certain interpretations of events while excluding others. It is the system of knowledge and beliefs, and the meanings that get reproduced through the discourse and the texts on overpopulation that are the focus of the paper. It goes without saying that the current paper adheres to the view that discourse functions as both a site of and a stake in power struggles.

Another contribution to CDA is Foucault's views on what he calls a 'field of presence', that is, the intratextual relation between different statements and discourse, how statements and discourses originating and formulated elsewhere are taken up and combined in intricate ways to produce new complex discourses. According to Foucault, 'there can be no statement that in one way or another does not re-actualize others' (qtd. in Fairclough, 1992: 47). The implication of this is that the social relevance and meaning of any given discourse depends on its relation with other discourses – on how it draws for its meaning upon other available discourses. This has been referred to elsewhere as "intertextuality" and yet by others as "interdiscursivity". Fairclough uses the terms interdiscursivity and intertextuality rather than Foucault's "field of presence" (1992: 102).

Though Foucault's theory on discourse can be proven a necessary contribution to CDA, there are however some limits to the usefulness of his theory given that one of CDA's main concerns is with the conditions of change of oppressive discursive practices and of social structures in general. Foucault's concept of power has been criticized for not giving due consideration to the possibilities of change and to the possibilities of dominated groups to resist dominant systems. Fairclough positions himself against what he sees in Foucault's discourse theory as the overt determination of the subject in discourse which makes it impossible to envisage meaningful agency by the subject, making social change a difficult concept and pursuit (1992: 57). Fairclough, on the other hand, views the relationship between discourse and social subjects as a dialectical one so that social subjects are seen as both constructed in discourse and determined by discursive practices yet also as able to reshape those same discursive practices (Ibid: 45).

To repeat, though CDA operates within a post-structuralist perspective, Fairclough takes distance from post-structuralism's "judgmental relativism" and from the characteristic tendency in postmodernism to reduce the whole of social life to discourse. According to him, discourse is a "form of social practice" rather than simply an individualized act or a result of some situational variables (1989: 63). This proposition implies that there are two ways of thinking about discourse; first, discourse is a form of action, a way of acting upon the world and upon each other. Secondly, discourse is in a dialectical relationship with social structure. This means that discourse is on one hand socially determined, and, on the other hand, social structure is discursively constituted. In other words, discourse not only is a reflection and a representation of the social world, but it also signifies and constructs the world in meaning by shaping and constraining social structure. A dialectical view of the interplay between discourse and the social helps us, according to Fairclough, to avoid the pitfalls of either overstating the determination of the social in discourse or the determination of discourse in the social. As he argues; "the former turns discourse into a mere reflection of a deeper social reality, the latter idealistically represents discourse as the source of the social." (1989: 65)

According to Fairclough, there are two types of social order; the societal and the institutional, and each is constituted by a corresponding order of discourse. The order of discourse and the social order are not independent of one another, but rather the former is part of the latter. The order of discourse is the discursive dimension of the social order (1989: 29 – 30). Any given order of discourse structures the relationship between the discursive types that are contained within it in relationships of complementarity and of competition, of struggle for dominance etc. In other words, the order of discourse is a social structuring of the relationships between different ways of making meaning. In any given institution or social order, certain ways of making meaning are more dominant while others are considered marginal or oppositional. It is however important to note that the order of discourse is not a closed system, but is rather subject to contestation, struggles of language and struggles to fix meaning. This relation of competition and struggle for dominance that exists between different discourses makes that the concept of hegemony is an important point of analysis in CDA as some ways of representing, through becoming dominant may serve as legitimisers of relations of power and domination (1989: 31-35).

Discourses are first and foremost positioned; in other words, they are different representations from different positions. That discourses are different representations of particular aspects of the world from particular perspectives depends on the fact that these representations are

themselves the effects of the different relations that people have to the world, relations which in turn are contingent upon their socio-cultural position, identities and their interpersonal relationships. This implies that the same aspects of the world may be represented differently by different discourses, which makes one of the tasks of CDA to have to consider the relations – relations of competition, domination and hegemony – that may exist between competing discourses (Fairclough, 2003: 124). Consequently, in the population discourse, different representations (different discourses) struggle to define the meaning of the population crisis. And depending on the discourse, the priorities and the suggested solutions to tackling the issue may be different.

To repeat, the meaning of texts can never be understood through an analysis of their contents alone. This is why a critical discourse analysis requires constant contextualization – understanding discourses in the light of their social context. That critical discourse analysis implies an analysis of the text in its context also means that discourses to a certain extent gain their full meaning through a consideration of their relationship to previously produced discourses and texts or those that are simultaneously occurring (Titscher, et al., 2000: 148). This speaks for the need of an intertextual and interdiscursive analysis as important aspects of a critical discourse analysis. Hence, every newly produced text is a re-articulation of other texts, and it is these texts that also condition its meaning. Consequently, as will become clear through the course of this paper is how important it is to understand the text under study in light of the previously released works of Thomas Malthus, Paul Ehrlich and others whose ideas and theories have significantly contributed in the population debate.

It is this aspect of critical discourse analysis – a consideration of the intertextuality and interdiscursivity of texts – that enables the analysis to integrate important elements of the context with the text and to link such an occasional event as is the text to more durable social structures. Moreover, through the intertextual and interdiscursive analysis, it becomes possible to evaluate whether the text in question contributes to or whether it merely reproduces the current order of discourse and hence contributes to the stability of the dominant social order (J&P, 73).

The Three Discourses

In *Gender and Nation*, Yuval-Davis identifies three major discourses that tend to dominate national policies on population control; the “people as power” discourse, the eugenicist discourse and the Malthusian discourse (1997: 21). Moreover, regardless of which of the three discourses dominates actual policies in a given state, the family retains a central role in techniques of population control by governments. And the reason why this is so, is due to the fact that the family is the privileged instrument of the state through which information about the population is received.

Simply put, the people-as-power discourse means that a nation, or simply a group of people, depends for its future and for its survival on its continuous growth. Different nations have at some point in history encouraged or, in some instances, coerced women to reproduce. This can be seen in cases as various as the tendency in settler societies (such as took place in Australia) to incorporate “reproduction” as a crucial aspect of their national-building process; the incentive here being ‘to populate or perish’ (Yuval Davis, 1997: 29). Another case is Israel where measures for population growth included the immigration of “desired” groups – more exclusively Jewish – to populate the country. In other societies where there have been two or more national groupings or ethnical groups competing for the same territory, the discourse has been on keeping up the ‘demographic balance’ of the territory (examples of such nations being Lebanon, Cyprus, Bulgaria, the Former Yugoslavia, the Northern Ireland etc.). In such cases, government measures have varied from simple policies that encourage having more children to measures that criminalize abortion. In the US, the discourse has mostly been on the ‘demographic race’ as more or less outspoken efforts have been made to retain the “hegemony of the hegemonic collectivity” by encouraging the reproduction of the “desirable” groups (Ibid: 30). However, in the case of the US, corresponding measures were taken to discourage the reproduction of the “undesired” groups (such as the blacks, immigrants, the “feeble-minded”, etc.) through, for instance, forced sterilization or compulsory contraception.

The eugenicist discourse on the other hand is concerned less with the size than with the “quality” of the “national stock”. Hence, steps are taken to improve the “biological” characteristics of the nation by favoring the reproduction of the “good stock” (the supposedly “genetically” superior) while simultaneously discouraging the “genetically” inferior from reproducing (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 32). It is thus unsurprising that the category of the “genetically inferior” has included various groups of people such as the “feeble-minded”, the

poor, the uneducated, blacks, immigrants, etc. Though occurring in diverse ways and to some different extent, different countries have through various national measures encouraged the reproduction of some groups at the detriment of others.

The population discourse of Third World countries has however been predominated by the Malthusian discourse that is predicated upon a kind of “democratic panic”, the belief in an imminent crisis of a population that can’t feed itself as a consequence of excessive population growth. Thomas Malthus, British clergyman turned economist, predicted in the late 1800’s that population if unchecked would outgrow global resources since population growth followed a geometrical rate while food supply grew only at an arithmetic rate (Bauman, 2004: 36). It is exactly such discourse that has become the basis for the contemporary human population control movement. Moreover, the importance of such discourse is made all the more critical as it has increasingly become the cornerstone of population policies adopted by many developing countries themselves. Such policies are considered an important national development strategy, central in the solving of the economic and social problems in the Third World. However, these national population control policies are often much less the consequence of an internal governmental strategy than they are the result of measures induced externally due to the perceived national interests at stake of international donors (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Opinions have varied as to whether there is an actual correlation between population growth and economic performance, or the opposite, a correlation between population reduction and economic growth. Despite the never-ending calls to combat an impending “population explosion”, it has been argued that a look beyond such purely numerical demographic calculations reveals what is often hidden from sight in such calculations, namely, the socio-cultural realities at work. And, hence, one important aspect of this seemingly neutral “war against overpopulation” becomes instead the very realities and rationales of the unacknowledged side of this war (Bauman: 2004; Yuval-Davis: 1997). Yuval-Davis has, among others, argued that what perhaps lies behind the incessant cries to fight what is perceived as an imminent population crisis and the fears that get produced is “a racist fear of being ‘swamped’ by the non-western others” (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 33). After all, though the prospect of a surplus of “them” is always cause of fear; on the home front, the reverse is also true – a decrease in fertility rates is enough to cause worry (Bauman, 2004). As will become evident, these three aforementioned discourses are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In some instances, the Malthusian and Eugenics discourse may simultaneously co-exist and

dominate the public debate on population control through the use of different reproduction policies for different groups.

On the global level, on the other hand, through the promotion of such differential demographic policies characteristic of the contemporary population control movement, a North-South divide gets formed (a sort of global apartheid), in which, reminiscent of a eugenicist type of discourse, the fear of a less desirable “stock” that reproduces faster than the superior stock becomes the basis of various policy measures – both national and international – to population control.

Analysis

According to Fairclough et al., two things in particular need to be established prior to a discourse analysis; to establish what features characterize the specific discourse under analysis, and to clarify how to recognize its presence in the text and its continuation despite apparent shifts and changes in the language and emphasis of the discourse. In what follows, I intend to establish those features of the discourse by first establishing the social and historical context, that is, through a historical reading of the population control movement. (Fairclough et al 2004: 3)

This section is concerned with mapping the origins of the population movement, and with tracing the events and processes that made possible the creation of a “population crisis” and in so doing made visible and opened up the body population, its size and quality, as a space necessitating intervention and management. The goal is to look at how procreation was discursively constituted as a governable space, and as a field of knowledge with corresponding practices. In the process, what started as an ideologically fragmented movement gradually culminated into a population consensus where certain norms (Western norms of procreation) and reproductive behaviors were valorized as healthier, more ethical, economically productive and more responsible (Walter-Greene, 2011: 6). In the following sections, I attempt to trace the history of the population debate from Thomas Malthus to the contemporary population movement.

An Essay on a Principle of Population

Thomas Malthus' *An Essay on The Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society* argued that population always tended to increase exponentially while food increase was only linear. In other words, the former increased by multiplication while

food increased by addition. As a general rule, according to Malthus, “population, when unchecked, goes on doubling itself every twenty-five years” (Malthus, 1798: 7). There seemed, as he predicted, to be a race between the rate of population increase and the increase in food supply, a race in which the power of population always topped the available means of subsistence. Hence, populations always tended to outgrow the food supply needed for their survival. Furthermore, Malthus believed that there was an inevitable vicious circle where population could not increase without a simultaneous increase in the means of subsistence. But, on the other hand, where the means of subsistence were available population would dramatically increase to the point where the available resources no longer could support the growing population. This he saw as the “principle of population” at work in the history of all people. The English North American colonies (the United States) were a case in point where a favorable environment in terms of abundant means of subsistence had made possible an increase in population “without parallel in history” (Ibid: 33). This confirmed his thesis that populations always tended to multiply greatly in areas with plenty of resources whilst the rate of population growth decreased in areas with limited means of subsistence. However, as he also argued, though “the power in the earth to produce subsistence” seemed to match that of population, we ought not to be misled into thinking that food and population will always increase at an equal rate. Sooner or later, it will be found that the power in the earth goes on diminishing while population goes on in the reverse direction. The availability of food will then be contingent upon the amelioration of already available land; however, even technological advancement will not forever be able to keep up with a constantly increasing population (Ibid: 34).

According to Malthus there were two types of checks on population growth that offered a solution to the imbalance between population increase and food supply; preventive and positive checks. Preventive checks consisted of voluntary restraints made by “rational” individuals to limit their birth rates. These, he suggested, included economic calculations by the prospective bride and groom based on their income and the quality of life they can expect for themselves and their families. These also included late marriages and celibacy. However, without voluntary preventive checks to counter the overwhelming power of population, population growth would eventually, against the will of man, be brought back to balance by “misery and vice”, that is, “the constant operation of the strong law of necessity acting as a check upon the greater power” of population (Malthus, 1798: 8). These positive checks as he called them were periods of famines, epidemics, war and other ills brought upon by excessive

population growth that increased the death rate of population and hence served to curb overpopulation and re-establish the balance between population and resources. Without voluntary preventive checks, it was, according to him, those “positive checks” that would function as “able ministers of depopulation” (Ibid:61).

The consequences of the imbalance between food increase and population increase would, according to Malthus, always tend to subjugate the lower classes more severely. Malthus was also convinced there existed a correlation between the high birth rates he saw prevailed (he witnessed) among the lower classes and their poor economic conditions. Furthermore, Malthus was a strong opponent of the English Poor Laws because he thought they would have negative consequences for population growth. The English Poor Laws that dated as far back as the late 1500 were laws that regulated poor relief to the needy. According to Malthus, giving money to the poor would only encourage increased birth rates as they would give the false impression to the poor classes that the resources to support large families were readily available. As he puts it:

“...I think it will be allowed that considering the state of the lower classes altogether, both in the towns and in the country, the distresses which they suffer from the want of proper and sufficient food, from hard labour and unwholesome habitations, must operate as a constant check to incipient population.”(1798: 31)

Alleviating the poverty of the lower classes was to Malthus socially unfeasible. As he argued, “to remove the wants of the lower classes of society is indeed an arduous task”, because even attempting to do so would only succeed to lessen the wellbeing of the general population since as populations grew, resources would not be sufficient for everybody. According to Malthus, the poverty he witnessed among the lower classes would not be resolved by increasing productivity as that would only offer a temporary relief, but, he rather advocated for different kinds of fertility control such as late marriage, celibacy, etc. On the usefulness of the English Poor Laws, he concluded that “an abolition of all the present parish laws seems to be the best calculated to increase the mass of happiness among the common people of England.” (1798: 31). In the present, high fertility was identified to be the cause of poverty among the lower classes who as it seemed were reproducing faster than the higher classes. In the future, it would lead to even more misery, hunger and poverty. Limiting the birth rates of the poor had *paradoxically*, according to his theory, the potential to better their economic situation. By contesting giving financial aid to the poor, in other words what Malthus was

arguing for was that it was only by reducing their fertility that the poor classes could improve their situation. This marked the beginning of a long history of linking many of the social ills affecting humanity to population growth – a rather simplified explanation for such complex social problems. Unsurprisingly, the solution to those problems is simply thought to be found in limiting population growth.

Malthus believed that even if technological improvements could increase agricultural yields, this could only offer a temporary relief to the population growth issue as any improvement in living standards always tended to lead to a corresponding increase in population thus canceling the previous benefits of technological advancement (Malthus, 1798). Hence, he argued that the threat of famine due to overpopulation could never be overcome by increasing food productivity; the impending catastrophe could be postponed but could never be canceled. As Malthus was a man of his time, he also considered the role of emigration in alleviating population pressures in the sending country. Writing at the dawn of the industrial revolution, Malthus never anticipated the full impact that technology would come to have on food production. For Malthus, farmland would remain an inhibiting factor to any further population growth.

Malthus, by problematizing reproduction (in particular, the reproduction of the “lower” classes), the domain of procreation was from then on made available for public debate, for scrutiny, and if necessary, for regulation. Moreover, by making the link between the individual reproductive behaviors of the working classes and the economic and social welfare of the entire nation and by problematizing that link, Malthus could make visible the reproduction of the working classes as an activity that was in particular need of intervention and remodeling for the sake of the general welfare of the nation. Reproduction was now turned into a social problem, and, in so doing, Malthus succeeded in bringing procreation out of “the realm of the natural” into the “realm of the governable”. And, as Malthus’ theory traveled, it was successively made into the type of issue “that required the intervention of specialized discourses, practices, techniques, and knowledges” (Walter-Greene, 1999: 38).

One of the most enduring aspects of Malthus’ theory that has persistently exerted an influence is simply his arguments on the importance of the relationship between population growth and the economic development of a nation. It is then unsurprising that his theory has become central to the development discourse of the “third world” as family planning is increasingly

marketed as a vital tool for the empowerment of the poor in developing nations and within developed nations.

Moreover, the influence of Malthus' theory has stretched beyond the field of economics, though his influence was initially restricted to that field. Malthus' arguments in *An Essay* helped shape the theory of natural selection. Darwin saw in Malthus' theory the proof of "the struggle for existence" that goes on everywhere from plants and animals to human beings, where man produces more offspring than can possibly survive. Similar to Darwin's survival of the fittest, the lower classes because of their limited resources would have less chance for survival. In Darwin's own words; in Malthus' theory he "had at last got a theory by which to work". Both theories later came to shape the field of eugenics (Darwin, 1876).

As the nineteenth century proceeded, the influence of Malthus' theory gradually declined as a result of technological advancement, increasing agricultural productivity in spite of an increasing population and the discovery of new territory for agriculture in the colonies, the opening of new markets for international trade, among others. It will be in the North American colonies that Malthusian overpopulation fears would be revived again in the beginning of the twentieth century.

It is important to view *An Essay on the Principle of Population* in the wider context whence it originated. Malthus wrote his *An Essay* in the early years of the industrial revolution when the population of Britain had gone through significant increases. This caused Malthus and others with similar concerns to conclude that the size of population would continue growing until it could be successfully checked by epidemics, famines, and catastrophes resulting from overpopulation. Different factors contributed to this dramatic increase in population; a decline of the death rate, increasing birth rate, increasing availability of food. Moreover, industry offered greater employment opportunities and higher wages than was previously available. thus this making it possible for people to marry and have children earlier. However, through industrialization, cities and settlement centers around the factories grew at a very rapid pace, and they grew dirtier, more crowded and unregulated, public health and sanitation worsened to the point that there were repeated outbreaks of diseases. The very poor working and living conditions of the working classes were constant objects of concern.

Malthus wrote *An Essay* as a reaction to those intellectuals, social reformers such as William Goldwin and the Marquis de Condorcet, who believed that all the ills subjecting men were socially conditioned and could be eradicated with the right social structures. His book was

part of an intellectual debate on the roots of poverty. Malthus argued that there was a crucial relationship between the poverty of the lower classes and their reproductive behaviors. For Malthus, the poverty of the poor was conditioned upon their tendency to over-reproduce – to reproduce beyond the resources available to them. This he believed was particular to the lower classes and it explained the poor living conditions that they were subject to. Throughout history and in every society, there was always one part of the population living in poverty. Misery such as famines and poverty were, according to this view, natural consequences of the imbalance between population increase and food increase.

Some viewed Malthus' theory as an attempt to rationalize and justify the social inequalities generated by the Industrial revolution. Malthus' arguments on the economics of overpopulation helped to confine the causes, consequences and the solution of poverty to the lower classes and to their reproductive behaviors and hence served to legitimize, according to Marx's and Engel's critique of Malthus, the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class. Following Marxist tradition, Lenin also rejected Malthus' theory as "an attempt on the part of bourgeois ideologists to exonerate capitalism and to prove the inevitability of privation and misery for the working class under any social system". (Lenin, 1913).

One can already see here the tendency to individualize socio-economic problems. By linking the cause of the poverty of the lower classes to their reproductive behaviors, Malthus is able to legitimize his opposition to the Poor Laws. Malthus's theory also represents the beginning of an attempt to link procreation to economics (Greene, 1999: 39)

The Birth of a Movement

It is important to narrate the historical trajectory of Malthusianism through a brief but necessary recounting of the development of Malthusianism in early twentieth century United States. Events that took place here are an important link to the later institutionalization of population control (both in the US and internationally), and, it is events that took place in the United States that came to increasingly shape the trajectory of the population movement.

The theory of Malthus did not at first resonate with the situation in America where there were few people relative to an availability of abundant fertile land and where food supply depended on the access to a great army of labor to work on the land. Hence, America proved, at least initially, to be an exception to the Malthusian "principle of population". Through the

unfolding of new events; with the “end of the frontier” and as America was now “filling up”, Malthusianism started to gain a foothold in the United States. (Hodgson, 1991: 24)

New fears partly caused by heated immigration debates resurrected old Malthusian concerns. But, in the United States, Malthusianism came to take a slightly different course. It was in the US that Malthusian concerns came to become increasingly intermingled with the eugenics movement, and in the process gave rise to a new kind of Malthusianism that differed from Malthus’s original theory on important aspects (Hodgson, 1991: 5).

Fertility declines among city dwellers and the affluent had started being noticed as early as the mid-nineteenth century. But it was not until the end of the century, as the country experienced increasing immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe and to some lesser extent from China and Japan that the decreasing fertility among the upper- and middle class White population of northwestern European descent started becoming a problem. From having been previously referred to as an act of “prudence” stemming from the desire to only have a number of children that could adequately be provided for, fertility declines were now referred to as “selfishness” and “race suicide” (Hodgson, 1991: 10).

This growing concern with immigration was two-fold; the newly arrived groups were reported to reproduce at a much higher rate than were the “natives” (Walker, 1896: 828). But this was also a question of preserving “the American rate of wages”. As America had ended its territorial expansion, as all the best lands were already under cultivation and with a growing industrial and urban infrastructure, there was a corresponding declining demand for unskilled labor and increasing competition within the working class. The newcomers were now out-competing the “natives” by being willing to work for lower wages (Hodgson, 1991: 5).

The new anxieties originated from growing demographic fears that the quantity and quality of the population was now being threatened by, as one commentator at the time observed, “beaten men from beaten races; representing the worst failures in the struggle for existence” (Walker, 1896: 828). The old Malthusian concerns about the economics of reproduction were now coupled with concerns about the “compositional characteristics of the reproducing body” (Walter-Greene, 1999: 39). As another concerned writer noted at the time; “The economic question is by no means the most important one to consider in the problem of immigration. It is a race question and the birth rate shows the racial group that is to survive.” (Bushee, 1903: 61) Whereas traditional Malthusianism was concerned with the fact that populations if

unchecked tended to increase faster than the means of subsistence, the concern was now that though a population increase was taking place, the greatest fears resided in that it was being caused by the “inferior” races. This redirected the attention from a concern with the economic “prosperity of a nation” to one about the “biological quality” of the population. This re-articulation of the Malthusian discourse with a eugenic discourse gave rise to a new form of Malthusianism; what Hodgson calls “biological Malthusianism” (1991: 5). This problematization of different groups’ reproductive behavior came to set the course for population concerns and debates in the United States for the following years.

Interests in population matters already existed in fields as various as biology, public health, geography, history, sociology, economics, statistics, law and politics. Population issues were also important for different political activists, especially so for reproductive rights activists. And because of this very broad and diffuse character of the population field, there existed no consensus on which population problem was the most pertinent. Beliefs on what constituted a threat to the nation ranged from concerns on “overpopulation, depopulation, uncontrolled fertility, excessively controlled fertility, unrestricted immigration, race suicide, race degradation”, etc.(1991: 1). Hence, neither the history of the field or of the resultant discipline of demography can ever be thought of as a simple straightforward one, but a rather complex one where different discourses and ideologies converged and struggled for dominance.

Though today’s demographers may be appalled by some of the beliefs about race, gender and class that were dominating in early twentieth century debates on population, examining the historical context and ideologies that influenced earlier thinking is a worthwhile task. Not only does it elucidate the ideologies that contributed to the establishment of the discipline, but it also, as Dennis Hodgson has observed, “highlights an aspect of the field often overlooked today: concern about population arises as much from value considerations as from demographic trends.” (1991: 2)

The first attempts to institutionalize the management and control of population took place within private foundations. Hodgson traces the history of the population movement back to one meeting that was held in December of 1931 at the New York University office of Henry Pratt Fairchild, himself a strong proponent of immigration restriction. Thirteen guests in total were convened, all with one common denominator; a concern with research and work in the area of population. This came to be known as the first meeting of the Population Association

of America (Hodgson, 1991: 2). According to Hodgson, the list of invitees alone is very telling of the divergent strands that made up the field of population in the United States in the early years of the movement. There were four major factions that early on constituted the population movement; the eugenicists, the immigration restrictionists, the birth control movement and the population scientists (Hodgson, 1991: 2-3). To some of the members of the Population Association of America claiming allegiance to one of the factions did not preclude adopting one of the other views as well. Henry Pratt Fairchild that had summoned the meeting and that later went on to become the Population Association Movement's first elected president is a case in point. According to Hodgson, "Fairchild uniquely personified the disparate elements of early twentieth-century American population thought: a nativist with clear eugenicist leanings who had an academic post teaching courses in population studies while serving on the Board of Directors of Margaret Sanger's birth control clinic." (Ibid: 21). In the person of Fairchild, we see the physical materialization of the eclectic character of the early population movement. Having said that, the Population Association of America still existed in the midst of great internal controversies. In its earlier days, the organization's purpose was "the improvement, advancement, and progress of the human race by means of research with respect to problems connected with human population, in both its quantitative and qualitative aspects." (Walter-Greene, 1999: 41)

Though the election of Fairchild could point to the relative dominance of biological Malthusianism in the early stages of the Population Association of America, important events in the late 1930s made that the organization quickly came under the dominance of population scientists. By the end of WWII, Nazi Germany had largely succeeded in rendering eugenics unpopular and discrediting it. On the other hand, there had already been rising demands, following the Great Depression, within different government institutions and private companies such as life insurance companies for the sort of detailed demographic analysis that population scientists offered. Population statistics enabled the rise of a "science of the state"; the registry of "[p]ersons in the land, their ages, their places and forms of habitation, their employment, their births, illnesses, and deaths – all these were noted and transcribed. They were turned into figures, and collected together at central points; the unruly population was rendered into a form in which it could be used in political arguments and administrative decisions." (Walter-Greene, 1999: 43). It is in this context that demography emerged as a scientific discipline in its own right culminating in the establishment of the Office of Population Research at Princeton University. These "population scientists" could now set

themselves apart from the “popular writers” on population issues and from social activists such as the Birth Control movement activists through their “insistence on empirical research methods” (Ibid, 46 & 47). Population scientists came from then on to set the tone for the population movement.

Though, by the end of WWII, social Darwinism and eugenics had been on the way out, this does not, according to Walter-Greene, mean that the old racist ideology was banned from the population movement, but rather that the racist effects of biological Malthusianism came to be re-stated and were now operating under the guise of a new discourse on population (1999: 49). The Great Depression had been marked by a period of fertility declines in the United States. But, faced with rising fertility rates in Asia and in Africa, there were increasing interests in Malthusian problematizations of population growth. The attention was now redirected to the differential reproduction rates between the “West” and the “rest”, resulting in the formulation of the famous theory on population growth, the “demographic transition” theory. It is in this context that the Indian famines of the 1960s, which the proponents of Malthusianism claimed were a consequence of the unequal relationship between high population growth and food supply, came to become the archetype of how unchecked population growth in the Third World would come to affect the economic welfare of populations in the developed world (Ibid: 47).

As the demographic transition gained popularity, it became increasingly the new discourse on overpopulation. Efforts were also made to institutionalize the population issue at the international level. And in 1969, through the mediation of the US, the United Nations Population Fund was created. Through the demographic transition theory, Malthusian discourse on the relation between population and resources could be exported to the Third World. An international population crisis was created by bringing together a Malthusian-type of discourse on population growth with a development discourse (Walter-Greene, 157). The same way as Malthus problematized the reproductive practices of the poor, by adding development to the equation, the reproduction of the Third World increasingly became the focus of international development agencies. And, similar to Malthus’ theory, through the discourse on economic development, procreation was assessed in terms of how it affected the economic welfare of the Third World. Through the UN an institutional site was created where the expertise to assess and manage all the different harms brought upon by population growth could thrive. In the times Malthus lived in, it was the situation of the poor that fueled public

debate on the population question. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was the newly independent countries, racial and ethnic minorities that became the focus of attention.

In the late 1960s American biologist Paul Ehrlich released the *population Bomb*. In it he warned of an impending overpopulation crisis which he predicted would take place in 1970s where hundreds of millions of people would starve to death. Through environmentalists such as Ehrlich, attempts were made to link population and economics to yet another variable, that is, the environment. A discourse on environmental degradation added “a necessary supplement” and incentive in the mission to combat population growth. Here is also the same emphasis on limits, though the set of limits contained within the later discourse encompasses more factors than the one envisaged by Malthus; from a concern on food, to the fear that a growing population not only threatens the survival of families, groups of people, states but also the entire biosphere. There is also the same imbalance between population (population growth) and resources.

Here I have attempted to present the history of the population movement as one of a contested field where controversies abounded and where the narrative that dominated the field at any given time in history should be viewed as a product of the historical conditions and the struggles over meaning that took place within the movement. Through an account of the history of the field we are also reminded of the claim that the discipline of demography is “the offspring of mixed parentage and stormy unions” (Hodgson, 1991: 3).

Program of Action

Setting the Context

For activists and commentators alike, the Cairo International conference on Population and Development was upheld as an important “paradigm shift” and a milestone in the history of population policy and in the history of women’s rights. From the conference, there occurred an important shift in emphasis from a strict focus on demographic targets to a people-first and rights-based approach. This was, it is argued, an approach that, like never before in the context of population policy, stressed the primacy of human welfare needs and sustainable development goals in the place of demographic reduction concerns. Most notable was that sexual and reproductive health issues were now moved to the center of population policy. It was agreed that promoting sexual and reproductive rights were key to poverty eradication and to development. And this was of course, for many observers, a great leap forward from the

population debate's troubled past. Others also argued that Cairo managed to move the population debate beyond the simplistic and reductionist theories that were characteristic of the population movement for years to a position that acknowledged the complexity of the population issues (Brigham, 2012).

Again, according to Alison McIntosh, the success of the Cairo conference lay in the fact that it could set itself apart from its predecessors – the Bucharest and Mexico City population conferences of 1974 and 1984 – on significant issues. Moreover, the success of the conference can also be attributed to the successful introduction of new “symbols and concepts” in the discourse on population (1995: 249). She also points to the fact that the conference coincided with a couple of changes and events that played an important role in the outcome of the conference, such as the rising influence of the international feminist movement, the end of the Cold of War and the election of a liberal president in Washington. And the result of it all was that “a new definition of population policy was advanced, giving prominence to reproductive health and the empowerment of women while downplaying the demographic rationale for population policy.” (Ibid: 223).

Others point to the fact that the report did not depend on the common “apocalyptic” imagery that for long had characterized the population control movement. Moreover, instead of limiting the discussion to mere calculations of fertility rates and a pure concern with increasing the availability and use of contraceptives, the document included a wider range of issues such as gender equality, universal education, high infant mortality and morbidity, maternal health and even the prevention and treatment of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The program of action also included new categories such as “adolescents” and “men” (Brigham, 2012: 11) Others argue that the very fact that these issues were given equal consideration at the Cairo conference is an indication to how far the world has come since the time when the debate only focused on the “population bomb”.

Though not a legally binding document, the Program of Action was signed by 179 countries and enjoyed widespread support from a range of organizations. The document affirmed the commitment by states to assure general “reproductive health for all by 2015”. And, for the first time since Bucharest and Mexico City, the Holy See joined the Cairo consensus though with some reservations. What was also remarkable about the conference, it is further argued, was the unprecedented number of attendees as a great number of different groups (especially women's rights activists) and NGOs were invited to participate in the conference, and with that a great number of different issues weaved together from “multiple contextual threads”

were brought to the table for debate leading to the production of a more “holistic” perspective of and a more complex analytical framework for population issues. Moreover, the inclusiveness of the conference also made possible the break from traditional “finger-pointing”, characteristic of the previous international population conferences (Brigham, 2012: 12).

It might be admitted that in light of the two international population conferences that preceded it, Cairo might have somewhat seemed as a “novelty”. While there had previously been clear tensions and confrontations between developed and developing countries, it appeared as if somehow down the road leading to Cairo, consensus had been reached. The Program of Action attributes this change to “an emerging global consensus on the need for increased international cooperation in the context of sustainable development” and to “major shifts in attitude among the world’s people and their leaders in regard to reproductive health, family planning and population growth”. (Program of Action: 6 & 8). The argument I’m advancing here, however, is that this change in “attitude” is not necessarily the result of a recent realization by the world of the importance of a more people-centered view on population issues and of international cooperation, but it must rather be viewed as part of important discursive changes in the population discourse taking place prior to the conference and that could command greater support for the population agenda from the international community than ever before.

The question that the present section seeks to answer is whether the Cairo conference of 1994 really was the turning point of population policy and discourses as some have claimed, and whether it constitutes a redefinition of population discourse politics. I’d like to argue that through a close-reading of the conference’s report, the Cairo conference and its Program of Action bear, on the contrary, significant seeds from its past. Instead of views that present it as a major “paradigm shift” in the history of population policy, the Program of Action needs to be viewed as a continuation of the same population control discourse. With that said, one must here be able to establish important links between the text and its social and historical context.

In order to do that, one needs to analyze the present text in relation to its historical context through an intertextual analysis. In this way, it becomes possible to see how previous statements and texts on overpopulation get reproduced in the current text and contribute in giving it its meaning. In a way, looking at the text in its broader historical context, one finds out that the text says much more than what appears to be on the face of it.

An Intertextual Analysis

The Program of Action, is a 113-pages long report, extending over sixteen chapters including the preamble and a chapter on “Principles”. With the exception of these two introductory chapters all the other chapters of the text follow the same arrangement where each chapter (each topic) is composed of sub-sections (sub-topics) and where each of those sub-sections follow the same form: “Basis for Action”, “Objectives” and “Actions”. The major topics addressed by the document range from issues as diverse as gender equality, reproductive rights and reproductive health, the role of the family, education, international migration, urbanization, sustainable development and population growth. The Program of Action, the document itself states, is to serve as a guideline for population programs and actions at the UN and in individual countries over a period of 20 years.

In order to show the continuing relevance of the population discourse in the present text, it is highly important to account for how prior texts and statements get reproduced through the text. The overarching argument of this section is then that it is only through an intertextual analysis that the ‘insertion of history (society) into’ the Program of Action becomes clear (Fairclough, 1992). Through an intertextual analysis, we are looking for traces of the presence of other statements and texts in the present text. We want to look at how the present text implicitly and explicitly draws from other texts for the legitimation of its authority and how truth claims are thus accomplished and legitimized. The implication of this is that the social relevance and meaning of any statement depends on its relation with other statements.

Intertextuality also enables us to look for traces of ideology in the text (Fairclough, 1993:133)

On the merits of an intertextual analysis, Fairclough argues that to be able to fully make sense of a text one must establish connections or a “fit” between the different parts of the text with a “coherent, though not necessarily unitary, determinate or ambivalent, whole” (1993: 133).

One way of establishing intertextuality is looking at how the incorporation of other texts into the current text is achieved through presuppositions (“presupposed propositions). What makes presuppositions an important aspect of analysis is that presuppositions can be used to manipulate meaning. According to Fairclough, presuppositions can have ideological effects when what is assumed has the function of “common sense in the service of power” (1989:107). It is intertextuality that accounts for the complex and ambivalent nature of texts.

Since it is the insertion of women's welfare needs and goals into the Program of Action that accounted for what many argued was a re-definition of the population debate, it is to the re-articulation of the population control discourse with the reproductive health discourse that I now turn. Given how extensive the Program of Action is, I have chosen to only concentrate on the chapter on "Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights" even since reproductive health is also a major part of the success attributed to Cairo.

The chapter on reproductive rights and reproductive health is divided into five main topics: reproductive rights and reproductive health; family planning; sexually transmitted diseases and prevention of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV); human sexuality and gender relations and Adolescents. It is also worth mentioning that besides this chapter, there are three more chapters in the document that give a detailed consideration to gender issues and women's health issues; these are respectively the chapter on "Gender Equality, Equity and Empowerment of women", the chapter on "The Family, Its Roles, Rights, Composition and Structure" and the chapter on "Health, Morbidity and Mortality". Looked at from this perspective, Cairo was indeed a major milestone for women's rights activists. Through a redirected emphasis on reproductive health and gender equality issues, the Program of Action was able to disassociate itself from the population control movement's troubled past:

The principle of informed free choice is essential to the long-term success of family-planning programs. Any form of coercion has no part to play... Over the past century, many governments have experimented with such schemes, including specific incentives and disincentives, in order to lower or raise fertility. Most such schemes have had only marginal impact on fertility and in some cases have been counterproductive. Governmental goals for family planning should be defined in terms of unmet needs for information and services. Demographic goals while legitimately the subject of government development strategies, should not be imposed on family planning providers in the form of targets or quotas for the recruitment of clients. (Program, 1994: 43)

According to the Program of Action, what is implicit in the concept of reproductive right and what is needed in order to exercise that right to reproductive health is the "access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning" (Program, 1994: 40). Family planning is of course not an invention of the Cairo conference, and there is a long history of alliance between family planning and the population control movement. The provision of family planning services is a central concern for most issues dealt with in the Program of

Action. There are three arguments that are advanced to justify the importance of family planning for population and development programs.

1. “The aim of family-planning programs must be to enable couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information and means to do so.” (1994: 43).
2. “The success of population education and family planning programs in a variety of settings demonstrates that informed individuals everywhere can and will act responsibly in the light of their own needs and those of their families and communities (Program, 1994: 43)
3. “Owing to declining mortality levels and the persistence of high fertility levels, a large number of developing countries continue to have very large proportion of children and young people in their populations, the ongoing and future demands created by large young populations, particularly in terms of health, education and employment, represent major challenges and responsibilities for families, local communities, countries and the international community. First and foremost among these responsibilities is to ensure that every child is a wanted child.” (Program, 1994: 33)

These claims embody a number of assumptions (presuppositions). The first one is that “couples and individuals” are not able to act responsibly in their reproductive behaviors or to even space their children unless provided with family planning. The second assumption is that once given the necessary information on family planning individuals would reproduce responsibly in respect to the needs of their families, their communities and their own needs. The third assumption is that high fertility levels are a consequence of too many “unwanted” children. Put together, high numbers of population are a consequence of too many “unwanted” children being born as individuals are not able to reproduce responsibly due to a lack of access to family planning. The rationality of family planning goes of course without saying. The advocated solution is then that governments need to invest more in family planning services and family planning methods to meet widespread need.

Keeping in mind the argument intertextuality new texts are build out of prior texts and statements, from which, they draw in order to make sense and for their legitimation, I would now like to turn to the historical roots of the argument that the problem of high fertility simply can be understood as the consequence of a lack of access to family planning which results in many “unwanted pregnancies”. In 1960, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America

undertook a study on fertility and contraceptive use among the working class. In a remarkable report, *And the Poor Get Children: Sex, Contraception, and Family Planning in the Working Class*, the problem of high fertility among the working class was identified as being one of having too many “unwanted children”. The working class had larger families than they wished to have namely because of their inability to successfully plan their families. In the United States, the issue of population growth came to be recognized as “the unwanted child of poor families”. In other words, though the middle and higher classes had been able to “rationally” plan and have the size of families that they could adequately provide for, the working classes would only get there if family planning could be provided to them (Walter-Greene: 1999: 94). This perspective on the reproductive behavior of the working class went on to become the dominant view and it was later exported to the Third World.

While the arguments advanced on the merits and need for family planning is not generally accepted view, but has always been cause of controversy. There is a sense to which the Program of Action sanitizes controversy by failing to acknowledge alternative views on the subject. Here, we need to remember the argument that discourses are first and foremost positioned; they are different representations of the same aspects of the world from different socio-economic positions. These different views on the causes of high fertility contribute in favoring certain representations while devaluing the knowledge and experiences of the people that are most directly affected.

To repeat, different participants do not possess equal access to discourse. Rather, it is through discourse that unequal power relations are reproduced and legitimated. As already mentioned, there are three ways in which discourse is constrained by power; through a constraint on content, on social relations and subject positions. But, most relevant here is the way discourse constraints content (Fairclough, 1992).

The program of Action introduces yet another category among the beneficiaries of its reproductive health services, adolescents. The text argues that by promoting the education for adolescents on reproductive and sexual health and responsible sexual behaviors will contribute in helping them “attain a level of maturity required to make responsible decisions”. It will also contribute in delaying their child-bearing age, protecting them from unwanted pregnancies, minimizing health risks, curbing population growth, increasing their educational opportunities and improving their socio-economic status (Program, 1994: 43). To quote the document:

The reproductive health needs of adolescents as a group have been largely ignored to date by existing reproductive health services. The response of societies to the reproductive health needs of adolescents should be based on information that helps them attain a level of maturity required to make responsible choices. In particular, information and services should be made available to adolescents to help them understand their sexuality and protect them from unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and subsequent risk of infertility. This effort is uniquely important for the health of young women and their children, for women's self-determination and, in many countries, for efforts to slow the momentum of population growth. Motherhood at a very young age entails a risk of maternal death that is much greater than average, and the children of young mothers have higher levels of morbidity and mortality. Early childbearing continues to be an impediment to improvements to the educational, economic and social status of women in all parts of the world. (1994: 49)

What I'm interested in here is how sexual and reproductive behaviors are problematized. And through such problematization what is implicitly inferred is that by regulating reproduction a range of other goals will be reached. But of course this problematization of reproduction is very subtle. For instance, "the momentum of population growth" is not enlisted as the most immediate issue and it even becomes clouded by the other discourse on rights and needs and the health discourse. The paragraph starts off by defining the reproductive health needs of adolescents in primarily health terms (health discourse) while concentrating on the consequences of early child-bearing for health of both mother and child.

There is a problem with the way the cause and effect relation between early child-bearing and low educational opportunities and economic status is presented. And this is of course an interpretation to the portrayed problem which ignores other views on the issue, an interpretation which might help to conceal important power relations. In the developing world, for instance, where early child-bearing is often linked to child marriages, the problem of early child-bearing is more often than not a response to a lack of economic opportunities not the other around. Failing to acknowledge this fact has the consequence of reducing the causes of poverty or low economic status to failures inherent in individual actions and behaviors. Similarly, the solution to the problem will also be limited to the individual level. And, as Makoni Busi has noted, such representation is "in essence a moral discourse, not a neutral one" (2012: 418).

I'd like to emphasize the need to understand the Program of Action as a result of discursive struggles taking place at the level of the institutional order of discourse of the population movement. Discursive struggles mean that attempts are made to lock meaning. In other words, they are conflicts over meaning as different discourses struggle for dominance in a given order of discourse, whether it be a societal or institutional order of discourse. However, it is important to remember that meaning can never be fixed since the order of discourse is never a closed system but is rather subject to contestation of language and struggles to fix meaning (Fairclough, 1989). Discursive struggles can also influence dynamics of change. Here, I'd like to emphasize the need to understand the Program of Action as a result of discursive struggles taking place at the level of the institutional order of discourse of the population movement. To repeat, the Cairo conference not only brought together a variety of governments but even different organizations representing different groups and a variety of interests. It is not surprising then that what resulted was a cocktail of a range of issues all to be incorporated into a broader vision of population policy. The Program of Action is therefore a result of those discursive struggles and it was a way to reconcile in one document divergent discourses and interests. As a consequence, the document contains sixteen chapters, fourteen of which deal with a range of issues; all from reproductive health and rights, gender equality, family structure, population growth and distribution, urbanization, international migration, sustainable development, education, etc.

Some believe that the Program of Action by being too inclusive runs the risk of being so complex and multi-faceted to the point of "losing a clear residual message" (Brigham: 68). I however argue that the change in language of the population discourse that took place in Cairo should rather be viewed as attempts by the population discourse to articulate itself with emerging discourses in order to adapt to changing economic and socio-political circumstances. Prior to the Cairo conference, there had been a growing opposition from women's rights' activists that strongly criticized coercive population control programs that targeted women's bodies with complete disregard to their health, empowerment and general wellbeing (Hartman, 1995). Seen in this light, the Program of Action needs to be viewed as an attempt to reconcile divergent views and interests. I then dare to conclude that it is through the strategic co-optation of dissident voices (competing discourses) that Malthusianism managed to survive the Cairo conference. This persistence of Malthusianism needs to be seen through the malleability of the theory to changing circumstances.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to map the historical trajectory of the population control movement. By so doing, I intended to reveal the historical roots of the overpopulation discourse and to show how the population control movement emerged, how it travelled and how it has managed to survive in the midst of controversies and discursive struggles. Through a historical reading combined with an empirical analysis of the Cairo's International Conference on Population and Development's Program of Action, the aim has been to show the continuing relevance of the population control discourse in the Cairo's text. An intertextual analysis has been useful as it accounts for the way the discourse of overpopulation has discursively traveled how it has been rearticulated and how it has shifted in meaning through history.

It is the intersection and the articulation of the overpopulation discourse with other discourses, such as development, environmentalism, gender equality that have played a significant role in the production and direction of the discourse of overpopulation and that has set the pace for the regulation of population growth through different population policies. Hence, it is important to understand the resulting meaning of overpopulation as not being fixed but as being open and susceptible to change and as being the consequence of discursive struggles and power struggles over meaning.

The history of the Malthusian discourse is not a pre-ordained (straightforward one) one but it has rather been made possible through the combination of different elements, the articulation and co-articulation of different discourses. It is through the constant re-articulation of the overpopulation discourse with other discourses in order to adapt to changing economic and socio-political circumstances or through the strategic co-optation of dissident voices (competing discourses) that the Malthusian discourse has managed to survive. The present task takes seriously the claim that "the population crisis is a fabrication, something built out of materials and subject to historical change and intervention" (Walter-Greene, 1999:15) In talking about Malthusianism, it is important to think about all the different transitions and metamorphoses Malthusianism has gone through from its original context, which has determined its current shape. What I have tried to show is that it is not possible to fully fathom the consequences of Malthusianism, the beliefs, values and theoretical heritage underlying the theory unless one is acquainted with its origin and its historical trajectory.

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