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Dangerous Demographies The Scientific Manufacture of Fear

THE CORNER HOUSE

In the 1990s, Italian women gave birth to an average of 1.1 to 1.2 children – the lowest birthrate of any country in the world and "likely the lowest ever documented in the history of humanity for a large-scale population."[1] The Italian government worries that its nation's birthrate is "too low",[2] and the media repeat these worries. One women's magazine wrote of "demographic desertification"; a national daily newspaper described Italy as a nation that is "old and without babies," while another juxtaposed "empty cradles" with a growing "immigrant supply."[3] A cartoon in a June 1997 news magazine echoed the national mood, commenting that:

> "Italians don't want to have children anymore. They want to be free to screw around without too many explanations".[4]

In November 2002, Pope John Paul II described the "crisis of births" as a *grave minaccia*, or serious threat that weighs on the future of Italy.[5]

Concerns about ageing proliferate alongside those about the low birthrate. The fact that Italians are living longer is constantly in the news. Men live 76.8 years on average and women 82.5 years.[6] A July 1997 article entitled "Italy? It is old and without children" described the country as having become "the oldest country in the world, a country of great-grandparents."[7]

For some, this trend spells demographic "upset" in terms of the proportions of young and old. In 1950, there were 16.4 million Italians under 20 compared to 5.7 million people over the age of 70. Statisticians predict that by the year 2030, the proportions will invert: there will be just 6.2 million youths and 18.7 million seniors.[8]

A 2003 BBC report entitled "Ageing Europe is unprepared" provided one worrying statistic after another for Italy: a village with four births for every 14 funerals; predictions of a 1:1 ratio of productive worker to pensioner by the year 2050 in a population that had dwindled from 56 to 40 million. It warned:

> "When the muscular superpower across the Atlantic continues to enjoy steady population growth, old man Europe is in danger of becoming a shrivelled shadow of its former self. When will Europeans wake up to the implications of consistently low birth rates? Well, in the words of one European professor of population studies, probably not until they are all in their wheelchairs and they suddenly realize there is no one left to push."[9]

The US weekly opinion magazine *New Republic* predicted that "Italy will be a theme park in a couple of generations."[10] In the early 1990s, a young man told the author that if Italians didn't start having more

1. Golini, A., De Simoni, A. and Citoni, F., (eds.), *Tre scenari per il possibile sviluppo della popolazione delle regioni italiane al 2044 [Three Scenarios for Possible Population Development for Italy's Regions up to 2044]*, Consiglio Nationale delle Ricerche, Istituto di Ricerche sulla Popolazione, Rome, 1995, p.1.
2. Population Reference Bureau, 2001 World Population Data Sheet. http://www.prb.org, accessed 15 June 2002. By 2005, Italy's Total Fertility Rate had risen slightly to 1.3 births per woman (PRB, 2005 World Population Data Sheet, accessed 1 June 2006).
3. "Italia? Vecchia e senza bambini," *La Stampa*, 25 July 1997, p.17 (Thanks to Massimo Bressan for this reference); "Culle più vuote, l'Italia cresce solo per l'apporto degli immigrati," *La Nazione*, 27 June 1997, p.7.
4. *L'Espresso*, 26 June 1997. Thanks to Luciana Fellin for this cartoon.
5. Itti Drioli, "Le 'tavole' del Papa conquiestano il Parlamento," *La Nazione*, Quotiadano Nazionale, Prato, 15 November 2002, pp.3-5.
6. These life expectancies are just above the 2004 European Union average of 75 years for men and 81 for women (Eurostat, "A statistical view of the life of women and men in the EU25," 6 March 2006, p.2, http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int, accessed 5 June 2006).
7. *La Stampa*, op. cit. 3.
8. Golini, A., Mussino, A. and Savioli, M., *Il malessere demografico in Italia [The Demographic Malaise in Italy]*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2000, p.8.
9. Sackur, S., "Ageing Europe is Unprepared", BBC News, 2 August 2003, http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk, accessed 4 August 2003. Thanks to Milena Marchesi for this reference.
10. Easterbrook, G., "Overpopulation Is No Problem – in the Long Run," *New Republic*, 11 October 1999, p.22.

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children, it would mean "the end of the Italian race." In 1999, ABCnews.com, quoting the Population Reference Bureau, calculated that the last Italian would be born in the year 3880.

Intertwined with talk about births, deaths and ageing are comments about the third point of the demographic triangle: migration. More than a decade ago, then-Labour Minister Carlo Donat Cattin, in a July 1990 interview with the news-magazine *L'Espresso*, called on Italians to produce more babies "to keep away the armadas of immigrants from the southern shores of the Mediterranean."[11]

In a way, this obsession with dwindling numbers of people is odd, because since the middle of the twentieth century, it has been fears of "overpopulation" rather than underpopulation that have dominated popular, scientific and academic studies.[12] One would expect that Italy would now be held up as a model for other countries to follow. Instead, the demographic trend in Italy (and in other European and Asian countries, such as Japan) is viewed with great concern. As I engaged in ethnographic research in the Italian province of Prato during 1995-1997 and subsequently, I have asked: How has a consensus been achieved around the "problem of low fertility"?

Demographic Alarms and the Scientific Manufacture of Fear

Worries about low birthrates, ageing and immigration, and the societal consequences that are predicted to flow from them, can be traced largely to demographic reports.[13] Those by Italian demographers exhibit several patterns, frequently straying from fact, figure or observation into the realm of opinion or comment.[14] First, Italian demographers consistently describe the country's birthrate as *bassissima* – extremely low. For example, a book entitled *Children of Italy* noted that the "birthrate has undoubtedly sunk to the lowest level in the world"[15] – the metaphor of sinking suggesting an undesirable process in the context of the somewhat nationalist title.

Second, the reports all agree that this low birthrate constitutes a serious problem. A report on *Demographic Tendencies* describes the birth rate as:

> "provoking in the population – quickly but *silently* – a true and real 'mutation,' which has in itself the potential to unhinge the whole social and economic structure of the country."[16]

Similarly, the authors of an *Atlas on Population Ageing* classify demographic trends as bringing about:

> "rapid and profound transformations that have radically modified, and in some cases unhinged, the entire structure of the whole society."[17]

Renowned Italian demographer Antonio Golini and his colleagues have gone so far as to posit an "excess" of low fertility[18] and of pending "deformations" in the age structure that they believe create a vulnerable society, weakening its ability to meet the needs of its citizens for services, buildings and jobs.[19] They ponder the dangers that utterly transformed generational ratios may pose to "adequate social cohesion".[20] They push the idea that:

11. Quoted in Martiniello, M., and P. Kazim, "Italy: two perspectives." *Race & Class* 1991 32 (3): 79-89, p.88.
12. For example, Ehrlich, P., *The Population Bomb*, Buccaneer Books, Cutchogue, NY, 1968; Meadows, D.H, et al., *Limits to Growth*, University Books, New York, 1072 (updated as Meadows, D., et al., *Limits to Growth: The 30-year Update*, Chelsea Green Publishers, White River Junction, VT, 2004). Women's activist and critical US academic Betsy Hartmann refutes their theories:"The main problem is not that there are too many people and too few resources, but that too few people monopolize too many resources." (Hartmann, B., *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population Control*, South End Press, Boston, 1995, p.17.)
13. Demography is the scientific and statistical study of human populations, especially its dynamics as reflected in fertility, mortality and migration. Practitioners often portray themselves as belonging to a neutral, objective discipline, but historians and cultural critics have described its political roots from its beginnings. *See* Greenhalgh, S., "The Social Construction of Population Science: An Intellectual, Institutional, and Political History of Twentieth-Century Demography," *Comparative Study of Society and History* , 38(1), 1996, pp.26-66.
14. *See* Krause, E., "Empty Cradles" and the Quiet Revolution: Demographic Discourse and Cultural Struggles of Gender, Race, and Class in Italy," *Cultural Anthropology* 16(4), 2001, pp.576-611.
15. Volpi, R., *Figli d'Italia: Quanti, quali e come alle soglie del Duemila [Children of Italy: How, What and Why at the Dawn of the Second Millenneum]*, La Nuova Italia, Bagno A Ripoli (Firenze), 1986, p.31.
16. Golini, A., (ed.) *Tendenze demografiche e politiche per la popolazion:. Terzo rapporto IRP sulla situazione demografica italiana [Demographic Tendencies and Policies for the Population: Third Report on the Italian Demographic Situation]*, Il Mulino, Milano, 1994, (original emphasis).
17. Lori, A., Golini, A. and Cantalini, B., (eds.), *Atlante dell'invecchiamento della popolazione [Atlas on Population Ageing]*, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Rome, 1995, p.1.
18. Golini, A., Mussino, A. and Savioli, M,. op. cit. 8, p.7.
19. Ibid, p.98.
20. Ibid, p.99.

> "there should exist a 'correct' dose of numerical equilibrium between the generations . . . to assure a harmonious individual and collective development."[21]

This logic should also "apply to the distribution of various types of families."[22]

Third, many demographers believe that the Italians responsible for the low birthrate – those of childbearing age, and women in particular – have become irrational. One demographic text opens by stating that Italian procreative behaviours are "very far from [the] zero population growth that good sense suggests." Whereas some regions have "a level of denatality never touched by another consistent population in the world," other regions have indices that are "sensibly higher".[23] The book implies that people living in regions with low birthrates have lost their senses.

Some demographers have gone further in predicting the consequences of this demographic trend: the end of Italian culture. For instance, Golini, in describing the "inescapable" ageing of the Italian population, predicted the "death" of 400 Italian *comune* (counties) within three decades. A *comune* must have a certain number of people to be recognised as a legitimate governing entity; in quite a few *comune*, particularly those in mountainous and isolated areas, the population has declined.[24] When challenged for waking up "the ghost of Italian extinction", he said:

> "If we have a global view [of population], there is no problem. If the Italian population declines quickly, the immigrants will arrive and Amen. But we cannot stop at this. I study Mayan civilization and just as I regret their disappearance, I can regret it if the Italian or European culture were to disappear."[25]

Golini implies that immigrants bring difference and hence pose dangers to Italian national identity on the assumption that immigrants cannot continue Italian civilization. His statement also assumes that Italians are the bearers of a unique humanism that only certain cultural *and* genetic types can carry forth. After all, as a demographer he was talking about births.

Worries about the impacts on society of low birthrates, ageing and immigration can be traced to demographic reports.

Implicit and Explicit Pronatalism

Scientific pronouncements from demographers that frame the low birthrate as a serious problem constitute "sneaky pronatalism" – an attempt to entice people, particularly women, to have more children. In general, however, Italian demographers have avoided advocating stringent or overt pronatalist measures for several reasons. First, the shadow of fascism still hovers over demographic science. Most contemporary demographers want to distance themselves from the Italian fascist era of 1922-1944 and its blatant pronatalist policies (*see* Box: A Legacy of Fascism, p.4).

Second, many demographers understand the connection between women's reproductive decision-making and their chances for equal opportunities. They realise that a hard-line demographic policy could dismantle societal gains over the past several decades towards gender parity, particularly those related to education, employment,

21. Ibid, p.99.
22. Ibid, p.99.
23. Golini, A., "Introduction" *in* Palomba, R., (ed.) *Crescita Zero [Zero Growth]*, La Nuova Italia, Scandicci (Firenze), 1991, pp.vii, ix.
24. Before the Second World War, about 50 per cent of employed Italians worked in agriculture, a figure that had declined tenfold by the 1990s to five per cent. Widespread abandonment of the countryside led to a sweeping decline in rural labour (McCarthy, P., *Italy Since 1945: The Short Oxford History of Italy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p.10.) In the Tuscan province of Prato where I conducted field research, people increasingly migrated from the countryside after the War to economic centres, initially for jobs but eventually for careers, higher education, and urban lifestyles (*see* Krause, E., "Encounters with the 'peasant': memory work, masculinity and low fertility in Italy," *American Ethnologist* 32(4), 2005, pp.593-617).
25. "Allarme dei demografi: a causa della natalità sotto zero spariranno centinaia di cittadine italiane," ["Demographic Alarms: Due to the Below-Zero Birthrate, Hundreds of Italian Towns to Disappear"], *L'Unità*, 29 October 1996.

A Legacy of Fascism

Since the Second World War, Italy has pursued a hands-off national policy approach towards reproduction (except for Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's 2003 offer of 1,000 euros for a second child). This is in sharp contrast to the fascist era of 1922-1944.

Benito Mussolini launched an intensive demographic campaign in 1927, outlining his plan in his 26 May "Ascension Day" address to the Chamber of Deputies – a speech deemed so historic in its day that it was translated and printed in full in the *New York Times*. Mussolini lamented the trend of declining births in Italy. Between 1886 and 1926, births had dropped from 39 per thousand women of childbearing age to 27. He proclaimed that:

> "a declining birthrate was a symptom of disease and decline."[1]

"Population" had for some time been an instrument for monitoring and managing the "social body".[2] (Indeed, Italy's first nationwide census in 1861 had coincided with the foundation of the new Italian nation.[3]) But Mussolini's regime felt a special political anxiety over Italy's future as a viable nation with a vibrant civil society.

The fascist government thus ran a bold campaign encouraging couples to procreate for the nation. Mussolini envisioned a population increase from 40 to 60 million Italians by 1935 or 1940. The goals of fascist birth politics were "social defence" and multiplication: more boys to serve as soldiers in Mussolini's projected army of five million strong; more subjects to populate Italy's peninsula as well as its African colonies (Eritrea, Somalia, Libya) and the islands of the Aegean.

Reproduction was reconfigured as a national duty. Mussolini told his listeners:

> "The fate of nations is intimately bound up with their powers of reproduction."[4]

The campaign eventually turned to consensual as well as coercive means. The programme taxed bachelors; awarded prolific mothers with "birth bonuses" and other financial incentives; outlawed abortion to the point of making it a crime against "the race"; banned contraceptives; and restricted women's access to employment.

In addition, statistics were collected. Mussolini set up numerous commissions and agencies to monitor the population. The Central Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) was established in 1926 to ensure that population statistics rapidly developed as a field of study.[5] Emphasising the importance of statistical studies, Mussolini declared:

> "Numbers do not govern peoples, but especially in modern societies, which are so large and complex, numbers are a necessary element for whoever wishes seriously to govern a nation."[6]

Intensified statistical documentation contributed to the fascist goal of exerting state control over human activities to a degree never before attained.

Nevertheless, Italians did not submit passively to the regime's dictates. Oral historians and social anthropologists have documented Italians' creative and prolific resistance in snubbing Mussolini's attempt to control their bedroom behaviour.[7]

The campaign had little observable effect, and birth rates continued to decline. The average age at marriage did not lower, nor did the marriage rate increase. The most popular contraceptive technique at the time, withdrawal, was acknowledged to be beyond the scope of effective regulation, while condoms continued to be made available for public health reasons (although socially stigmatised), particularly to soldiers. Nonetheless, poverty and the lack of effective contraception led many women to seek abortion. Legislation banning the distribution of information on contraception and abortion remained in place until the 1970s, and abortion in Italy was legalised in 1978.

In the 1930s, Mussolini and the fascist press regularly acknowledged the "failure" of his campaign as demographic decline reached "catastrophic velocity". In December 1933, he said:

> "Until a few years ago, it could be said that the Italians were a people without space; in a few years, it will be said that instead there is a space, but the people are lacking".[8]

1. Mussolini, B., "Full Text of Mussolini's Speech Outlining His Plans for a Greater Italy: His Vision of Power Put into Words," *The New York Times*, 29 May 1927, pp. 12-13. *See also* Horn, D. G, *Social Bodies: Science, Reproduction and Italian Modernity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1994, pp.46-47 and p.49.
2. *See* Foucault, M., *The History of Sexuality (Volume 1),* Vintage Books, New York, 1978, pp.139-141.
3. *See* Livi-Bacci, M., *A History of Italian Fertility*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1977, pp.8-11.
4. Mussolini, B, op. cit 1 , p.12.
5. de Grazia, V., *How Fascism Ruled Women, Italy, 1922-1945,* University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992, p.48; Horn, D., op. cit. 1, p.14.
6. Mussolini, B., "Il discorso dell'Ascensione [The Ascension Day Speech, 26 May 1927], *in* Susmel, E. and Susmel, D., (eds.), *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini*, Vol 22, La Fenice, Florence, 1927, p.361, quoted in Horn, D. G, op. cit. 1, pp.46-47.
7. For details on this history, *see* Passerini, L., *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987; Schneider, J.C. and P.T. Schneider, "Sex and Respectability in an Age of Fertility Decline: A Sicilian Case Study," *Social Science Medicine* 33(8), 1991, pp.885–895; Krause, E.L., "Forward vs. Reverse Gear: The Politics of Proliferation and Resistance in the Italian Fascist State," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (3), 1994, pp.261-288.
8. Mussolini, B., "Cifre" *in* Susmel, E. and Susmel, D., (eds.) *Opera omnia de Benito Mussolini*, Vol 26, La Fenice, Florence, 1934, pp.124-5, p.125, quoted in Horn, D. G, op. cit. 1, p.156.

reproductive rights, sexual health, parental leave and family matters.[26]

Concern over gender issues is apparent in a draft demographic report on the quality of life in Tuscany, which called for innovation in policy to address issues of "sustainability with regard to the family as well as maternity", yet cautioned against "damaging or undermining civil liberties" owed to single people and, in particular, to women. The hesitation in making specific policy proposals results from respect for family privacy, explains Italian anthropologist Massimo Bressan. "The state should not heavily intervene in such choices."[27] Such policies are hard to make without raising the hackles of those who care about civil liberties and individual freedoms.

Nonetheless, political and social interest in family matters has noticeably revived in the past decade. Italy's former Minister for Social Affairs, Livia Turco, called for the family to be placed at the centre of public policies. She noted that:

> "between 1996-1999, family policies were planned as a great battle of culture and values arising from our awareness of the need [to invert the] trend [of] sterile familialism that has distinguished the last 50 years, during which the Italian family has been left alone to bear the burden of all the social and economic changes."[28]

Yet social scientist Giovanni Sgritta observes that family policies and the welfare system have not risen to the task of resolving problems, such as forecast pension shortages attributed to the demographic situation.[29]

Constantly describing low birthrates as problematic is "sneaky pronatalism"

Nationalism and Chauvinism

Despite this reluctance to recommend or implement pronatalist policies, a strong statement on population policy appears in the book, *The Demographic Malaise in Italy.*[30] Golini and his demographer colleagues call for a dual strategy that combines more immigrants with more new-borns to lessen, even if not prevent, the negative impacts of the inevitable changes in the country's age structure.

The current rate of immigration into Italy of about 80,000 to 100,000 new foreign residents per year could contribute "substantially to the demographic balance of the Italian population in the next few years," according to Golini and his colleagues.[31] In part, their projections assume that immigrants would not immediately assume the reproductive behaviours of Italian couples – in other words, that they would on average have more than one child. Golini predicts that the "immigrant" population would eventually climb from 2.6 per cent to 10.3 per cent of Italy's total population.

But the researchers caution that relying heavily on immigrants to "fill the demographic void" is risky. In the few years since Italy has been registering immigrants, their presence "has already created some social tensions to the point of manifesting rejection."

Thus they opt for augmenting the birthrate as the primary strategy to create a more viable and hence "normal" population structure. These demographers suggest that a successful scenario would require a fertility increase from a rate of 1.1-1.2 to at least 1.7-1.8 births per

26. Comparative assessments of gender parity across cultures and epochs raise vexing problems and risk reproducing stereotypes of Italian gender relations. Moreover, equal opportunities to work do not eliminate discrimination, nor do official counts of women participating in the workforce illuminate the recent or long history of women working for pay in hidden sectors of the economy. Nevertheless, among students born between 1952 and 1967, women surpassed men in terms of university degrees as well as high school diplomas (Schizzerotto, A., "La scuola è uguale per tutti?" *in* Ginsborg, P. (ed.), *Stato dell' Italia*, il Saggiatore, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, 1994, pp.558-562). Divorce was legalised in 1970 and abortion in 1978. The 1975 family rights law promoted equality between husband and wife, eliminating the legal position of the husband as head of the household. In practice, these changes threatened patriarchy but have not eliminated it. *See* Krause, E., "Italy," *in* Walter, L., (ed.) *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Women's Issues Worldwide: Europe*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Westport, CN, 2003, pp.341-372.
27. E-mail communication from Prato-based economic anthropologist Massimo Bressan, 14 January 2003.
28. Quoted in Sgritta, G. B., "The Situation of Families in Italy in 2001", European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography, and Family, 2001, http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/eoss/index_en.html, accessed 15 May 2003, p.9.
29. Ibid.
30. Golini, A., Mussino, A. and Savioli, M., op. cit. 8.
31. Ibid, p.101.

The demographic focus on women reproduces the notion that women alone create population problems but not men.

Demographic reports are not neutral but make moral judgements and normalising assumptions.

woman. To translate those averages into reality would require many more women to have two and three children, and many fewer women to have just one child or none at all. Indeed, the authors say, the most significant change would have to come in the number of women without any children: a decrease from the current estimate of 23 per cent down to 14 per cent. Another proportion of women – those with three children – would have to move up from the current 13 per cent to 21 per cent. Less dramatic, but still noteworthy, is that at least one per cent of mothers would need to have four or more children. Finally, this scenario would call for the number of women who have only one child to move from the current level of 29 per cent to 26 per cent.

Golini and his fellow demographers offer no concrete policy advice on how to realise their scenario – and ultimately admit that it is "impossible." It seems highly unlikely, for example, that nearly two out of three of the 36 per cent of women who have two children would procreate a third.

Instead, they explain why they think Italian women will not have more children. First, women have their first child increasingly later in life and hence do not feel they have enough time – physiologically, psychologically and professionally – to have a second, let alone a third. Second, in Italian society, "the interests of women are intrinsically at odds with the interests of babies and with the population". The demographers portray the demographic crisis as the manifestation of a:

> "profound and generalised crisis of values that all but supports procreative choice: as far as people have become individuals – women in particular but not only women – and couples . . . remain imprisoned within the play of social pressures and the drive toward individualism."[32]

The primary focus on women in these discussions of demographic engineering reproduces the dominant and long-standing notion that women are the main source of population problems. But there is a "scientific" reason for this focus: demographers calculate fertility rates from women only. Maternity is certain, paternity is not.[33]

Racism Clothed as Culture

The lack of neutrality in numerous demographic reports is startling. Judging by these Italian reports, demographers not only crunch numbers but also make moral judgements that bespeak of core values, assert their interpretations as unquestionable truths, and make forecasts that ooze with assumptions about a normal, healthy society: the nuclear family as a product of nature rather than a construct of culture;[34] the couple as a procreative unit; the woman as mother; national population being solely women's responsibility; and protected sex and planned offspring as the rational norm.

Demographers have thus contributed significantly to societal attitudes toward family-making and family size. To state that women's interests are at odds with those of babies is to stake out a moral ground on which women's primary role is as biological reproducer for the nation – much as it was during the fascist years.

32. Ibid, pp.102-104.
33. Furthermore, the mothers of adopted children are not included in fertility rates; rather, it is the biological mother's birth of that child that is counted.
34. Golini et al., op. cit. 8, pp.7, 98, 99.

Furthermore, the women in question are clearly not immigrants but Italian nationals who are white Europeans. The alarms that demographers have sounded about the low birth rate rarely strike direct racial chords – yet racial intonations can be heard if one listens closely. While demographers are often silent on the subject of race and like to appear objective, their silence can mask the effects that their alarmist claims have on racist feelings and actions.

Race scholars acknowledge that while the terms of racism have changed, racism still matters albeit in new ways. As sociologists John Solomos and Les Beck have observed, race today is often "coded as culture." In a 2002 review essay, Paul Reitter explains what this means:

> "The structures of racist ideology remain operative . . . but they now stigmatize cultural – not specifically racial – groups as innately deficient and dangerous."[35]

Bodies once discriminated against through naked racialising discourses are now clothed in cultural discourses that have powerful and harmful stigmatising effects.

An exchange during a 2002 convention involving young Italian entrepreneurs illustrates this. Economic Minister Giulio Tremonti publicly disagreed that immigration might reverse problematic population trends because it "doesn't resolve the pension problem, nor does it right the demographic curves." He invoked cultural reasons for his objections: "I have nothing against couscous, but I really favour pesto."[36] His linguistic choices are not accidental: couscous can be interpreted as a symbol for Muslims, pesto for Italians, particularly those from the North. Demographic data clearly shaped his opinions.

Demographers' alarms assist in constructing and normalising Italians as homogenous, "white" and European. They enable racism by promoting a politics of difference that heightens whiteness, not as an objective skin colour but as a subjective ideology. This ideology functions as an instrument of power by guaranteeing and naturalising privilege.[37] Furthermore, alarmist discourses encourage a form of demographic nationalism in which the national population is depicted at risk from internal sources – low fertility and rapid ageing – as well as from external ones – increasing immigration.[38]

In the contemporary era, respectable elites tend to avoid making explicitly racist statements. Instead, they frequently use cultural differences to justify why they regard immigration as a threat. Regrets about Italy's impending cultural death, attributed to increasing numbers of immigrants who bring different cultures, arguably mask but encourage racist feelings. Revised racist ideology relies on undesirable cultural attributes to depict certain groups as dangerous.

Although Golini and his colleagues maintain they do not approve of rising intolerance against migrants, their argument increases it. For instance, in describing the processes of integration of migrants into Italian society, they write: economic integration is normally fast; logistic integration (such as home and school) is medium-long; and socio-cultural and political integration is long to very long. This characterisation takes for granted stereotypes of an old-world society resistant to change and fearful of difference. It reinforces conservative, xenophobic notions in which racism is "coded as culture" and not based on some supposedly objective somatic or visual "black-white" differences.

Racism clothed as culture can be just as harmful and stigmatising as that based on skin colour.

35. Reitter, P., "Racism: Coded as Culture?" *The Nation* (October 28), 2002, available at http://www.thenation.com/doc/2002s1028/reitter, accessed 7 June 2006. *See also* Beck, L. "The New Technologies of Racism," *in* Goldberg, D. and Solomon, J., (eds.), *A Companion to Racial and Ethnic Studies*, Blackwell Publishers Inc., Malden, MA, 2002, pp.365-378.
36. Ippolito, R., "Gli immigrati non sono un viagra." *La Stampa*, 9 June 2002, p.10.
37. In 2003, I went to California where I came upon an exhibition at the Laguna Art Museum, *Whiteness: A Wayward Construction.* California is the first US state in which whites are now the minority. "White privilege and presumption," wrote David Roediger in the exhibit catalog, "often operate as unnoticed, as if they were natural". *See* Roediger, D. R., " 'I Came for the Art': Exposing Whiteness and Imagining Nonwhite Spaces" *in* Stallings, T., (ed.) *Whiteness: A Wayward Construction*, Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, California, and Fellows of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2003, p.53.
38. It is important to remember that people or populations occupy territories or physical space. Italian piazzas, for instance, can change dramatically as new populations come to frequent them, be they vendors, immigrants or tourists. The norm of whiteness only becomes apparent when potential "invaders" threaten to transform places into non-white spaces. Demographic alarmism creates a raucous noise that gives legitimacy to white public space. *See* Hill, J. H., "Language, Race, and White Public Space", *American Anthropologist* 100(3), 1998, pp.680-689; Page, E., "No Black Public Sphere in White Public Space: Racialized Information and Hi-Tech Diffusion in the Global African Diaspora", *Transforming Anthropology* 8(1&2), 1999, pp.111-128.

Ultimately, Golini and his associates fail in their attempt to occupy a neutral, "objective" ground. While they suggest that it is up to "the hosting society to embrace the immigrants and treat them like citizens," they also sound alarms about the existence of structured "limits to immigration".[39]

In sum, demographers' constructions of social reality help to legitimise a process of rallying behind a white, European racial identity. Their narratives reveal the simultaneous cultural and biological foundations of racist agendas.

Panic Over Immigrants

The demographers' alarms of sub-replacement fertility levels and coded racism have not stayed within demographic science: they reverberate loudly in the media and popular culture and among other influential elites in Italian society, encompassing journalists, politicians, corporate directors, academics and other scientists. All these discourses reproduce racism, racist ideologies, and racially based social hierarchies.[40]

39. Golini et al., op. cit. 8, pp.101-102.
40. van Dijk, T. A., *Elite Discourse and Racism*, Sage Publications, London, 1993.

Alarm Over European Demographic Trends

All over Europe, demographic trends attract negative press. When Spain's fertility rate reached 1.1 in 2001, it was said to be the lowest national average in Western Europe. In Sweden, Germany and Greece, the total fertility rate in 2001 was 1.4 births per woman on average, according to the World Health Organization.[1]

That same year, a billboard advert in Sweden featured businessmen speaking into microphones at what looked like a press conference and wearing lapel badges with the dictum "Fuck for the Future". The badge's yellow letters on a blue background, the colours of the Swedish flag, also resembled the European Union emblem.

The image was actually part of an advertising campaign for Swedish tennis star Björn Borg's line of designer underwear. The phrase "Drop your pants or drop dead" may have been a tactic to sell more underwear, but it also reflected a regional mood about low reproductive rates.

The ad campaign, moreover, featured white men only. The visual white dominance serves as a reminder that population politics are also racial and gender politics.

Panic over declining fertility rates has travelled from West to East. As of 2005, a line-up of Eastern European nation-states tops the US Population Reference Bureau's list of the lowest-fertility countries in the world: Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Moldova, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine. (Also in the top-ten are South Korea and Taiwan.) Each of these countries tallies a 1.2 "lifetime births" per woman.[2]

In Russia, President Vladimir Putin received international news coverage in May 2006 when he announced the country's primary concern as "love and motherhood" – and offered women the financial incentive of about $10,000 for their second child so as to augment the nation's birthrate.[3]

This figure dwarfs the amount Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi began offering women in 2003: a baby bonus of 1,000 euros ($1,000) to European or Italian citizens who gave birth to or adopted a second child.[4] But the policy hit a snag in April 2006. Berlusconi sent a letter to all parents of newborns just before the national elections with best wishes and instructions on how to collect the bonus. Among the recipients were some immigrant families ineligible for the cash. The Economy Ministry reportedly asked the non-citizen families to return the money.[5]

Implosion or Ideology?

As these alarms of implosion echo around the world, what ideological conflict do they signal? Consider that population politics impinge on immigrants even in places where national fertility rates would seem to provide less fuel for paranoia, for example, the United States, which has a total fertility rate of 2.1.

Former presidential candidate and conservative Patrick Buchanan, in his 2002 best-selling book, *Death of the West*, cites Europe as a cautionary tale:

> "The death of the West is not a prediction of what is going to happen, it is a depiction of what is happening now . . . . Outside of Muslim Albania, no European nation is producing enough babies to replace its population."

In particular, alarmist approaches to demographic trends stimulate a climate of fear and anxiety toward immigrants. For instance, concerns expressed in media and other reports over the future of the Italian nation posit a causal relationship between the increasing numbers of immigrants in Italy and the declining birthrate. Consider a 1997 headline from *La Nazione*: "Cradles emptier, Italy grows only due to the immigrant supply." The article suggests that international immigrants have a major impact on the Italian population, even though a close reading of the data indicates that as many Italians migrated out of Italy in the 1990s as non-Italians entered the country. While the contribution of foreigners to population growth "is very modest",[41] immigrants are nevertheless often seen as a demographic threat and as "taking over" Europe.

Such media coverage of demographic trends consistently depicting immigrants in a negative light contributes to feelings of public panic. It invariably contrasts reasonable, rational Italians with irrational, out-of-control non-Europeans, who are described by means of threatening metaphors, such as "invaders". Anxious sentiments and negative reports of the newcomer population are commonplace:

Alarmist approaches to demographic trends encourage fear of immigrants.

41. Golini et al., op. cit. 8, p.9.

His political agenda is to incite panic in his readers. He warns:

> "The First World has to turn this around, and soon, or it will be overwhelmed by a Third World that is five times as populous and will be ten times as populous in 2050."

His overarching project is to prevent the decline of a white population – particularly those who are Christian, conservative, protectionist and anti-immigration. He positions these people as heirs to a mythical, unified European legacy, writing against those segments of society who are socially tolerant and secular. His opponents are the socialist state and women who have "given up" on bearing and raising children.[6]

Similar fears appear on the front pages of major US newspapers. Declining birthrates have become newsworthy, and the trend receives consistent alarmist reportage. In December 2002, *New York Times* reporter Frank Bruni described the birth rate trend as an "increasingly worrisome reality for Italy and other European countries whose fertility rates have plummeted over the last decades." He described a worsening situation in which the "slow-building consequences are coming into starker relief" as European countries:

> "address the specter of sharply winnowed and less competitive work forces, surfeits of retirees and pension systems that will need to be cut back deeply."

His descriptions reinforced the notion of Europe as a dying continent. For instance, looking at a playground in Ferrara, Italy, filled with children and adoring parents, Bruni found "something wrong with the picture. Most of the parents were gazing at one, and only one, child."[7]

Another doom-and-gloom report appeared in a 1998 *New York Times* article entitled "Population implosion worries a graying Europe," which framed low fertility as an "epidemic." Reporter Michael Specter located the etiology of this epidemic in women's practice of "choosing work and education over having children."

The article described birthrates in many countries as being "in a rapid, sustained decline. Never before – except in times of plague, war and deep economic depression – have birthrates fallen so low, for so long."[8]

Exposing the nationalist demographic discourses as born out of a politics of fear might enable space for an anti-racist, counter-politics of inclusion to open up.

1. Bruni, F., "Persistent Drop in Fertility Reshapes Europe's Future," *The New York Times*, 26 December 2002, p.A1.
2. Population Reference Bureau, 2005, World Population Data Sheet, http://www.prb.org, accessed 1 June 2006. Italy and Spain's rates have risen slightly to a national average of 1.3 births per woman, according to the PRB's statistics.

   The demographic situations of ten countries in Euope are presented in Douglass, C., (ed.) *Barren States: The Population Implosion in Europe*, Berg, London, 2005. Included are Norway, Germany, Russia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Spain, France and Ireland. For China, *see* Greenhalgh, S., and E. Winckler, *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, Stanford Univesrity Press, Standford, 2005.
3. Erofeyev, V., "Putin's Baby Love," *The New York Times*, 20 May 2006, p.A13.
4. Fraser, C., "Italian women shun 'mamma' role," *BBC News*, 27 March 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4739154.stm, accessed 1 June 2006.
5. Lee, Y., "Italy Seeks Return of 'Baby Bonus' from Immigrant Families," *All Headline News*, 22 April 2006, http://www.allheadlinenews.com, accessed 1 June 2006.
6. Buchanan, P. J., *Death of the West: How dying populations and immigrant invasions imperil our country and civilization*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2002.
7. Bruni, F., op. cit. 1.
8. Specter, M., "Population Implosion Worries a Graying Europe", *The New York Times*, 10 July 1998, p.A1.

" 'The Senegalese wanted to kidnap my son,' but the police dismantled the house: In Turin, the psychosis of the immigrant."[42]

" 'Casbah' in the heart of Milan; 163 Asians are living in the piazza."[43]

"Stones and clubs: the anger explodes among blacks without housing."[44]

"War in the new ghetto: Immigrants against immigrants among alcohol and knives."[45]

"Immigration, a record in Prato: 33 clandestines for every 1000 inhabitants, nothing like it in Italy."[46]

"Immigrants – disastrous hygienic-sanitary conditions; Three Chinese workshops closed."[47]

These headlines enable the dominant members of society to justify their intolerance as inevitable and reasonable.[48] For instance, one response to the perceived threat to the Italian nation has been financial incentive programmes, most locally or regionally based (until Berlusconi's baby bonus, *see* Box: "Alarm Over European Demographic Trends" p.8). They are designed to encourage more births – but not of non-Europeans. In May 1999, one newspaper proposed that the city of Milan should offer monthly payments of one million lire (about $600) for each birth in the city, but only if the residents had lived in the city for at least 15 years. The vast majority of first-generation migrants would have been unlikely to qualify for the subsidy. Without presenting any evidence of actual immigrant birthrates, the article declared that:

"In the shadow of the Madonna shrine are foreigners who continue to procreate while the Milanese, due to choice or economic difficulty, seem always less enthusiastic to confront the prospect of having a family."[49]

Invoking the shrine calls attention to the fact that the newcomers were likely to be Muslims rather than Catholics.[50] Several years ago, a prominent priest called for "the need to erect a Christian dike against the Muslim invasion of Italy."[51] The panic over perceived immigrant birthrates and the local policy designed to exclude a particular population combined to give off a "racist odour", said critics on the political left.

In a less controversial but widely publicised programme, the mayor of Laviano, near Naples, offered 10,000 euros ($10,000) for any baby born in his village.[52]

North and South

Demographic discourses generated about non-European "others" are also connected to the history of Italian racism. Golini's regret about the potential disappearance of "Italian" culture seems to leave out all the differences, inequalities and historic racisms within Italy itself, filling in the resulting blank slate with descriptions of a homogenous peninsula, constructed as the cradle of European civilization.

42. *La Repubblica*, 1 March 1990.
43. *La Repubblica*, 6 November 1990.
44. *La Repubblica*, 8 November 1990.
45. *La Repubblica*, 6 November 1990.
46. *Il Tirreno*, 12 November 2002.
47. *La Nazione*, 15 November 2002.
48. Over the past decade, Italy has tried hard to rid itself of its "leaky frontier" image, and to align itself with other European Union countries in formulating a unified policy on immigration. In January1990, Italy's first comprehensive migration legislation, known as the "Martelli" law, closed the country to further immigration. According to the Migration Policy Institute, the law reflected "an attempt to control and monitor immigration and thus to pave the way for the institution of a quota system. It stipulated that any immigrant – legal or illegal – who could prove that he or she had come into the country before the end of 1989 be granted a two year residency permit" (http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/print.cfm?ID=121, accessed 18 May 2006).
As of January 2001, Italy's national statistics institute, ISTAT, tallied nearly 1.5 million resident (that is, legal) immigrants, representing just 2.5 per cent of the country's population of nearly 58 million. By 2004, the figure had risen to 1.99 million non-nationals, or 3.4 percent of the population, with Albanian citizens being the largest group ("Non-national populations in the EU Member States," Eurostat, No. 8/2006, http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/, accessed 6 June 2006). Most of Italy's immigrants work and live in the central and northern regions of the country where their labour is increasingly needed, but public opinion continues to associate immigration with increased crime and poverty.
49. "Coppie milanesi, fate figli vi diamo un milione al mese" ["Milanese couples, have children and we'll give you a million a month"], *La Repubblica*, 5 May 1999, p.30.
50. The most recent data available, 2004, shows the majority of *cittadini stranieri* (foreign citizens) as migrating to Italy from Albania (316,659), Morocco (294,945), Romania (248,849), China (111,712), the Ukraine (93,441) and the Philippines (82,625) (http://www.demo.istat.it/str2004/index.html, accessed 6 June 2006).
51. A 2002 US Department of State *International Religious Freedom Report* noted prominent Catholics "emphasizing the perceived threat posed by immigrants to the country's 'national identity' and what they view as the country's need to favor immigration by Catholics 'or at least Christians.'" The Report noted the June 2000 decision of the Italian Catholic Church to tighten dispensation for Catholics to marry Muslims. Its focus on the "difficulties in Catholic-Muslim mixed marriages" reversed Church policy of the late 1990s when officials had organised classes on Muslim world culture and tradition in response to increasing interfaith marriages. The Report also noted that hostile comments towards Muslims intensified from late 2001 onwards: "[A] prominent priest . . . warned that the New York and Washington attacks were consonant with '13 centuries' of Muslim warfare against Christians. Bologna Cardinal Giacomo Biffi reiterated previous calls that immigrants be selected for their ability to

But the panic about immigrants has not induced all northern Italians to put aside the prejudices they may have against southern Italians.[53] On the contrary, in the 1990s, long-standing sentiments against southerners continued to simmer alongside rising anti-immigrant anxieties. Note this comment from a sewing machine repairman to the author while she was conducting fieldwork in a home-based sweater-finishing workshop in 1996 in Tuscany:

> "Those weren't Italians [who emigrated to the USA], they were *marocchini*, little Moroccans. Down from Rome, they're all *marocchini*. They have more Arab blood. They don't even speak Italian."[54]

The northerner's comment not only marked southerners as non-Italians, but also constructed himself as a "real" Italian. His comment defined so-called non-Italians as "matter out of place,"[55] and thus anomalous, polluting, even dangerous. His categories point to perceived differences based simultaneously on biological and on cultural attributes – differences that are viewed as intrinsic, immutable and threatening. Demographic alarm-sounding reinforces both aspects of racial differentiation.

Intolerance manifests itself more publicly in the xenophobic political party *Lega Nord*, or Northern League, which has pushed a platform that is both anti-immigrant and anti-southern. The party's ultimate goal of dividing Italy into two countries has relied on a rhetoric of superiority and of old "us-versus-them" dichotomies: between "natives" and immigrants, between *padani* (northerners) and *marocchini* (southerners).[56] One of the League's proposals was to require that *extracomunitari*, or non-European immigrants, ride in segregated train cars, an idea the daily newspaper *La Repubblica* lambasted as "railroad apartheid".[57] Despite being extremists, the Northern League's political alliances gave it a legitimate voice in Italy's government for several years. In May 2001, national elections resulted in a five-party, centre-right "Freedom House" coalition, which included Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's party, Forza Italia, the National Alliance, the Northern League, the Christian Democratic Centre, and the United Christian Democrats.[58]

Irrational Sex

This anti-southern bias has long been related to the South's relative poverty (*see* Box: "Criminal Anthropology and Racial Formation", p.12). And poverty in southern Italy has in turn long been attributed to high fertility, which, since the time of Malthus, has itself been regarded as a sign of ignorance and moral bankruptcy and a justification for policies designed to give the poor their just desert: starvation.

Because the birth rates of Europeans dropped so dramatically between the 1780s and 1950s (depending on region and socio-economic class), a great deal of early and classical population theory depicted Europeans as "paragons of rationality, their minds disciplining their bodies on behalf of long-range goals."[59] As people elsewhere started controlling their fertility to similar degrees, they, too, joined the march of progress to rational personhood. Having rational sex meant

integrate into Italian society, 'integration' being chiefly dependent on religious identity." Within Italy, some political figures repeated these sentiments, while others contested them. Italian President Ciampi warned against "drawing the wrong equation between Islam and terrorism" (http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2002/13941.htm, accessed 7 June 2006).

52. In other rural areas, local administrators have also offered economic incentives to encourage births. *See*, for example, Kennedy, F., "Italy offers families baby cash," *BBC News*, 1 December 2003; Palmer, A., and B. Johnston, "Where have all the babies gone," *Daily Telegraph*, 18 April 2004.
53. The historical process of racial formation has been well documented, particularly in the US. *See* Ignatiev, N., *How the Irish Became White*, Routledge, London, 1996; Roediger, D., *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Verso, London, 1991; Sacks, K., "How Did Jews Become White Folks?" *in* Gregory, S., and Sanjek, R., (eds.) *Race*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, 1994, pp.78-102.

    Whites from lower-socioeconomic strata are also frequently racialised. *See* Hartigan, J., *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1999; Krause, E., "'The Bead of Raw Sweat in a Field of Dainty Perspirers': Nationalism, Whiteness, and the Olympic Class Ordeal of Tonya Harding," *Transforming Anthropology* (7)1, 1998, pp.33-52.
54. Author's fieldnotes, 4 December 1996.

    Local accents and lexicons vary greatly from region to region, even town to town, particularly when social class is considered. When Italy was unified in 1861, Italian was mainly a literary language and spoken by less than three per cent of the population. Given the high number of languages spoken throughout the peninsula, the government quickly established that "proper" or "standard" Italian would be based on the Florentine dialect spoken in most of Tuscany. A national education system gradually led to a decrease in variation in the languages spoken throughout the country. But it was not until the 1960s, when access to television became more widespread that Italian became broadly known and quite standardised (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#Languages, accessed 18 May 2006).
55. Douglas, M., *Purity and Danger*, Routledge, London and New York, 1988 [1966] p.35.
56. Petrillo, A., "Italy: Farewell to the 'Bel Paese'[beautiful country]?" *in* Dale, G. and Cole, M., (eds.) *The European Union and Migrant Labour*, Berg Publishers, Oxford, 1999, p.245.
57. *La Repubblica*, 17 January 2003.
58. A centre-left coalition won the general election in April 2006 by a narrow margin (http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4033.htm, accessed 7 June 2006).
59. Schneider, J. C. and Schneider, P. T., *Festival of the Poor: Fertility Decline and the Ideology of Class in Sicily, 1860-1980*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1996, p.5. *See also* Krause, E., *A Crisis of Births: Population Politics and Family-Making in Italy*, Wadsworth, Belmont, CA, 2005, pp.68-72.

that people were controlling their "animalistic" impulses. In demographic parlance, women or couples having small families were "leaders" and "modern", while those still having large families were "laggards" and "backward". Nothing has more strongly divided populations into modern or backward than their procreative practices.

In Italy, the stigma associated with prolific child-bearing varied regionally and socially. In the 1950s in Sicily, people in better-off classes characterised the sexual endeavours of poor peasants as "the festival of the poor." A concern about the size of families was expressed as "*più famiglia, più fame*" – more family, more hunger.[60]

Outsiders generalised this characterisation to the whole of southern Italy in their portrayals. In 1958, for instance, US journalist and food writer Samuel Chamberlain declared that:

60. Schneider, J. C. and Schneider, P. T., "Going Forward in Reverse Gear: Culture, Economy, and Political Economy in the Demographic Transitions of a Rural Sicilian Town" *in* Tilly, L. A., Gillis, J. R. and Levine, D., (eds.) *The European Experience of Declining Fertility, 1850-1970: The Quiet Revolution*, Blackwell, Cambridge, 1992, pp.156, 158.

Criminal Anthropology and Racial Formation

The prejudice of many northern Italian writers, policymakers and public intellectuals towards their southern compatriots intensified from 1861 onwards after the formation of Italy as a single nation.[1]

The process of uniting Italy's disparate kingdoms and city-states, which had been independent or under the control of France, Austria or the Vatican, was uneven.[2] Unification largely benefited the North, particularly its textile, metal and mechanical industries. It grew wealthy as the agricultural South grew poor. Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci, who first coined the phrase *La questione meridionale*, or "The Southern Question", observed:

> "the North concretely was an 'octopus' which enriched itself at the expense of the South, and . . . its economic-industrial increment was in direct proportion to the impoverishment of the economy and the agriculture of the South".[3]

The economic disparities between North and South have persisted ever since.[4] In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the South was populated with malnourished and illiterate people suffering from malaria, filth, brutalities of feudal servitude and the exploitations of a tyrannical wealthy class.[5]

Rather than referring to economic processes connected to the politics of state formation, the dominant explanation cited the innate racial inferiority of southerners, who were construed as naturally barbaric and as biologically inferior.

Contributing to such explanations were studies of criminal anthropologists. In the 1870s, an elite southern Italian physician, Cesare Lombroso, developed a theory of innate criminality. He believed that criminals were born bad, and that environmental factors or historic circumstances were irrelevant to the making of a criminal. Crime was simply hereditary. He used a "scientific" variable dubbed "congenital Latin decadence" to illustrate that men from Calabria and Sicily were predisposed to crime.[6]

His theory wielded tremendous influence on social thought and judicial practice well into the 1900s – and his ideas reinforced anti-southern sentiments. Lombroso served as an expert scientific witness in criminal trials, pointing out particular somatic features: "outstanding ears, great maxillaries and cheek bones . . . sinister look, nose twisted to the right".[7]

One of Lombroso's adherents, Alfredo Niceforo, published a book in 1901 that compared northern and southern Italians, aiming to demonstrate the "fact" that there were "two Italies" with "two races." It sought to substantiate the racial inferiority – physical, psychological, social and moral – of southern Italians.

One of the strongest Italian critics of the racial theory of criminal anthropologists was Gaetano Salvemini. "Race is formed in history," he wrote in 1899. Salvemini pointed to uneven economic conditions and development as well as to forms of governance similar to colonialism to explain the endurance of southern poverty. The real cause did not rest in the "blood of the southerners", he stated, but in the unfair system of land ownership and class immobility. He claimed that policies and procedures favouring large estate owners kept the poor impoverished.

Today, southern Italy is one of the poorest regions of the European Union in terms of per capita income. Infant mortality in the first 28 days of life is 5.7 per 1,000 live births, four times higher than in the northern Italian provinces and double the European average, according to a September 2005 EU study.[8]

Yet Gianfranco Micciché, Italian minister for the *mezzogiorno*, the area of Italy south of Rome, points to hopeful trends. Unemployment levels have declined from an average of 21 per cent in 2001 to 14 per cent.[9]

But inequities persist as do stereotypes, some of which are applied not just to the South of the country but also to Italy as a whole. For instance, *The Economist* recently relied on age-old modernisation metaphors to describe Italy as "caught in a long, slow decline,"[10] as "Europe's laggard,"[11] and as "structurally unsound."[12]

More offensive were photographic captions. One photograph accompanying an article about economic woes in the South showed a street full of clothes hanging out on washing lines between buildings on either side:

> "Sicily suffers from overpopulation and the poverty that goes with it. The prodigious Italian faculty for producing progeny is never better illustrated than here. What Sicily needs are more fertile fields and fewer fertile women. Bambini positively swarm."[61]

Still just a little over 20 years ago, US anthropologist William A. Douglass pointed out that:

> "For the biased North Italian, the southerner is . . . given to fathering broods of children, and unconcerned with personal hygiene."[62]

Such depictions of the Italian South and of southerners as prolifically fertile are based on old stereotypes. Demographers Margarita Delgado

61. Samuel Chamberlain, *Italian Bouquet: An Epicurean Tour of Italy*, Gourmet, New York, 1958, p.463.
62. William A. Douglass, "Migration in Italy", *in* Kenny, M. and Kertzer, D. I., (eds.) *Urban Life in Mediterranean Europe: Anthropological Perspectives*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1983, p.182.

the caption, "Good at laundering"[13] has a double meaning, given the text's discussion of organised-crime groups in Italy.

Another photo complementing an article entitled "Reform or die" – characterising Italy's economy as "suffering from slow growth and a steady deterioration of its competitiveness" – depicted a group of *motorino* riders with the caption "Let's go, but where?".[14]

Both images and captions reproduce stereotypes of disorderliness and chaos in southern Europe.

Beginning with the postwar boom, and especially in the 1960s, numerous southerners moved north for jobs. Upon arrival, they faced harsh discrimination not unlike that experienced by non-EU immigrants today.[15]

Persistent put-downs of cultural practices that differ from those of northern Europe lend a perverse legitimacy to Eurocentric logics of racial and material dominance that find their roots in old notions of superiority.

1. After 1860, anything south of Rome was increasingly represented as "homogenous and inferior" (Schneider, J.C, and Schneider, P.T., *Reversible Destiny: Mafia, Antimafia, and the Struggle for Palermo*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2003, p.40). Eurostat lists eight regions of the country's 20 regions as comprising this *mezzogiorno*: Abruzzi, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Molise, Sicily and Sardinia.
2. For a definitive account in the English language of politics in modern Italy, *see* Mack Smith, D., *Modern Italy: A Political History*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1997 (updated version).
3. Gramsci, A., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, New York, 1971, pp.70-71.
4. *See* Schneider, J.C., *Italy's "Southern question": Orientalism in One Country*, Berg Publishers, Oxford, 1998.
5. Teti, V., *La razza maledetta: origini del preguidizio antimeridionale [The Damned Race: Origins of Anti-Southern Prejudice*], manifestolibri, Rome, 1993, p.12.
6. Gibson, M., "Biology or Environment? Race and Southern 'Deviancy' in the Writings of Italian Criminologists, 1880-1920," *in* Schneider, J.C, (ed.), op. cit. 4., pp.99-117; Schneider, J.C., and Schneider, P.T., op. cit.1 , p.40.
7. Gould, S. J., *The Mismeasure of Man*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1981, p.138.

   Lombroso's criminal anthropology was part of a Western practice of scientific racism. *See* Alland, A. Jr., *Race in Mind: Race, IQ, and Other Racisms*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002; Baker, L., "A Model Approach for Studying Race: Provocative Theory, Sound Science, and Very Good History," *American Anthropologist*, 106(1), 2004, pp.168-172; Baker, L., and Patterson, T., "Race, Racism, and the History of US Anthropology," *Transforming Anthropology* 5(1&2), 1994, pp.1-7; Goodman, A., "Three Questions about Race, Human Biological Variation and Racism," *Anthropology News* 46(6), (September), 2005, pp.18-19; Holt, T., *The Problem of Race in the Twenty-First Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2002; Horn, D. *The Criminal Body: Lombroso and the Anatomy of Deviance*, Routledge, New York, 2003; Lombroso, C., and Ferrero, G., *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute and the Normal Woman*, (translated and introduction by Rafter, N.H. and Gibson, M.,) Duke University Press, Durham, 2004 (original 1894); Tucker, W., *The Science and Politics of Racial Research*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana 1994; Tucker, W., *The Funding of Scientific Racism: Wickliffe Draper and the Pioneer Fund*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2002.

   The 1930 penal code was partly inspired by Lombroso's work. Abortion had been illegal since at least 1889 as an attack on individual life and the rights of the fetus, relying on a determination that life begins at conception. The penal code, however, redefined abortion, contraception and voluntary sterilisation as "demographic dangers", as crimes against the Italian "stock", and as threats to the nation and the state. Bodily autonomy and the rights of individuals were subordinated to the demographic interests of the nation (Horn, D., *Social Bodies: Science, Reproduction and Italian Modernity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1994, pp.15-16, 82-84).
8. Nadeau, B., "Poor, Poorer, Poorest", *Newsweek* (international edition), 26 Sept.-3 Oct. 2005
9. Unemployment rates vary significantly by region, according to Eurostat. In 2002, the highest and lowest rates in the South appeared in Sicily (17.2%) and Abruzzi (7.9%) whereas in the North they occurred in Liguria (5.8%) and Alto Adige (2.7%) (*The Economist*, "Addio, Dolce Vita: A survey of Italy," 26 November 2005, p.14).
10. *The Economist*, op. cit. 8., p.3.
11. Ibid, p.4.
12. Ibid, p.6.
13. Ibid, p.17.
14. Ibid, p.18.
15. Carter, D., *States of Grace: Senegalese in Italy and the New European Immigration*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997; Cole, J., *The New Racism in Europe: A Sicilian Ethnography*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997; Douglass, W. "Migration in Italy," *in* Kenny, M. and Kertzer, D., (eds.) *Urban Life in Mediterranean Europe: Anthropological Perspectives*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1983, pp.162-202; Krause, E., *A Crisis of Births: Population Politics and Family-Making in Italy*, Wadsworth, Belmont, CA, 2005, pp.161-163, 172-174.

Pérez and Massimo Livi-Bacci have written that, "Contrary to popular belief, Italy and Spain have never had very high levels of fertility."[63] Indeed, in the 1950s, when Chamberlain made his observations, the total fertility rate in the United States – just over three children per woman – was significantly higher than in Italy at just over two per woman. A century earlier, between 1860-70, so-called natural fertility levels among Italian and Spanish women were lower than those of German, Dutch or Belgian women, and were about the same as those of the English, Danish and Swedish. Nonetheless, travellers and observers like Chamberlain and his 19th-century predecessors:

> "mistook the noisy presence of children in the streets . . . and the active role they took in many rural and urban occupations as signs of unusually high fertility".[64]

But even demographers such as Livi-Bacci have attributed the cause of the birth rate in southern Italy dropping later than in the rest of Europe to the southerners' clinging to tradition.[65] His explanation, which relied on aggregate statistics, reinforced notions of a backward South.

A significantly different picture emerges from village research conducted by anthropologists Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider in Sicily.[66] Up until the late 1800s, having a large family in Sicily indicated wealth. When agricultural markets collapsed at the beginning of the 1900s,[67] the landed gentry was hard hit. To maintain their luxurious lifestyle, elites had to change their ways. They embraced smaller families. Their primary means of birth control was coitus interruptus.

Artisans and peasants experienced economic cycles differently. Artisans began to have smaller families in the 1930s during the Great Depression. The peasants – agricultural day labourers and sharecroppers – were the most numerous class and actually increased their family size up until the 1950s and 1960s when changes such as land reform led them to adopt coitus interruptus as well so as to limit births. The Schneiders' class-based analysis draws on demographic data and local memory to reveal:

> "interclass relations in the local community that created insurmountable obstacles to upward mobility for the *braccianti* [sharecroppers and day labourers], and made it difficult for them to construct and realize a new family ideal."[68]

In a complex reading of the "social relations of domination and humiliation" during the inter-war period, the anthropologists describe a situation in which the wives and children of poor men "were not fully their own, but in a dependency relation with *padrone* [the gentry bosses]." Continuing to have large families – or rather a pregnant wife and a new-born child – was a way for otherwise powerless men to affirm their masculinity, albeit superficially.[69]

For each class, it was not that southerners suddenly broke with tradition and rejected the customary values that marked them as "backward". Rather to realize the *old* value of respectability, they had to make adjustments, such as limiting their fertility by means not only of coitus interruptus but also of rhythm methods, barrier devices, herbal remedies, abortions, and intensive and long-term breastfeeding. Some couples also limited family size through traumatic means such as abandonment or infanticide.[70]

63. Delgado Pérez, M. and Livi-Bacci, M., "Fertility in Italy and Spain: The Lowest in the World", *Family Planning Perspectives* 24(4) July/August 1992, p.163. Sicily's total fertility rate (TFR) was slightly higher than other regions but well below non-Italian perceptions. It went from 2.61 in 1975 to 1.70, a decline of 34.9 per cent, compared to the national rates of 2.18 to 1.31, a decline of 39.9 per cent, during the the same 15-year time span (p.164). The lowest rates were in the northern region of Liguria, which shifted from 1.65 in 1975 to 0.98 in 1990, a 40.6 per cent downward change. The US Population Reference Bureau defines Total Fertility Rate as "the average number of children a woman would have assuming that current age-specific birth rates remain constant throughout her childbearing years (usually considered to be ages 15 to 49)" (http://www.prb.org, accessed 1 June 2006).
64. Delgado Pérez, M. and Livi-Bacci, M., op. cit. 63, p.162.
65. Livi-Bacci, M., *A History of Italian Fertility*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1977.
66. Schneider, J.C. and Schneider, P.T., op. cit. 59 and 60.
67. The collapse was due to capitalism's first depression spanning the 1890s to the 1920s, when "drastically falling cereal prices and mounting tariff battles with other countries destabilized not only agrarian Sicily, but Italy as a whole. In interior, latifundist [huge estate] towns . . . members of the landed class managed to stave off their own decline by shifting the burden of contraction onto their peasant sharecroppers and day laborers" (Schneider, J.C., and Schneider, P.T., "High fertility and poverty in Sicily: Beyond the culture vs. rationality debate," *in* Greenhalgh, S., (ed.), *Situating Fertility: Anthropology and Demographic Inquiry*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p.186).
68. Ibid, p.192.
69. Ibid, p.200.
70. On the history of abandonment in Italy, *see* Kertzer, D., *Sacrificed for Honor: Italian Infant Abandonment and the Politics of Reproductive Control*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993.

Demographic Malaise?

By the 1990s, the demographic yardstick for distinguishing modern from primitive reproductive behaviour no longer worked in Italy. Reproduction had become subject to a control that was itself seen as "irrational". It was viewed as having reached pathological extremes. Livi-Bacci compared modern Italians' refusal to procreate with anorexics' refusal to eat.[71] His characterisation frames the reproductive activities of Italians as far from rational, because anorexia is a debilitating, self-destructive disorder.

It is also very much a gendered disorder. Who is refusing to procreate if not women? (Recall, demographers calculate fertility rates by studying groups of women.) The implication is that angst-ridden and body-obsessed women are rejecting their responsibility to replenish the nation. They have a disease. They have not become irrational like their "inferiors", but rather have been struck by a pathology that prevents them from exercising their rationality.

This idea is echoed in the book by Antonio Golini and his colleagues, *Il malessere demografico in Italia* or *The Demographic Malaise in Italy*.[72] The term *malessere* is typically used with an illness; it is the opposite of well-being. It is generally used in reference to the body, but its use in the book title points not only to individual bodies but also to the social body – or more accurately the *national* social body. The metaphor implies that the national social body is suffering from a demographic illness. The authors turn a demographic trend into a social pathology or a national disease.

In 1997, Minister of Health, Rosi Bindi, commented, "If the increase in the life span is a conquest, the low level of natality is a sign of lost civility or at least of tragic uneasiness."[73] Her alarm echoed that of Golini that Italians' reproductive outcomes in the past made them more civilised. But was it not the very prolific reproductive patterns of southerners that marked them as backwards, and even stigmatised them as *marocchini*, or Arab-like?

The bottom line of "demographic malaise" is the creation of fear: fear of a future in which the old social and class structures of society no longer exist; fear of vulnerability; fear of change; fear of a "deformed society"; and fear of immigrant others. Similarly, disappearing but not mentioned are the culturally constructed justifications that protected social institutions such as the patriarchal family, the landed nobility and white northern Italians. "Demographic malaise" is not just about a "deformation" in the age structure. It is also about waging a politics of difference in an age of transnationalism.

The bottom line of "demographic malaise" is the creation of fear – of the future, of change and of Others.

"Demographic malaise" is about waging a politics of difference in an age of transnationalism.

Consequences of Alarm

The expert voices of demographers create a cacophonous alarm that rings not only in the ears of Italians but also in the ears of immigrants. The alarm ringing is about Italy as a nation and about Italy as part of Europe: as Christian and as white. Demographic politics are racial politics even when they are careful not to engage in vulgar racism. In the current context of Europe, racism has become coded as culture. When politicians speak of "cultural difference", they mask the

71. Livi-Bacci described demographers who work on the topic of low fertility as being "in the worrisome position of the doctor faced with the case of an adolescent who refuses food." The loss of appetite, he reasoned, might just be due to social factors that could be changed. But, in a worse-case scenario, the loss of appetite was due to an alteration of core values and hence reflected "a true and real anorexia" (Livi-Bacci, M., "Introduzione" *in* Golini, A., (ed), op. cit. 16, p.14).
72. Golini, A., Mussino, A. and Savioli, M., op. cit. 8.
73. *La Stampa*, op. cit. 3.

practices of protecting white European privilege and perpetuating exclusion.

Alarmist demographic discourses masquerade as objective science. In reality, they constitute a strategy of subordination. Demographers express fears of demographic desertification from a position of authority, and their opinions give weight to those fears. Alarmist claims about "demographic deformations" enable racism because they stimulate a climate of panic and anxiety towards immigrants. They fuel a media environment in which the norm is to depict immigrants as a threat.

Furthermore, as demographers speak with regret about a future "disappearance" of Italians and of Italian and European culture, they rewrite history. They encourage forgetting. They encourage a myth of an Italy that was once "pure" and homogenous. Finally, such discourses encourage some Italians to forget their history of internal racism when united against external immigrants, but then slide back to it in other contexts. The kind of prejudice that southern Italians experienced when they moved north, particularly after the 1950s, is a reminder that Italy has its own history of internal racism. The shadow of the "Southern Question," darkened by turn-of-the-last-century racist science, lingers. Science gave credence to a view of southerners as deviant from birth while ignoring other historical forces. This history lives on in prejudices against southern Italians whom northerners continue to disparagingly refer to as *marocchini*, or Arab-like.

Scientific alarms about an ageing population imply that the country is dying of a falling birthrate. This talk of national decay, as anthropologists Susan Gal and Gail Kligman point out, is "a recurrent theme of nationalist discourse all over Europe".[74] Italians – particularly women – are depicted as pathological in terms of their sexual practices. Once, Italians who embraced small families were held up as the paragons of rationality. Now they are characterised as quasi- anorexics; instead of refusing food, they are refusing procreation.

In sum, demographic discourses in the context of record low fertility in Italy pursue three principal strategies for manufacturing fear:

- disseminating tropes of nationalism that assume a "pure" and homogenous population;
- constructing certain sexual and reproductive behaviours as polluting what was once "pure"; and
- deploying scientific authority to give legitimacy to a "crisis".

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

Cultivating a world of open frontiers, open hearts and equal footing with each other is the task of alternative initiatives.

74. Gal, S., and G. Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000, p.27.

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