

Talking about...Population

THERE ARE MANY different perspectives on population. Some see it as a problem that causes increased poverty. Others argue that population levels lead to increased environmental degradation. Another viewpoint plays down the number of people, arguing that the real determinants of poverty and environmental degradation are the level of development in any given society. Conscience asked some of the world's leading voices on the issue to share their views with us, and you.

Participants

Martha Campbell is the president, CEO and founder of Venture Strategies for Health Development, a nonprofit organization created to improve the health of low income people in resource-poor settings. She is a lecturer in the School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley. She has directed the population program of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

Betsy Hartmann is the director of the Population and Development program and Professor of Development Studies at Hampshire College. Her books include “Reproductive Rights and Wrongs” and the co-edited anthology “Making Threats: Biofears and Environmental Anxieties.” As a longstanding activist in the international women’s health movement, Hartmann has spoken and consulted on international population, development, environment and security issues.

Anju Malhotra is the vice president of research, innovation and impact at the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). She is an expert on women’s empowerment, gender equality and demographic and social change. She has made extensive contributions to the field in conceptualizing and measuring women’s empowerment; maximizing the potential of girls and young women; advancing reproductive health and rights; and developing rigorous but feasible and accessible approaches for monitoring and evaluating programmatic impact.

Sarah Onyango is the Africa regional director of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, which implements sexual and reproductive health projects in Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan and Uganda. She has worked in reproductive health and rights programming and advocacy for several years, leading teams in both the public and NGO health sectors. Onyango also was the country representative for Ipas in Kenya.

Malcolm Potts is the first holder of the Fred H. Bixby endowed chair in Population and Family Planning in the School of Public Health, Berkeley, and as CEO of Family Health International (FHI), he launched the first large scale studies of maternal mortality, which helped start the worldwide Safe Motherhood Initiative.

Claire Fox (moderator) is the director and founder of the Institute of Ideas, a think tank that creates a public space where ideas can be contested without constraint. She is the former co-publisher of *LM* (Living Marxism) magazine and a panelist on the BBC’s “The Moral Maze.” She is a member of the European Cultural Parliament and sits on the Advisory Board of the Economic Policy Centre.

CF: IN 1994 AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON Population and Development in Cairo, reproductive rights advocates were successful in moving the population discussion from being one about numbers to being one about the rights of women. But the debate about numbers

has again emerged as a key factor in the discussion. In fact, the Institute of Ideas has organized a number of debates about that new paradigm in the population debate. So, to introduce today's discussion, I'm interested in whether you agree with that perspective.

BH: I do see the shift happening and I'm quite alarmed by it. I think there are several reasons for it. One, ironically, is that we have a Democratic administration in Washington, so there is an attempt to increase international family planning funding after the years of the Bush administration, and I'm all for that. But I think in the process sometimes organizations are willing to use population alarmism as a way to justify increases in international family planning assistance. And you see examples of that in population agencies in Washington, for example, saying that population growth is the main cause of climate change, et cetera. We also see the strategic use of the threat of terrorism to appeal to conservatives in Congress about this issue. Finally, I think that there is a real sense of crisis, with climate change and the economy being very real issues. In the US there's been a tendency to look for scapegoats and blaming the fertility of poor women has always been convenient in these moments of stress.

MC: I've been worried all along about this concept of blame and I feel we have to be very, very careful not to say the climate change is caused by population growth. Climate change is a very separate issue and is created mainly by people in developed countries. What we need to really look at is specific examples. This isn't

about blame but Uganda is going to triple its population size between now and 2050. I think that people there are going to be greatly disadvantaged. This is not about alarm, it's looking at some real numbers and being willing to say there is a problem here about water supplies, about whether or not there will be tension, because there are a great many young people who are not going to have jobs and a great many young men who will not have opportunities. This is not about telling people what to do. This is about letting women have options on whether and when to have a child. We're not in favor at all of telling women to have fewer children.

AM: I think that there are several reasons for the re-emergence of the population debate. I think part of what Betsy stated is true: there is real fear. There are emerging issues about climate change. There's terrorism. And there is an administration in power that is more sympathetic to population and family planning issues. As a result, all sorts of different constituencies are mobilizing.

That said, I think there's another very fundamental reason. After the Cairo agenda was conceptualized, the Bush administration came in and basically destroyed it. That left a huge hole and we are now seeing the re-emergence of population issues because there is more to it than just fertility and family planning. Between the 1950s and the 1990s, other issues were simmering on the backburner, because the fertility issue was at the forefront. Now that fertility has declined in many countries, we see the emergence of, for example, migration and for others, gender equality. It's partially politics, but there is also a

genuine intellectual hole that people are trying to fill by bringing population back on the agenda. Unfortunately, I think many are still talking only about the numbers games. And frankly, I think there is a great opportunity for the reproductive health and the population fields to be much more creative and put some new paradigms on the table.

SO: In the last couple of years we have seen stagnating use of family planning and contraceptives. Previously, we had seen a steady reduction in family sizes. However, certainly in some parts of Africa, we have also seen major issues that contribute to population growth, like increased migration towards cities and, coupled with high poverty levels and the other negative environmental effects, this gives us great concern. I believe that this leads to the reintroduction of population and development issues and we should consider whether we should be focusing on population or on the rights of women.

I think, as previously stated, we need to be creative in looking at these issues and we cannot start by blaming developing countries. Consumption levels and environmental degradation are not totally dependent just on population levels. So I think the issue is how we can resolve the global issues. We need to be creative but also mindful in looking at solutions.

CF: There has been some discussion about not playing the blame game. Betsy, are you scaremongering about how much the debate has changed?

BH: Unfortunately, I don't think I'm scaremongering because in my work I monitor the narratives that are raised in the population and climate change spheres. I'm very alarmed indeed. You see people like Paul Ehrlich, author of "The Population Bomb" saying these things. You see groups like Population Action International promoting the view that population growth is a major cause of climate change. Population Connection (which used to be Zero Population Growth) put out a mass mailing that repeated the alarmism of the 1960s

and 1970s. I'm seeing this narrative again and again. In addition, something that really distresses me is the anti-immigrant movement in the US. Some of them are masquerading as environmentalists and saying that immigration—by increasing population growth—is the cause of climate change and environmental degradation. We can see the strategic use of these discourses. And hopefully this is a fringe occurrence, but Population Action International, for example, is not a fringe institution. So I am extremely worried.

mc: As a matter of fact, I find most of the environmental organizations are fearful about talking about population at all because of the coercion issue—which was a serious concern at the time of Cairo.

is a discussion in Europe about economic development in India or China, people say, “Well, you know, the problem is that there are so many Chinese people and if they have the same lifestyles as us...” This discussion puts an enormous moral pressure on the developing world.

so: I think coercion per se is always negative and unacceptable. I think contraceptive use has increased over the years not so much because of coercion, but because of the availability of information and awareness and women appreciating that this improves their lives. I think the emphasis really needs to be on promoting the benefits of family planning for the individual woman, for the couple, for their families, and encour-

part, it's women who are interested in gaining that reproductive control and who want family planning and fertility control options that are safe and effective for them and accessible to them.

That's non-negotiable in my mind. So in that sense, I don't think governments are dictating what the agenda should be, but responding to a need. At the same time, I do think that the broader population issue deserves to be on national and international policy agendas. So going back to the fear mongering and talking about numbers only, it's a rather bad and desperate strategy on the part of the population movement. But that doesn't take away from the fact that urbanization, migration, numbers, size, the implications of population growth,

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There were some terrible periods when coercion was widely used, in India and China especially, but also Peru. We all know that they shouldn't have happened, but the problem is that concerns about coercing women to have children or pregnancies that they don't want were ignored. What happened is that family planning budgets dropped like a rock, not just because of AIDS, but also because nobody was supposed to talk about family planning anymore.

I don't see that there is any conflict between population and attention to some real numbers and the rights of women. I think the rights of women are very, very important. I don't see any conflict there. I think it's been driven by talk about alarmism and conflict, but there is no need for that.

The coercion issue is interesting. Generally speaking, explicit coercion is certainly unfashionable. However, while people don't admit to it, there is a kind of moral pressure. My experience of this in relation to the developing world is quite straightforward. Whenever there

aging them to use these methods as well as making the methods available. Because once there's a feeling that there is pressure from developed countries, or that their use will benefit developed countries, then it has negative social and political ramifications. Women are always the ones who suffer.

cf: Anju, the Optimum Population Trust in the UK, which has advised the government, argues for a voluntary two-child policy. While it's voluntary, that's fine, but the argument concedes that there are too many people in the world. If you create a climate where the issue is the number of people, isn't that a new, unwelcome shift of which we should be critical?

am: I think that fundamentally family planning access has to be about women personally gaining reproductive control. And at this point in time, I think it also has to be part of policy discussion by government and international agencies and donors in large part, because the demand is coming from women themselves. For the most

age structure, labor force, dependency ratios, are all legitimate issues that should be on the table for a conversation.

cf: Betsy, that sounds harmless enough. On the one hand, it's a perfectly reasonable argument. As part of the discussion about population, shouldn't we just simply note that these things are happening? Are we demonizing them by calling them Malthusians?

bh: The population field itself is very diverse and complex. So when I talk about alarmism and certain people and groups of people or agencies, I'm not talking about the whole population field. I certainly agree that women's control over their own reproduction and sexuality is essential. I also believe it's important to debate demographic issues such as age structure, declining populations, migration, et cetera. What I'm mainly concerned about, though, is that unfortunately the understanding of development often does have a Malthusian undertone. I don't want to brand all

demographers and all development people with this. Again, I think it is complex. But case studies in Tanzania and Haiti have shown that if you have a Malthusian understanding of development, of poverty, of insecurity, of instability, it can end up distorting reality and adversely affecting the delivery of family planning services.

In many countries, you have healthcare providers or governments who are already prejudiced against the poor. What we see is that even on the clinical level, women are not given the full range of contraceptive choices. They are pushed to use the most effective methods to prevent pregnancy, not necessarily what is best for their own health. I do think we have to look at all levels of this. I teach population issues, I study population issues, but what I'm concerned about is this resurgence of Malthusian thought.

MP: Two things. Let's get clinical providers out of this discussion. Instead let's teach the entire community to help themselves. You mentioned Haiti. Haiti has an appalling delivery of family planning services because it's over-medicalized. What we should be doing is to teach Haitian women to give injections of Depo-Provera to those who want it. We should take the pill off the prescription in the US. It is over-medicalized.

Secondly, and this is simply a statistical fact: In some parts of the world there is a Malthusian disaster of huge proportions occurring, especially in Nigeria where a population of 140 million people is going to 290 million by 2050. There is no possible way in which the Nigerians can educate themselves, create jobs for themselves or feed themselves.

CF: But, can I ask you, Malcolm, in relation to what you said, is the driving force for you the Malthusian vision of a terrible catastrophe or is that that you're interested in giving women autonomy to control their own bodies—in which case as it happens sometimes they might or might not use contraception? Isn't there a danger that your support for contra-

ception is actually being driven to solve another problem that you perceive?

MP: It's not an either/or. It's a win-win. I'm a biologist. I understand numbers. I'm also a physician. I've offered family planning to thousands of people. I've done abortions. We respect women. We offer them the choices that they want in fertility control. That is the only strategy which we can possibly adopt.

SO: It's most important to give women choices and rights. In most developing

relevant, but that doesn't affect the individual woman. In a developing society, the problem is really at the level of the woman.

CF: You heard what Malcolm said, Sarah, when he said there really is a kind of huge problem of over-population that's going to lead to mass misery and immiseration.

SO: Issues about population explosions are so farfetched from the realities of people's lives. I don't say they are irrelevant, but in terms of mobilizing support



Claire Fox (moderator)



Martha Campbell

countries women cannot make these choices because they are not adequately informed. They're not educated enough. They're not empowered enough. Once we address issues around empowering women to make choices, they will make the right choices. They'll make the choices to have families that they can manage and that are good for their lives. The core of the problem is poverty; the core of the problem is development. In the short term, we need to help women manage their reproductive lives in a way that doesn't risk their lives. In our society, not only are women having large numbers of children, but they can lose their lives as a result of this, or end up with complications that mar their lives in the future. So I think we need to look at the small picture as well as the big picture. The bigger picture is

from people, we have to see where they themselves are affected.

CF: Martha, at the beginning you asked us not to talk about population and climate change in the same breath. But everybody is. Certainly, all the reproductive rights conferences in Europe now talk about the environment and climate change. Babies born today are counted through the CO₂ they emit and the babies that we stop being born are counted as carbon savings. This trend exists throughout the feminist movement. How do you feel about that?

MP: The only strategy which is ethically acceptable and which is achievable and practical is to empower women to control their fertility. I do feel an obligation to tell people about the Malthusian disaster

that's arising and the hell that's emerging because we need resources. We don't even have enough contraceptives in sub-Saharan Africa to meet the needs of the people who live there. That is absolutely unacceptable. I would like somebody in the World Bank to say to the heads of states in these countries, "Look, you have placed a huge number of totally unnecessary barriers between the women and the choices they need to make."

mc: Let's take an example. If you look at water supplies in all of the countries dependent on the Nile, and put that together with the fact that the populations of those countries are going to

Another thing that really worries me when we talk about the Malthusian paradigm or about Malthusian disasters, is the lack of understanding about political economy and power. Who holds power in government? What is the role of international financial institutions? What is the history of colonialism? What is the history of the postcolonial period? Which political parties are operating? Who are they supported by? Which multinational corporations are investing their resources?

I also have some concerns about Malcolm's point about making contraceptives like Depo-Provera widely available without any clinical oversight. I believe that we do need basic health over-

to bring down fertility rates is simply not there. It would be a good thing to empower women and bring down fertility rates that way, but also we need to consider what it means for women's empowerment when fertility rates come down.

When women are having fewer children we see a major shift in patriarchy in society and women's lives overall. What does that mean? My sense is that you can't have one blanket explanation for explaining why fertility rates come down and that it is the only way that women are going to be empowered. In most societies, this is an iterative process.

So I think that we are past the one-size-

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double. There will be great competition over that very limited water supply. There are environmental aspects that should be grouped together with population growth that do not have anything to do with consumption in developed countries. I think we have to be very sensitive with this, and all the way through the population debate. We have to be really, really aware of how uncomfortable people are about the subject because they assume it's about telling people what to do instead of letting them do it.

I do want to say that there is not one country that has achieved economic development or emerged from poverty while fertility is still high. We can't find one. None.

bh: I find that to be pretty problematic. I think development and fertility reduction can go hand in hand, and sometimes development precedes fertility reduction and actually sets the stage for fertility reduction, because of reduction in infant mortality, increased access to education, et cetera.

sight; not all contraceptives are appropriate for all women.

am: I think this opposition between a population perspective and women's rights and Malthusians versus a more enlightened perspective is an unnecessary part of the process. The political economy aspect of it is very important. I also think that we need to consider that individual women make choices within largely patriarchal structures. So to say that this is all just about individual women's choices is problematic.

I think what the data really show is that fertility rates have come down for a number of reasons. They've come down because of development. They've come down because family planning was available. They've come down because in some cases, governments were coercive. In other cases, they were not. They've come down in places where women were empowered. They've come down in places where women weren't empowered. So, in fact, the evidence that you need women's empowerment

fits-all debate. It's not even a developed versus developing country dichotomy, because you can't even classify developed and developing countries. Do you call China a developing country?

cf: There are some very stock philosophical approaches to this debate. Some people think that too many people will cause all sorts of problems for the planet. Others who are committed to women's equality and reproductive rights believe that the problem is not the number of people, but rather is a social problem of production and distribution of resources. I also see a kind of pessimism about the future. One has to bear in mind that the environmentalist philosophical discourse is to argue that economic development per se is problematic.

Malcolm, you're obviously pessimistic about certain areas of the world. Do you think that you could bear more people, if they were rich enough?

mp: Oh, I'm very worried about some countries, which are exactly the ones

where women have not had the access to contraceptives, the family planning choices that they deserve. We're in a very serious situation, probably because we wasted so much time.

so: There are issues that need to be addressed. But I think that looking at the population growth in Kenya as meaning that we will have some 13 million people without a job is very lopsided. They could be 13 million very productive people. One interesting issue that has emerged out of Kenya is that studies show that the current generation wants to have more children than their mothers wanted to have. We need to find out why they have made this choice. I think we need to work out this issue in a balanced manner, paying attention to development issues, population issues and issues of concern to individual women. Clearly, one of the common arguments in Africa is that population densities in many African countries are much less than those in many developed countries.

cf: Thank you, Sarah. That was very useful. I think we should now move on to a discussion about whether there is a birth dearth in developed countries. Is there a crisis of fertility?

mc: I'm not sure that that this is much of a crisis at all compared to countries with enormous populations where the resources are not available even for educating people, because populations grow much faster than educational resources. But people are very worried. Japan is obviously very worried. I'm a lot less worried about it than I am about the fact that women don't have options on whether or not to have another child.

bh: I think there are two things going on. One is immigration. Declining birth rates can have an economic impact in terms of supporting older populations, younger workforces, et cetera. And I think immigration is one way that you can deal with that. So I think a lot of the arguments around a birth dearth are actually

a fear of immigration and there's a racial and ethnic component to that debate.

But also I think it's important to look at the persistence of patriarchy, for example in a country like Italy. If women join the workforce and are then forced to assume a double burden at home, I think in some cases that can also impact how many children women have. So I think social services should exist to assist women who work, and we also need a challenge to the patriarchal structures that don't always allow women to have



Betsy Hartmann

children if they want them. We see this in countries with more flexible work hours, where men participate more in the home and raising children. Sweden has introduced better benefits for paternity leave, et cetera, and we can see that people are having two children instead of just one.

I don't think it's a major cause for alarm, but I think what's interesting to look at is why it's happening and that depends very much on the social context. If it's due to a lack of services for women or the existence of patriarchal structures we need to look at those more closely. I also think we need to be very cautious about the use of rhetoric around any birth dearth because it is often targeted at immigrants.

am: I would very much agree that there is some fear mongering around this issue, in part because of immigration. If you

think about it, when Europe was going through its population boom a couple of centuries ago, a lot of that was taken care of by emigration outside of Europe. In some sense, population momentum in many developing countries is also being taken care of in that way.

I also agree with Betsy's point, and this relates to whether it's a developed country or a developing country, whether it's a high-fertility country or a low-fertility country. The policy environments that you have for the labor force,



Anju Malhotra

education, if family planning is supplied through the health system, the level of respect that exists for women, all of these really help determine whether women are able to capitalize, not just on having the number of children they want when they want them, but all the other things that go with that.

Her point about Italy is classic. Women are having fewer children because there is no support system, and the concept of motherhood still places a heavy burden on women, as compared to Scandinavian countries where fertility rates are not that low, because the policy environment is so much more supportive of women being able to do their roles.

I think that's equally applicable to developing countries, which is why I'm saying that it's not just about giving individual women access to family planning. It's ensuring that while you're doing that,

all the other development processes that are going on are going to be supportive of women as they shift their roles. There are now huge numbers of women in sub-Saharan African who don't want large numbers of children. But you have a lot of places in South Asia, Africa and Latin America where women want fewer children. They see what the possibilities are for them with fewer children. But it's not just access to family planning, but realizing all those other possibilities that's important to them.

CF: Malcolm, I'm coming to you because I want to ask you a specific question. You made a point very early on in the discus-

tion because women can choose when to have children. The children are better off because they are loved and belong to small families and not competing at all with their siblings. They get better education. The children are more healthy. The women are more healthy. It's just a wonderful win-win situation and one of the side effects is that we also have a smaller carbon footprint.

to make family planning easily accessible. Now, this caution about clinical things is just not practically valid. The WHO states that Depo-Provera can be given to anybody. It's easier to use than the pill. You can take it if you're breastfeeding. It doesn't matter if you're diabetic. We have to get these things out. Even in the United States of America, one half of all pregnancies are unintended. The developing countries as a whole provide 3 percent of the global carbon footprint. This is trivial. The carbon footprint comes from the north. We must make choices available to people across the board and we're not going to do it in a complicated clinical context in some

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CF: Sarah, can I just turn to you? One of the things that I want you to consider is how aid organizations and NGOs use language that relates to women's rights, feminism and reproductive rights. Is this appropriate in all cultural settings?

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sion when you made a passionate call for the de-medicalization of family planning.

I just wondered what you thought the barriers are and whether you think that family planning is enough?

MP: I think they've got the same issues in the North as in the South. I entirely agree what was said about patriarchy in Italy and the very low birth rate. Through all our discussions, there is a final, common pathway and it's based upon a very simple set of biological premises. Human beings have sex more frequently than they need to in order to have even a large family. They have sex hundreds or even thousands of times more frequently than they need to have the children they want. So they have to have the information and the technology to separate sex from childbirth. As long as I go into any African hospital and see women suffering and dying from abortions, I am going to believe and assert in the face of everybody in this discussion that the number one policy must be

very low-resource setting. We could prevent 2 million infant deaths on this planet next year if we have all our pregnancies spaced 36 months apart.

CF: I want to take you back to that point you made about the population debate being more about the developed world, because there is a nervousness about it, or at least a sensitivity I think you said earlier. Do you think the big thing in America really is population control?

MP: We have a wonderful, practical example here in California. We have a special program that provides help for people who live below 30 percent of the poverty line. They receive free family planning from a whole variety of doctors that they can choose. A very careful evaluation of the totally volunteer program shows that it's preventing about 100,000 unintended pregnancies a year. That's a lot of carbon emissions. That's a wonderful example of a win-win situa-

SO: We are often asked why we are focusing on women's issues and gender issues. The general public interprets issues around gender, about women's rights, about reproductive rights in a particular way. In terms of communicating, we try as much as possible to be inclusive and promote the involvement of all members of society. This means bringing men to the table because any real dialogue on women's rights and reproductive rights cannot happen without the involvement of men.

CF: Betsy, do you see how this pseudo-radical rhetoric could be used to shroud a reactionary agenda on population?

BH: I have had significant experience in the international women's health movement. We see a lot of international solidarity on these issues and a really conscious attempt not to have an agenda imposed from the West but rather more working it out together. Sometimes the

language of reproductive rights is appropriated by population control interests. We have to be very cautious about that. It does depend on which group you're talking about and you can't paint this with a broad brush. There is a lot of good stuff going on.

For example, the idea of carbon footprints can be useful when you're looking at, for example, the US, as individuals here have much higher carbon usage than people in Africa. But so many of the causes of climate change are more systemic, having to do with industrial patterns, with the types of energy we use, with lack of investment in alternative energies, with no alternatives to the use of fossil fuels. So we see a pinpointing of the individual as the main problem in climate change and therefore population reduction is one of the main solutions. This is very problematic. In fact, I see it as a form of climate change denial because we're denying the kind of real solutions that we need. For example, by capping carbon emissions, green jobs, investing in alternative energy, green innovation, et cetera.

CF: Final thoughts.

AM: I have been trying to be balanced, but I do think that there are some fairly unequivocal points. Malcolm makes a very good case that sexuality and procreation have been separated, and that's a genie that's come out of the bottle and it's not going back in. The population movement and the feminist movement needs to take a strong look at that and see what it means in terms of access to safe and effective contraception on a regular basis for all women who want it.

The separation of sexuality and procreation has huge implications for gender relations overall and women's position in society. The feminist movement needs to tackle this in a positive manner, rather than just being in a defensive mode and saying, OK, well, we're not talking about population control.

On the other hand, the solutions we need to look at in dealing with climate change, economic growth, social secu-

rity, urbanization, et cetera, including numbers, age structure and other aspects of the population debate. Population has to be a part of that policy agenda.

MP: Family planning is a choice; it's not a diagnosis. Doctors diagnose things. People make choices. We have to give people the information and technologies that they need. People who over-medicalize family planning are simply being paternal. The profession to which I belong is a very paternalistic one; we like to control things.



Sarah Onyango

We need to get away from that control. We've got to give women choices about safe abortion. There is no country with level fertility that doesn't have access to safe abortion, including Ireland, because Irish women will go to England.

SO: I agree that we need to ensure that women are adequately informed and have access to the family planning methods of their choice. But, I think side by side with this, we need to be conscious of the environmental problems and address these in ways that have worked in other countries: greener cities, access to water, deforestation. We cannot ignore these, but we shouldn't be talking about population. We should be clear that these are issues about reproductive rights.

BH: I strongly support women and men's access to family planning and abortion

and that would be one thing that Malcolm and I agree on. I also believe we need massive investment in primary healthcare in developing countries, of which family planning is a part. And I think sometimes when we divorce healthcare and family planning, it can be very dangerous.

I'm also a little more skeptical about whether all contraceptives are safe for all women. I do believe we need to look at the side effects of certain contraceptives carefully in terms of which popula-



Malcolm Potts

tions of women they're appropriate for and which not, and for that you need a functioning healthcare system.

I do think that talking about demographic issues as part of development makes sense, but I certainly don't think the return to a Malthusian paradigm makes sense at all. I'm extremely worried about it. It's being well-funded in the US.

To end on an optimistic note, I think there's a very strong countermovement within the population field itself, within the reproductive health and rights field. There are many environmentalists who also aren't buying into this Malthusian notion of the causes and solutions for climate change. They are the mainstream and the alternative is this fringe, Malthusian, alarmist community. I think we have to be very strongly outspoken against it at the same time that we strongly defend women's and men's reproductive rights.



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mc: I really appreciate Betsy's comments on patriarchy as it relates to Italy, Spain and other parts of the world. I think that educated people should not be afraid of talking about the numbers of people. Numbers of people does not mean population control. I wish we could get rid of the pejorative language of population control. It is not necessary to control anybody. It's as if the Malthusian paradigm has become a pejorative term.

There is a Malthusian fringe, but we don't want to make that sound like the mainstream of those who are concerned about the number of people. When we talk about numbers it doesn't mean coercion. It means numbers and enabling women to have control over whether and when to have a child in a reproductive rights framework is very important. We need to let women have options about their fertility, and I think we all agree on that.

cf: Just a few thoughts, if I may, from my crystal ball. I'm pessimistic in the sense that I think, see and read a great deal of pessimism about the future and I have detected a very deep strand of anti-humanism emerging. I can see a rise in panics about population that I think are less about numbers and more represent a philosophical anti-humanism, a kind of misanthropy about the future. I have been in a number of debates about population. Usually, I am accused of being religious because I think that we shouldn't be so concerned about population levels or of being a climate-change denier by the greens who tell me that if I can't see the catastrophic impact on the planet of too many people, then I'm obviously in denial.

It's interesting that you can discuss as we did today, the issue from all sides. While I'm closest in today's discussion to some of the things that Betsy said, I'm also sympathetic to a number of things others have said, particularly Sarah. Martha was really right to emphasize the need to have this discussion openly and frankly and Anju correctly made the point that in order to reach any solutions we need to be more sensible about it. ■