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Reproduction in Retrospective, Or What's All the Fuss over Low Fertility?

Elizabeth L. Krause

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International Handbook on Gender and Demographic Processes

Springer

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Reproduction in Retrospective, or What's All the Fuss Over Low Fertility?

Elizabeth L. Krause

Concerns about low fertility are confounding. Why on earth should anyone be worried that women in certain countries have so few children? Most people have grown up hearing about the threat of overpopulation. The commonsense assumption is that there are too many human beings in the world. The bottom line, this argument goes, is that there are too many children. Given concerns about population, shouldn't having few children be cast in a positive light?

Contrary to conventional wisdom, in many parts of the world, such as Western Europe and Russia, declining birth rates are of major concern. Should we agree with or challenge those concerns? As bells sound alarms of overpopulation and climate change, how do we understand all the fuss about lowest-low fertility?

A critical look at current and historic campaigns can go a long way toward exposing the specters of nationalism, sexism, racism, and even classism that haunt demographic discourse and policy. Nation-states' efforts to work their ideological way into bedrooms and intervene in couples' reproductive practices amount to political deployment of gender and sexual norms. Such deployments have long histories (Watkins 1992) and are hardly unique to Italy or other European

nation-states, e.g., (Kanaaneh 2002; Parker et al. 1992; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). In the United States, a form of demographic nationalism has blended with alt-right politics. Demographic nationalism manifests different forms.

On September 22, 2016, the Italian Ministry of Health launched an advertising campaign to promote its first National Fertility Day. The campaign was so controversial it was immediately withdrawn. One commentator wrote in *The Guardian* that the ads were not only sexist but also echoes of fascist pronatalism (Coppolaro-Nowell 2016).¹

The reference was to 1927, when Benito Mussolini delivered his Ascension Day Speech that launched an infamous demographic campaign. He taxed bachelors up to age 65, awarded prolific women, rewarded prolific couples, outlawed contraceptives, narrowly defined women as reproducers for empire, and eventually made abortion a crime against the race.² His political

¹See also Matt Payton, 2 September 2016, *The Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/italys-baby-making-campaign-fertility-day-birth-rate-an-angry-response-fertility-a7221321.html>. Accessed November 17, 2017.

²Pronatalism under the fascist regime included coercive as well as incentive measures. The regime changed abortion from a crime against the person to a crime against the race and nation. Contraception and information about it were illegal. The regime's pronatalist drive was also expressed

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agenda was designed to get women and men to procreate for the sake of the nation. Indeed, the specter of Mussolini's demographic campaign has haunted the Italian imagination for nearly nine decades.

Initially, I became interested in reproduction as an intellectual puzzle when I learned, through the work of oral historian Luisa Passerini, of factory workers' resistance to Mussolini's demographic campaign. The men and women she interviewed in the northern Italian city of Turin had lucid memories about how they avoided compliance with the dictator's desire to get men and women to crank out babies to populate colonies and feed his war machine (Passerini 1987).

Comparatively, at least on first glance, the Italian National Fertility Day campaign seems fairly innocuous. Let's consider why the campaign was so fraught. One image featured an attractive woman of child-bearing age holding an hourglass with the slogan, "Beauty has no age limit. Fertility does." Another shifted the focus to males, featuring a man with a droopy, partially smoked cigarette: "Don't let your sperm go up in smoke." Another showed two pairs of feet layered in bed with a smiley face: "Young couples: The best way to be creative." Still another depicted an image of baby shoes wrapped in the tricolored ribbons of the Italian flag, "The constitution provides for conscientious and responsible procreation." However parsed, the message was clear: having sex should be about having babies, and young couples have a national duty to procreate!

5.1 Fertility Promotion as Demographic Nationalism

All told, campaigns such as that promoted on Italy's first National Fertility Day reflect a rising tide of demographic nationalism. This form of nation-building draws on knowledge about population structures within delimited political bound-

through propaganda about motherhood. See de Grazia 1992, Horn 1994, Ipsen 1996, Krause 1994, Passerini 1987, and Snowden 2006.

aries to fuel patriotic feelings and intensify sentiments toward xenophobic bursts and movements.

Demographers' alarms assist in constructing and normalizing Italians as homogenous, "white" and European. The alarms enable racism by promoting a politics of difference that heightens whiteness, not as an objective skin color but as a subjective ideology. This ideology functions as an instrument of power by guaranteeing and naturalizing privilege. Furthermore, alarmist discourses encourage a form of demographic nationalism in which the national population is depicted at risk from internal sources—such as low fertility and rapid ageing—as well as from external ones—namely, increasing immigration (Krause 2006). One famous team of demographers went so far as to author a book that depicted the birth trends as a pathology—a broad and dire social malaise (Golini et al. 2000).

The National Fertility Day ads sent a similar warning message that had urgent undertones. Besides the unmistakable heteronormative bias of the ads that aim to instill in young people a desire as well as duty to procreate, and the hourglass marking time running out, a racial/ethnic preference is also apparent. The young woman featured in the ad about youth and fertility had fair skin with chestnut hair and appeared to be what one might associate with Northern Italian features. The stacked four feet of the "couple" laying in the bed also clearly belonged to white people. The campaign conveyed an unspoken national preference for white Italian babies.

Such racial preferencing is particularly disturbing in a country that has become known as the "door of Europe." Thousands of migrants have drowned while crossing the Mediterranean from Africa to the Italian island of Lampedusa. Security measures have intensified along with detention centers. Forced deportations throw humanitarianism into question, to say the least (Carter and Merrill 2007). In addition to tragic deaths, many immigrant women from various points of origin give birth in Italy. In Prato, for example, the hospital in 2009 began to record more births to foreign-born immigrants, mostly Chinese, than to Italian citizens (Bracci 2013).

For the past 20 years, as I have worked on population politics related to reproduction, I have witnessed a sea change in the practices and attitudes toward childbearing. I first conducted ethnographic research during 1995–1997 in the province of Prato in the heart of the greater central Tuscany metropolitan area. (Prato split from the Province of Florence in 1992 in no small part due to its unique industrial history.) More recently, I have completed a 5-year collaborative ethnographic project focusing on how immigrant or citizen individuals and families cope with globalization (Krause 2018).

When I started my research trajectory, fertility trends had become a hot topic. In 1992, demographers Margarita Delgado Perez and Massimo Livi-Bacci published a landmark article in which they announced that fertility rates in Spain and Italy were the lowest in the world of any nation-state. Both nations were Catholic and both had witnessed dramatic changes in family structure (Perez and Livi-Bacci 1992). The women of these Mediterranean countries, once seen as bastions for large families, became famous for their reproductive practices. They gave birth to an average of 1.1–1.2 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" (Golini et al. 1995).

I followed the after-effects of this 1992 study. I tracked the narratives with great interest. During my 22 months of dissertation research, I put field-based, ethnographic research to the test to see how this profound demographic transition affected people at the level of everyday life.

Around that time, the Italian government began to worry that its nation's birthrate was "too low."³ Media outlets repeated 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."⁴ A cartoon in a 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."⁵ 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.⁶

Reproductive practices are typically denied history. They are more often than not put into the category of behaviors that are deemed as belonging to nature rather than culture. That's a bunch of hooey. Reproductive behaviors are every bit a part of history as are the stories of great men. It's just that those great men did not want to talk about reproduction. Some had slave women in their lives. Others abandoned their children. Too much detail about reproductive matters could be embarrassing for them given the moral emphasis on idealized kinds of families. Talk of sex was risky business as it could inevitably expose them for having all of those "illegitimate" children (Lepore 2009).

I came of age in an era when women were told that reproduction was an individual choice. I would never say that's entirely wrong. But it's not entirely right either.

Reproductive matters have long been a matter of nation states and the related ongoing moral revolution in which states engage. State practices are concerned with managing and administering populations. Reproductive matters have histories. They intersect with dominant ideologies of class, race, and gender in profound ways (Krause 2001).

³Population 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). The newer data sheets do not include a column with the country's view about whether fertility rates are too low. <http://www.prb.org>, accessed 20 November 2017.

⁴"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.

⁵*L'Espresso*, 26 June 1997. Thanks to Luciana Fellin for this cartoon.

⁶Itti Drioli, "Le 'tavole' del Papa conquistano il Parlamento," *La Nazione*, Quotidiano Nazionale, Prato, 15 November 2002, pp. 3–5.

If I were to tell the truth, I would say that I became interested in reproduction because of my own family. Back in the 1950s, it was not uncommon for young couples to get married so that they could have sex. Typical of many in their generation, my parents also married young. Their pattern of making a family, however, did not altogether fit the norm. The spacing of their four daughters was unusual. My mother was 19 when she got pregnant with my oldest sister and 43 when she had my youngest sister, meaning that 23 years separate the oldest from the youngest. I am separated by 9 and 10 years my older sisters and 13 years from my youngest sister. Three of us, including me, were not planned but rather "failed" contraceptive methods. Only the last child was planned!

My own two children were born 9 years apart. People often assume that their fathers were different or that we had infertility difficulties as a couple. Neither is the case. The birth spacing resulted from graduate school. It was not really planned. Life just happened.

Such patterns of unplanned births are not so unusual. Even in Italy, a surprisingly small number of children are planned. This does not mean that they are not unwanted. It just means that a lot of parents throw caution to the wind. Family planning literature is extremely slanted toward planned procreation. In reality, that's just not how things happen. It's a major inconvenience to admit, but even very modern people in the context of lowest-low fertility are not completely "rational." They also feel things and act spontaneously. (Thank goodness. Otherwise we might as well all turn in our human souls for microchips.)

5.2 Ethnography as Counter to a Rationalist Paradigm

Italians have charted a unique path to their historic destination. National fertility surveys have revealed unconventional uses of birth control methods—more coitus interruptus and condoms than pill—than family planning experts would predict for a lowest-low fertility society

(Castiglioni et al. 2001). Numerous unplanned babies have also been reported, puzzling scholars and laypersons alike. Despite the trends, modernization paradigms persevere, and a rational-actor model continues to dominate descriptions of fertility-related behaviors (Krause 2012).

Consider some of the assumptions that appear in scientific literature related to family size and planning. One of these leading assumptions has been that women, or couples, engage in rational decision making moored in cost-benefit analysis. Furthermore, the presumption is that rational choice has manifested in a societal pattern of very small families. After all, reproductive behaviors are what determine demographic numbers, such as fertility rates. Interpretations of these numbers reveal another assumption: that this historical shift from so-called natural fertility to controlled fertility signifies that people exercise rational and controlled behavior related to planning a family. The additional assumption is that in a lowest-low fertility context people behave rationally, and more so than in a high fertility context.

The truth of the matter may be that this narrow conceptualization of human behavior—in leaving out emotions, desires, and ideologies—exposes the limits of a paradigm. Rather than explaining demographic trends, rationality instead has served as a potent norm in population science.

Ethnographic and historical research challenge this rationalist paradigm. We live in an epoch that has generated an ideology in which adults are expected to be rational about reproduction. People who do not follow norms of rationality—whether due to age (too young or too old) or class (too poor) or race (not the "right" race or ethnicity for the national ideal) or migration status (not the "right" citizenship)—risk stigma, bad treatment, or worse. In an epoch that necessitates the need to be rational about reproduction, my ethnographic research revealed a different story: Italians use the figure of the "unplanned" baby in playful ways that expose fissures in the rationalist paradigm.

To understand those fissures, consider that family planning is deeply rooted in modernization

theories, whose adherents embraced an evolutionary model of human social organization (Greenhalgh 1995; Wolf 1982). One end of the spectrum is assumed to be spontaneous whereas the other was assumed to be calculating. These ends of the spectrum were value laden. Those on the spontaneous end were dubbed laggards and thus irrational, backward, and associated with "primitive" peoples; by contrast, those on the calculating end were leaders and thus rational, forward, and associated with "modern" peoples. The binary itself breaks down in Max Weber's complex views on rationality, particularly where he identifies "the greatest irrational force of life" as "sexual love" (Weber 1946, 343).

Societies across time and place have sought to regulate this "irrational" force of nature. Weber understood that there was nothing particularly natural about sexuality or eroticism long before Foucault (1978) penned his volumes on the *History of Sexuality*. Foucault's concept of biopolitics underscores a form of power directed at managing and governing populations. The concept of "biopolitics of the population" (Foucault 1978, 139) demarcated a shift in the exercise of power in Western societies. This new form witnessed a diffuse form of power aimed at administering life. It departed from the old form, which privileged the sovereign ruler in his role to determine death.

Quality and quantity of inhabitants living in a given state territory became essential. As governments sought techniques of management, a variety of techniques and apparatuses were designed to "know" the aggregate. Turning the population into an "object of knowledge" ultimately allowed for justifications to enact "normalizing interventions," as Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (2000, 19) have observed. Modern power has certain characteristics: it "exerts a positive influence on life that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (Foucault 1978, 137). Foucault's work has had a powerful influence on feminist anthropologists and others who have sought to connect large-scale global influences with local practices and experiences (Krause and De Zordo 2015).

One lesson is that biopolitics are never stagnant. They are the State in action. Here, the State is not merely a unitary, static thing but a set of practices involving all of its legislators, all of its inhabitants. Another insight is that biopower is typically diffuse. It has a penetrating effect on individuals and interpellates them as subjects. In a sense, it gets under their skin. Individuals become subjected to norms of behavior, and they typically internalize those norms. They come to know that having only two children, for example, is "normal." Experts, such as those who generate statistics, provide the important discourses that set the terms at a large scale.

Weber traces how, in the Occident, eroticism gradually turned away from "the naive naturalism of sex," associated with the "organic cycle of peasant life" (Weber 1946, 344). In its place, the Occident began to embrace a view of eroticism that emphasized the value of an "inner-worldly salvation from rationalization" (Weber 1946, 346), a shift he attributes to salon culture. As states employed techniques of "reproductive governance" (Morgan and Roberts 2015), powerful conceits emerged with force.

Emily Martin notes the "profound implications" of relying on a "conceit of reason."⁷ Such conceit seduces people into thinking that "any institution, nation or person could be built on a structure of the rational" (Martin 2009, 11). Martin set out to dismantle the rationality-irrationality binary. To that end, she critically discusses a futuristic world in which the brains of patients suffering "mental illness" are scanned and diagnosed as "bipolar brains, schizophrenic brains, or whatever," without having to consider any subjective perspectives from the patients on their pain. She urges interpreters to rescue the "semiotic" and, related, to push an anthropological insight: "that relationships and practices imbued with meanings are a life lived, not merely a symptom of an underlying physical truth" (Martin 2009, 10). This rescue mission offers a core ingredient to a dismantling recipe. "We do not need to add emotions to rationality; we need

⁷Martin draws inspiration from examinations of tactics of colonial authority (Stoler 2004, 4).

to follow the consequences of realizing that rationality is a skeleton that has never actually lived on this earth: its 'bones' are made up of 'blood,' visceral material enlivened by 'irrational' emotions and sentiment" (Martin 2009, 11). Part of questioning the rationalist discourse underlying the fetish with lowest-low fertility also involves a lesson in throwing off cold skeletal hands and dismantling conceit.

5.3 Culture of Responsibility

A culture of responsibility dictates an intense set of expectations for Italian parents, particularly mothers, in terms of attaining and displaying middle-class respectability (after Schneider and Schneider 1996). Italian demographer Livi-Bacci (2001) suggests that Italy's lowest-low fertility results from "too much family": that is, Italians retain excessively strong family ties and care deeply about providing for their children. Young adults tend to wait to attain desirable personal, economic, and educational status before becoming parents themselves (Livi-Bacci 2001, 146). My ethnographic research confirmed the view of a society that continues to value strong families, while also emphasizing historical adjustments, at times traumatic, to the rigid pecking order of a patriarchal family (2005a, 184). The unraveling of a family hierarchy is deeply linked to economic shifts, and it necessitated a subsequent reworking of gendered subjects located in new socioeconomic consumption contexts, which weigh heavily on mothers (Krause 2005c).

Intense responsibility contrasted with the historic high rates of infant abandonment in the late nineteenth-century. High rates of married women were among those who left their infants at the "wheel" of Brunelleschi's famous *Ospedale degli Innocenti* in Florence (Kertzer 1993). Trauma and loss were deeply associated with the change from families with numerous children to those with few. The demographic transition from high to low fertility rates was neither a single nor a universal story. There were many different nuanced stories: some rural areas transitioned

before urban areas, some areas with high infant mortality transitioned before those with low infant mortality, and so forth.⁸

In my field site, I documented through archives and memories the history of straw weavers networked across the Tuscan countryside in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who worked long hours for low pay producing straw hats for a nascent global economy. Many of these weavers were certified as lacking milk. Those certifications appeared in state registries called "Baliatici," or wet-nurse registries. Once certified, the women could apply to receive subsidies to pay wet nurses to care for their infants. I argued that this allowed the women to continue their weaving activity to contribute to household finances. Submersed beneath all of that "dry" mercantile activity of straw, I suggested, was a wet and hidden traffic in milk. Circulating infants meant that human substances lubricated the economy and kept it "flexible" (Krause 2009).

The protagonist of my book *Unraveled* was born in 1920 and was one of seven children. Emilia Raugei grew up during fascism. She married and had only one child. In the course of our interviews, memories related to fertility decline revealed a history of hidden traumas and dislocations that were all but forgotten. These traumas and dislocations involved birthing that was commodified in a triangular trade among an underclass of women and children. In the Province of Florence of the early twentieth century, these subjects of history were interconnected in their roles as wetnurses, weavers and foundlings.

⁸Anthropologists and demographers for decades grappled with satisfactory explanations for fertility decline, building on the Princeton European Fertility Project, which concluded that the timing of fertility decline did not correlate well with economic development or demographic variables, thereby disproving a hypothesis that fertility decline had universal explanations and showing that it did not always or predictably coincide with modernization measures (Coale and Watkins 1986). This failure led to an interest in cultural setting; however, vague and reified notions of "culture" plagued demographic research (Kertzer 1995, 31–32, 43–4); see (Schneider and Schneider 1996) for explanations of differential, historic fertility decline.

Birthing was more than simply about birthing. It was also about negotiations of labor, capital accumulation, as well as non-capitalist kin relations. Memories and archival data reveal a situation in which a burgeoning global economy in Tuscany depended on a hidden economy of weavers and wetnurses. The memories exposed silent trauma steeped in this traffic in human substances, which took its toll on human emotions and life course.

Despite the fascist leader's best efforts, fertility rates continued to decline among women in Emilia's generation. The trends have a history, and those histories have trajectories. The forces of decline had much more to do with the forces of demographic shift than any particular sentiments of resistance. Those women and men may well have been resisting more than fascism. They were in no small part resisting the trauma of having been peasant sharecroppers and having grown up poor. That eventually meant embracing the symbols and rhythms as well as practices and logics of modern life (Krause 2005b).

Italian parenting became anything but *disinvolto*, or laid back. When I was doing my ethnographic fieldwork, I noticed how parents, especially mothers, devoted substantial time, attention, and discipline to the cleanliness of the houses, the precision of well-laundered and ironed clothes, the selection and preparation of food, and the measured attention to children's health and educations—all reflections of a serious attitude toward parenting. Sweatermaker Carlotta, a native of Prato with a middle-school education, recounted to me during an interview her strategy of deflecting her daughter's pleas for her to have a second child:

"Look, Alice. I would like to make you a little brother or a little sister. But see you are, you're not a child," I go, "that listens to your mamma, you're not a well-behaved child, you always want to do everything, to ..."—even if I know Alice, she's a good kid, she's not bad. So I told her, "Look, Alice," I go, "if you yourself were a more tranquil, calm child," and then I told her, "and if you would eat more," because y'know she makes me a wreck, it's all about eating. And "if you would eat more, then I could make you a little sister or a little brother." [audio interview, Province of Prato, July 15, 1997; author's translation]

Carlotta drew on dominant morals—in which precision, rationality, and order were deemed necessary—to suggest that her daughter's behavior prevented the "gift" of a sibling.

The commonly heard phrases "*Ci vuole tanto a vestire un figliolo ogni giorno*" (it takes a lot to dress a child everyday) and "*stare dietro ad un figliolo*" (to guide a child attentively) express the persistent "necessity" of the self-sacrificing mother (Krause 2005a, 145). Those who violated the small-family norm faced censure, particularly if they were of humble means. When Cinzia, a displaced sweatermaker-turned-housecleaner, was pregnant with her third son in 1996, family and friends chastised her. Of her mother, she recalled, "to us children she has always said, 'Hey! You're stupid if you have another one.... Two are enough for you.'" Although in theory Cinzia agreed, she nevertheless continued the pregnancy. The decision brought harsh criticism. "There was one [woman] carrying on, 'to have three kids here in town, we are half-witted,' understand?" (audiotape interview, Province of Prato, October 23, 1996; author's translation).

5.4 Baby Bonus and 'Sneaky' Pronatalism

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, news reports picked up on the demographic trends. As it turns out, the demographers' reports were not as neutral as we might expect. They were simply couched in neutral terms. Close inspection revealed significant *pronatalism*—a position that favored births across the political spectrum. In other words, the work was politics thinly veiled as science. The media quickly picked up on this stance and, as one might expect, emphasized as well as exaggerated dire predictions. Alarm ringing begat alarm ringing.

My ethnographic work exposed the strategies that demographers used to frame the birthrate in Italy as a "problem." First, I underscored how the exercise of scientific authority had powerful and hegemonic consequences. It produced expert knowledge that extended beyond the field of

demography. Second, I suggested that this knowledge was integral to a politics of cultural struggle that portrayed men and, in particular, women as irrational family-makers. Third, I argued that this instance of demographic science contributed to an alarmism that enabled an "elite" sort of racism toward immigrant others.

Despite all the media attention on the reproductive trends, throughout the 1990s, no broad-sweeping pronatalist policies were proposed or passed in Italy. That all began to change in the early 2000s.

In fall 2003, the Berlusconi government maneuvered to pass the first postwar "baby-bonus" law. The government offered 1000 euros to Italian or European citizens who gave birth to, or adopted, a second child between December 1, 2003, and December 31, 2004. The baby bonus marked the first nationwide pronatalist policy since Mussolini's infamous demographic measures. What made that baby bonus possible was a set of discourses on "rational governance" (after Foucault 1991). The bad word of pronatalism once again become legitimate, acceptable, even "respectable."

The law itself reflected the prevalent expert view that fertility rates were dangerously low and required intervention; however, it countered a widespread opinion among Italians that having few children itself had become moral and respectable. In no small way, limiting births to one or two children became the quintessential sign of being modern. This popular small-family view manifests itself in lowest-low fertility rates.

The tension between having few children and having a few more children was real, but it was the strong and authoritative voice of demographers that built a foundation for the baby-bonus campaign. The bonus was passed after much groundwork. The fact that it was limited to EU citizens attested to the logics of demographic nationalism. The "social Viagra" of the baby bonus was designed to stimulate the birth of only certain babies (Krause and Marchesi 2007; Krause 2001, 599, 2005a, 178–181).

5.5 Immigration and Circulation

As the hospital of Prato began to witness more births to foreign-born women than to Italian citizens, another paradox arose: many of these women were Chinese migrants and, after weaning, they sent their infants back to China to be cared for by grandparents or other relatives. My new book, *Tight Knit: Global Families and the Social Life of Fast Fashion*, details this paradox. Ultimately, kin-related values, norms, and practices became entangled in the hegemony of global supply chains.

Analysis focused on three major themes related to parents' motivations for circulating their children back to China: alienating tempos of fast fashion; a sense of inevitability; and a concern for children's well-being. This circulation of children has given rise to a host of new discourses and interventions on parenting, from various institutions and experts. The research suggested that global households underwrite capitalism through noncapitalist elements that are integral to the economic organization that fast fashion requires. Parents find value in circulating children in its power to activate systems of reciprocity across kin, to create networked bodies across territories, to secure affective bonds across generations, and to free up time so as to enhance their ability to work and make money.

It seemed almost uncanny to me when I learned that many Chinese immigrants living and working in Prato engaged in a circulation of children that, although more distant than that of the straw weavers and wet nurses, was nevertheless structurally similar. The world was transforming at a fast pace, but global histories repeated themselves and in no small part due to economies that are similar in structures though different in particulars.

5.6 The 'Old World' and Its Future

Referring to Europe as the Old World has never been more on point. Are there reasons to be concerned about an aging continent? Of course. Is

anyone who expresses these concerns a racist? No. Are concerns about aging, birthing, and immigration related? Yes. Should we be mindful of these connections? Yes. Do we need new tools and perspectives to address an aging society, on the one hand, and a changing one on the other? Definitely. Changes in population structures result in new disparities and needs for new ways to contend with the present and imagine the future.

Alarms continue to ring. Being within earshot means having the wherewithal of being deaf neither to their cacophony nor effects. The popular media, backed by scientific reports, continue to describe Europe as on the brink of "population disaster," as *The Guardian* reported as recently as 2015.⁹ This is nothing short of alarmist. The article itself points to the fallacy of its own fearmongering: immigrants wanting to come into Europe as well as the need for better and more humane ways of dealing with global disparities.

Related, economic projectors commonly tie population shift to the viability of pensions, healthcare, and social services. One Spanish group, led by a business consultant, in 2013 started the non-profit group Demographic Renaissance, according to the *New York Times*, allegedly to raise awareness related to the population issue. The name took me by surprise. The indexing of European heritage appears to be "neutral," not offensive, and thus innocent. Yet as Lilith Mahmud's work has suggested, the sacredly held Enlightenment values of modern society—fraternity, equality, humanity—have limits in terms of what emancipatory promises liberal humanism actually grants to whom (Mahmud 2014). A demographic Renaissance implies rebirth. In the context of demographic nationalism, what kind of rebirth is imagined and for whom? What kind of myth of continuity is at work here between Renaissance Europe and

Europe today? Who is invited to sit at the table of a demographic Renaissance?

As long as there has been a discourse on sexuality, reproduction has hardly been limited to the metaphorical private domain of the bedroom. It has played and continues to play a central role in the public spheres of politics, the state, and civil society.

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⁹<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/23/baby-crisis-europe-brink-depopulation-disaster>. Accessed 17 November 2017; <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/14/world/europe/italy-births-fertility-europe.html>. Accessed 20 November 2017.

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Assisted Reproductive Technologies and Making and Unmaking of Kin in Iran: Transformation or Variation on a Theme?

Soraya Tremayne

6.1 Introduction

Major changes which have taken place in Iran during the past few decades have had a profound, lasting and irreversible impact on some of the social institutions they have touched. But their impingement has been less transformative on others and has served the purpose of further strengthening the existing core cultural values. Global trends, among many other agents of change, have played a significant part in engendering some of these changes and, in spite of the conservative outlook of the Iranian state, both Iranians and their theocratic ruling clerics have been swift to embrace what globalisation, especially the global technologies, have to offer (Lotfalian 2004). However, while some of these technologies have been adopted without the necessity for an examination of their impact on moral and ethical grounds, the application of others has required official approval and legitimisation, due to their practice affecting core cultural norms and values and religious rules. Among these technologies, none has proved more challenging, complex, and controversial than the assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) affecting procreation, which is perceived to be a divine right and beyond the powers of humans to con-

trol. Reproduction, in its foundational role for the perpetuation of family and kinship, is paramount and considered a duty rather than a choice in Iranian culture. Historically, voluntary childlessness has not been an option for individuals and failing to reproduce is deemed detrimental not only to family and kin group, but also a threat to the stability of society. It is therefore understandable that the introduction of modern technologies affecting procreation has been received with caution and has raised profound questions as to their legitimacy, engaging experts from various disciplines to explore their broader implications.

Concern about the legitimacy of ARTs is not limited to Iran and their endorsement has required the involvement of the legal, ethical and, in some cases, religious authorities of the countries where they are practiced, to explore their impact on society. However, among the social institutions, it is kinship that has been most affected by the impingement of these technologies. ARTs, through offering their users new choices, have become instrumental in broadening and/or re-defining the boundaries of kinship and relatedness in many societies. In reaching specific localities, ARTs have generated a multitude of cultural, religious, and legal interpretations, by both the state and the users of these technologies. For example, ARTs are shown to be challenging the foundational assumptions about kinship in Euro-American models (Strathern 1992), mainly through the practice of third party gamete

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