**Abstract**

The global population control policies and programs that have been promoted and orchestrated in the "Underdeveloped World" by the U.S.-led "population establishment" emerge directly from the last 500 years of colonial invasion, land dispossession, capitalist exploitation, and cultural genocide. Reproductive imperialism, the intricate connection between current population control efforts and the need for cheap labor by transnational corporations, has resulted in a type of foreign invasion in which Underdeveloped World women's wombs become the "final frontier" of colonization. Consequently, the struggle for reproductive liberation is fundamentally an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist process.

# Reproductive Imperialism: Population and Labor Control of Underdeveloped World Women

by

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## Reproductive Imperialism: Population and Labor Control of Underdeveloped World Women

### Introduction

A new era of global population control policies and programs has recently been entered. At the 1994 United Nations' Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo, Egypt, the deleterious effects of population growth on socioeconomic conditions in the Underdeveloped World[1] (or Third World) dominated the international media coverage. This era is characterized by a retrogression from the demands of the international community for improved access to education, health care, land and social equality put forth as solutions to the problems faced by "developing nations" at the 1984 United Nations World Population Conference in Mexico City (Gibson-Rosado 1993). The 1994 conference reasserted fertility reduction and population control as *the* indispensable measure for socioeconomic development of the "Third World."

In accordance with this view, the "population establishment," an interlocking network of public and private agencies that fund and promote global fertility reduction strategies, has linked population control efforts to the larger process of development assistance in the Underdeveloped World. The commonly accepted assumption is that by reducing population growth in those areas with the highest levels of natural increase, also assumed to be those areas of greatest underdevelopment, the negative effects of "overpopulation" on socioeconomic development and the environment can be arrested.

While it is clear that population processes have a relationship to socioeconomic development, the view that population growth is chiefly responsible for social underdevelopment has been hotly contested and challenged by a wide variety of grassroots and nongovernmental organizations. The countervailing perspective considers population control programs and policies as part and parcel of the colonial legacy that continues to haunt the Underdeveloped World. The funneling of large amounts of resources into such programs in Africa, Asia, and Latin America by the population establishment (along with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund [IMF], and the United States Agency for International Development [USAID]), can be considered "reproductive imperialism"--that is, a type of foreign invasion and domination in which Underdeveloped World women's wombs become the "final frontier." From this perspective, the manipulation of women's reproductive capacities can be seen as a strategy for maintaining the colonial and dependent relationships that exist between the "Overdeveloped" and "Underdeveloped" Worlds.

This paper examines various critiques of international population policy. It investigates the relationship between global population control and the increasingly intense needs among transnational corporations for a controllable, cheap labor pool. Finally, it consolidates the evidence that points to an intricate connection between population control programs and global business interests.

## Critical Perspectives in Population Control

The theoretical foundations of contemporary population control were expressed in the 18th century in the writings of Thomas Malthus (1970). In *Essay on the Principle of Population*, Mathus asserted a fundamental contradiction between the growth of population and the amount of world resources available for human sustenance. In the Malthusian scheme, the geometric growth of population is countered by the arithmetic increase in food supply. According to this logic, the poverty and despair of the working class that existed during the time he wrote was a result of the fundamental law of population in which its growth inevitably placed pressure on the environment and its resources (Malthus 1970). This contradiction between population growth and societal well-being was posited by Malthus to be universal and inescapable. It is this assumption that informs the dominant approach to population growth in the Underdeveloped World.

Malthusian logic has been incorporated into the present day modernization approach to societal development (So 1990). From a modernization perspective, societal development is a linear process whereby societies move through distinct stages. Each stage is characterized by a particular population dynamic. This sequence of stages is explained by the demographic transition theory.[2] In this scheme, the "developing" world is viewed as stuck in the intermediary or transition stage on the path to development. This stage is characterized by lowered death rates, resulting from the diffusion of advanced medical technology from the developed world, offset by the persistence of traditionally high fertility rates. The result is rapid population growth, a major obstacle to the socioeconomic development of these countries.

According to Philip M. Hauser (1960:4):

> Of all the problems that are generated by rapidly growing population none are more grave than those arising from the relationship between population and economic development. For the adverse effects of explosive population increase on the efforts of the underprivileged people of the world to achieve higher levels of living are producing explosive world political problems, both short and long run. The implications of world population growth are both global and international.

In order for these areas of the world to develop and "modernize," they must progress to the third and final stage of the demographic transition scheme. The perceived inability of countries in the developing world to reduce their population growth rates independently underlies the necessity for external intervention. Population control programs comprise this external stimulus.

The assumptions upon which neo-Malthusian and modernization theory are based have come under serious attack and been directly challenged by the facts (Bondestam 1980; Hartmann 1987; Kasun 1988; Shrestha and Patterson 1990). In her study of the relationship

between global politics and population control, Betsy Hartmann (1987) found no correlation between hunger and population density. As opposed to population growth confronting a finite supply of resources, economists have linked the availability of resources to the variable forces of production and distribution (Bondestram 1980; Kasun 1988; Meek 1971). The inability of underdeveloped countries to feed their populace can, in large part, be attributed to market related factors, as opposed to their food production capacities. In fact, studies (Hartmann 1987; Kasun 1988) have shown that most countries in the Underdeveloped World utilize only a fraction of their food producing capabilities. According to Jacqueline Kasun (1988:35), "the less-developed countries, those whose present food supplies are most precarious, are capable of feeding 18 billion people, or six times their present population."

Thus, the "population outstripping food production" thesis used as an explanation for the hunger observed in Asia, Latin America, and Africa (see, e.g., Berelson 1969; Caldwell and Caldwell 1986) fails to take into account the multitude of other factors that impact food production and distribution. Emphasis on growing crops for export in most underdeveloped countries, for example, plays heavily in the equation. Very often the largest proportions of land are relegated to growing crops to supply the "global supermarket" rather than a country's population (Kasun 1988; Mass 1976; O'Brien 1983). The demands of the world market, as opposed to the needs of a country's people, determine key aspects of food/resource production and consumption. In Latin America, despite high levels of malnutrition and poverty, food exports predominate over food imports (O'Brien 1983; Vickers 1991). Therefore, the cash-cropping and maldistribution of available resources characteristic of neocolonial dependence are as, if not more, responsible for the indigence that exists in the Underdeveloped World as is population growth.

In addition, there has been no conclusive evidence linking population growth or density to economic development. Kasun (1988:48) reports that:

> in view of all that has been said and done on the assumption that population growth is harmful: the economic studies have failed to demonstrate that population growth has bad economic effects. Even more startling, the statistical evidence indicates that among developing countries more rapid population growth may be associated with more rapid growth of per capita output.

In short, uninvestigated assumptions promoted as scientific fact by Malthus in the 18th century have remained vastly unsubstantiated. Nevertheless, they form the ideological and "scientific" basis upon which rest the doctrine and practice of the population establishment (Bondestram 1980; Kasun 1988; Mass 1976).

The global population establishment has come under fire from nationalist, feminist, and historical materialist camps (Davis 1981, 1990; Kuumba 1992; Mass 1976). From a nationalist/pronatalist perspective, population control programs are viewed as vehicles of racism and genocide. The linkage of present-day population control organizations to the

eugenics movement which sought to selectively limit the procreation of certain race/ethnic groups during the earlier part of the century is evidence of this claim (Akhter 1992; Davis 1990; Hartmann 1992; Mass 1976). The Birth Control Federation (forerunner of Planned Parenthood Federation), the Race Betterment Society, and the Population Reference Bureau promoted "birth control as a means of reducing the population of immigrants and blacks" (Mass 1976:33). The selective targeting of particular ethnicities and nationalities for population control programs has been documented in such disparate places as the United States, South Africa, Brazil, Puerto Rico, and Israel (Alexander 1990; Brown 1987; Davis 1990; Gray 1980; Kuumba 1992; Mass 1976).

From a feminist perspective, the population control approach is perceived as yet another expression of patriarchal manipulation of women (Dixon-Mueller 1993; Hartmann 1987; Mies 1987). The tactics used by various international agencies in their narrowly focused quest for lowered birth rates are said to disregard the input and cultural context of their female "subjects." Feminists critique population control policies as yet another form of the sexual power dynamics that subordinate and objectify women (Dixon-Mueller 1993; Hartmann 1992; Mies 1987). Maria Mies (1987:332-333) notes:

> It is the ideology of man's dominance over nature and woman, combined with the scientific method of analysis and synthesis that has led to the destruction of the woman as a human person and to her vivisection into a mass of reproductive matter. The expropriation of woman's reproductive competence and capacity goes, ironically, hand in hand with the extension of property categories into the female body.

Coercive tactics and financial incentives are often used to "persuade" women to utilize contraceptives. As will be expounded upon later in this paper, women's employment in certain South African industries, in transnationals in the Philippines, and in other underdeveloped country contexts is often made contingent on proof of contraceptive usage (Brown 1987; Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1982). In the mid-1980s, the Bangladesh government initiated a sterilization incentive system in which "each person--man or woman--who agrees to be sterilized receives 175 taka and a free sari or sarong" (Hartmann 1990:19).

These "strong-arm" population control tactics are even employed on Underdeveloped World women in Overdeveloped World countries (i.e., African Americans, Native Americans, Latino/as, and the poor). The linking of birth control to receipt of transfer payments for impoverished women of color in the U.S. occurred in the 1970s and, again, in the early 1990s (Davis 1990; Baker 1993).

Population control has been formally defined as "a large-scale social policy of limiting births throughout a whole society or in certain groups for the purpose of changing economic, political and/or ecological conditions" (Linda Gordon, cited in Punnett 1990:105). It is markedly different from and not to be confused with the concepts of family planning, access to birth control, or reproductive rights. While these latter concepts rest on the notion of

gender equality and informed decisions in the midst of multiple options, population control is philosophically and ideologically rooted in inequality, patriarchy, and exploitative colonial relationships (Kuumba 1992).

The racist and sexist nature of population control is evidenced by the fact that Underdeveloped World women have been particularly targeted for population control (Fried 1990; Hartmann 1992; Kuumba 1992; Mass 1976). These women are members of national and ethnic groups considered expendable and, at the same time, they are doubly victimized by patriarchal power--from the colonial or neocolonial power structure and the male power structure of their societies (Alexander 1990; Mies 1987; Ward 1990). The programs to which women in African, Latin American, and Asian societies (and Native American women) fall victim are often formulated and implemented without either their input or participation. These programs are intricately linked to other forms of material and ideological domination that inform women's status, a status most often characterized by restrictive legal rights, depressed economic conditions, and lack of access to needed resources (Mies 1986; Vickers 1991).

While feminist and nationalist critiques of the population establishment's fertility reduction strategies and justifications are valid, they are limited. Many of the investigations that have focused on the racist and sexist implications of population policies have paid little attention to the role that these strategies play within the larger context of global economic trends. From a historical materialist approach, population control must be conceptualized within the historical development of exploitative economic relations between core and peripheral countries as well as women's productive and reproductive labor (Mass 1976; O'Brien 1983; So 1990). When these considerations inform investigation into population control, population control can be seen as foreign domination of Underdeveloped World women's wombs in pursuit of profit and power--in short, "reproductive imperialism." I use this concept to highlight the imperialist penetration and labor force control inherent in the global population control movement.

The historical materialist and neo-Malthusian/modernization approaches to population differ in many ways. Neo-Malthusian/modernization theory charges that population growth places pressure on a country's "means of subsistence." In contrast, historical materialism argues that in a market-based economy, where business interests determine the number of jobs available, it becomes difficult to pose the "means of subsistence" as predetermined and finite. The optimum population size in the capitalist context is dependent on market forces, as opposed to human need. Thus, the real contradiction comes to lie between the population and the "means of employment" (Meek 1971).

Mainstream explanations (Caldwell and Caldwell 1986; Meier 1989) for current conditions of underdevelopment avoid explanations of the world's problems that challenge the interests and practices of the global capitalist class. As a result, they disregard the legalized effects of colonial oppression, land dispossession, and proletarianization and their

relationship to the existence of poverty and unbalanced population growth in underdeveloped countries. These omissions allow population growth to be used as a scapegoat for the inequities in the global division of labor and maldistribution of resources. According to Bonnie Mass (1976:36), "the ideology of 'overpopulation' fits neatly within the imperialist scheme of effecting a greater rate of exploitation in industrial development."

The historical materialist approach perceives the social ills usually attributed to population growth as symptomatic of the hegemonic control over the world's productive and reproductive forces by the world capitalist system (Bondestram 1980; Mies 1987; Perlo 1993). As Kathryn Ward (1985b:565) maintains:

> the process of underdevelopment generated by the world-system also can be conducive to maintenance of high fertility levels in developing countries through lowered economic growth, heightened income inequality, and the declining status of women.

The preoccupation with population control as panacea for the Underdeveloped World's problems has impeded the critical investigation of the relationship between international population dynamics and other social factors. Specifically, the apparent harmony between population control and the increasingly intense need on the part of multinational corporations for a controllable, cheap labor pool warrants investigation (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1982; Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983; O'Brien 1983; Ward 1990). The increasing proletarianization of Underdeveloped World women and their inclusion on the "global assembly line" make this linkage even more important to uncover.

*Population Control in the World System*

The economic crisis in the world capitalist system that characterized the 1970s and 1980s led transnational corporations to seek alternative strategies to continue and enhance the generation of profit. These new strategies included global restructuring, the "emergence of the global assembly line in which research and management are controlled by . . . developed countries while assembly line work is relegated to periphery nations that occupy less privileged positions in the global economy" (Ward 1990:1). This contemporary method of expropriating resources and labor on a global level has had particular implications for women. Women's labor in industry has increased in importance since the 1970s with the globalization of the hi-tech assembly line (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1982; Tiano 1984; Ward 1990).

A key difference between this and previous stages in the expansion of world capital is the rapid proletarianization of young women who had previously been left as the rural workforce while men were incorporated into the wage labor force (Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1982; Ward 1990). It is presently estimated (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1982; Ward 1986; Sklair 1991) that young women of childbearing age comprise 80 to 90 percent of workers in multinational-controlled light assembly work. Transnational

corporations utilize women's labor in the Underdeveloped World to avoid labor legislation and keep labor costs low (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1980; O'Brien 1983; Ward 1990). As opposed to increasing living standards and levels of equality, the entrance of Underdeveloped World women into the post-industrial labor market has had particularly negative effects on the status and power of women (Ward 1985a, 1985b).

How does population control fit into the global restructuring equation? From a global, historical, and materialist perspective, the pressing question regarding population policy becomes one of identifying the interests that such policies serve in this configuration of the present distribution of world power and resources. The likely answer to this question is that the proliferation of these programs facilitates the extraction of profits from the Underdeveloped World. That is, as Maria Mies (1987:324) clearly stated, reproductive technologies:

> have been developed and produced on a mass scale, not to promote human happiness, but to overcome the difficulties faced by the present world system in continuing its model of sustained growth.

She goes on further to say:

> The goal of these processes of subordinating nature, women and the colonies and treating them as spiritless and passive matter that can be dissected and recombined . . . was and is the optimization of human labour for the production of material wealth (Mies 1987:326).

Transnational corporations continue to have a vested interest in manipulating key segments of the international labor force. Thus, population control policies have accompanied the spread of the global assembly line. The 1960s saw a rapid spread of "offshore" (i.e., outside of the U.S.) transnational corporation sites. According to Annette Fuentes and Barbara Ehrenreich (1982:8), "From 1960 to 1969 investment in offshore manufacturing by U.S. firms mushroomed from $11.1 billion to $29.5 billion." This was followed by a drastic increase in resources allocated to population control by the USAID. From scant beginnings in the late 1960s, by 1975 the U.S. Congress allocated approximately 67 percent of the health care expenses in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1975 for population control programs (Mass 1976; Hartmann 1992). Between 1962 and 1972 USAID's allocation for population control increased from $34 million to $123 million (Mass 1976). The fertility reduction strategies being promoted in the Underdeveloped World should be analyzed within this broad global and materialist context.

Corporations and their owners have been integral to the institutionalization of population policy. The list of players in the population complex reads like a Who's Who of imperialist monopoly. For instance, John D. Rockefeller funded and formed the Population Council in 1952. In 1934, the Kellogg family founded the Race Betterment Foundation which promoted the eugenic ideology of improving human heredity through

selective reproduction. Both the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations began to finance population studies and programs at universities in the 1950s, and their support continues today. Hugh Moore of Dixie Cup set up a fund for the cause in 1954 and started the Campaign to Check the Population Explosion in 1967. Thus, corporate interests fueled the institutionalization of neo-Malthusian logic against the Underdeveloped World and its peoples.

The intrusion of population policy into the Underdeveloped World coincided with the growth of U.S. foreign investment in the 1960s (Mass 1976; O'Brien 1983). Prior to this period, underdeveloped countries such as Brazil and Mexico had pro-natalist positions. They viewed population growth as a stimulant to economic development. The increased pressure resulting from the existence of "more mouths to feed" and the heightened levels of productivity engendered by the larger workforce were viewed positively (O'Brien 1983). The entrance of transnational corporations into these areas and subsequent land displacement of peasants that followed created the disjuncture between population and resources that population control policies confront. Put bluntly:

> [t]he imbalance in the number of rural peasants to available farm land had created adverse population processes. . . . In other words, the content of population policy is a result of a complex process involving multinational penetration in the economy and the dependency that such penetration creates (O'Brien 1983:12).

*Corporate Profits and Population Control*

The profits accrued by transnational corporations through the operation of population control policies and programs have both short- and long-term components. The short-term aspects include the immediate extraction of low cost labor from young women, the creation of a consumer market, and the establishment of a "dumping ground" for population control products. Inexpensive research, testing, and development of contraceptives and reproductive technologies are additional corporate benefits. In the long term, profits to transnational corporations are assured by the containment of a superfluous or redundant labor force, the maintenance of political stability, and the perpetuation of dependent core-periphery relations.

Population control strategies allow young women to be used as a source of cheap and controllable labor at various production sites along the global assembly line. While employment in the public sphere was once touted as the panacea for Underdeveloped World women's high fertility and social subjugation, studies (Mies 1986; Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Ward 1985b, 1986) have shown that these perceived correlates of public sphere employment must be greatly qualified. According to Ward (1985b), the relationship between women's work, increased status, and fertility reduction in developing countries varies greatly depending on the types of jobs to which women have access.

The types of jobs available to women on the global assembly line are clearly not those that enhance social status (e.g., economic standing, political/legal rights, opportunity structure, and the like) nor lead to automatic reductions in fertility. They are typically low-wage, labor-intensive jobs (O'Brien 1983; Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1982; Ward 1990). Women are preferred by transnational corporations due to their socialized docility, and lack of power, resources, and organization (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1982; Tiano 1984; Ward 1990).

Population control programs facilitate the super-exploitation of women workers on the global assembly line and increase the profits accrued from their labor. It is fortuitous, from a business perspective, to keep these women from leaving the labor force during their most productive (and reproductive) years. In this way, the use of trained labor is not interrupted and a continuous, cheap workforce is guaranteed. Limiting the fertility of women workers in the Underdeveloped World increases the returns to on-site training, thereby lessening the overall costs associated with their labor while also avoiding the expense of training new or replacement workers. Moreover, without the interruption of maternity leave or maternal responsibilities, this "new-category-of-workers" is made available for continuous expropriation of their labor.

By encouraging population control, transnational corporations are able to escape the expenses of health/welfare benefits and services which are needed, and often demanded, by pregnant women and women with children. Corporate expenditures on labor force maintenance are thereby reduced. In the Philippines at one time, for example, "a medical certificate proving that a job applicant is not pregnant is often required, eliminating any expenses for maternity benefits" (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1982:31). Similarly, the fact that Brazil's 1988 Constitution allowed for a 120-day maternity leave led many corporations to request proof of sterilization and pregnancy tests (Christensen 1990).

As illustrated, this preference for childless workers is made very clear. Transnational corporations openly solicit childless women workers. An advertisement in a Mexican newspaper reads, "We need female workers; older than 17, younger than 30; single and without children" (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1982:11). The coercive techniques often used to "encourage" women workers to use birth control also speak to the overt connection between business interests and childlessness among its female workforce. In South Africa:

> women at some factories report that they must accept an injection of Depo-Provera contraceptive in order to keep their jobs . . . . There is some talk, by the Director-General of the Department of Health and Welfare, among others, of using drastic measures including compulsory sterilisation, unless blacks accept family planning voluntarily (Brown 1987:269).

Underdeveloped World women represent another source of profit for transnational corporations and the population control industry through the creation of markets for contraceptives (Akhter 1992; Braithwaite 1984; Mies 1987). To pharmaceutical companies,

women in the Underdeveloped World represent a relatively untapped consumer base for a variety of products, including contraceptives. The lack of restrictive quality legislation and absence of widespread information surrounding the side-effects of many products allows for the promotion and distribution of a wide range of reproductive control products (Akhter 1992; Hartmann 1990).

Dumping substandard and recalled contraceptives in the Underdeveloped World is common practice. The Dalkon Shield is a case in point. According to John Braithwaite (1984), in his study of corporate crime in the pharmaceutical industry, this intra-uterine device was dumped in approximately 40 underdeveloped countries after it was recalled from the U.S. market. The same strategy was used with Depo-Provera at the time that it was determined to be unsafe in the U.S. (Akhter 1992; Mies 1987).

In this way, pharmaceutical companies continue to reap profits from products that would otherwise be destroyed. Agencies in the U.S. government--such as the U.S. Office of Population and USAID--facilitate this process by purchasing and distributing these products in the Underdeveloped World. In the case of the A. H. Robins' Dalkon Shields, for example:

> AID purchased the contraceptive device at discount rates for "assistance" to developing countries after the product was banned in the U.S. Double standards for Third World consumers were even more remarkable when Robins sold AID unsterilised Shields in bulk packages at a 48 per cent discount. AID justifies the discount Dalkon dump on the grounds of getting more contraception for the aid dollar (Braithwaite 1984:258).

It is often difficult to identify the real profiteer because governmental and nongovernmental agencies play "interference" for the pharmaceutical companies. Governmental and nongovernmental agencies, in effect, subsidize the exploitative efforts of private interests in the population control industry. In the words of a Bangladeshi researcher, "The U.S. Population Council is the visible promoter . . . while the interests of Leiras Pharmaceutical and Wyeth laboratories remain hidden" (Akhter 1992:2).

Profits through population control are also generated in the area of research and testing. New and controversial contraceptives can be tested on women in the Underdeveloped World more cheaply than in western countries and without financial risk. Women in Puerto Rico, Haiti, Mexico, Chile, Columbia, Iran, Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Hong Kong, Honduras, Peru, South Africa, and Pakistan have served as "Guinea Pigs" in the testing of contraceptive drugs and devices (Braithwaite 1984; Mass 1976; Mies 1987). Mies (1987:338) summarizes as follows:

> It is cheaper, faster and politically more convenient to use a "crash programme" against fertility to find out about long-term effects of a contraceptive than to test it in clinical tests on samples of women in the West.

> In this sense, a number of third world countries have been turned into laboratories for transnational drug industries.

Testing and distribution of new contraceptives in the Underdeveloped World serves the transnational profit motive on numerous levels, including: the reduced danger of law suits; saved costs of more expensive testing in the U.S. or other western countries; sales revenues prior to FDA approval; time reductions in new product development; and reduced safety precautions (Braithwaite 1984).

As a long-term profit generation strategy, population control is further used to curb the reproduction of superfluous and redundant labor. In an early critique of Malthusian theory, Karl Marx asserted:

> it is capitalistic accumulation itself that constantly produces, and produces in the direct ratio of its own energy and extent, a relatively redundant population of laborers, i.e., a population of greater extent than suffices for the average needs of . . . capital, and therefore creates surplus population (cited in Meek 1971:23).

The displacement of persons from the land in the Underdeveloped World by the expansion of the world capitalist system, coupled with reduced corporate need for labor due to scientific-technological innovations, has created unprecedented large surplus labor pools worldwide (Brecher 1993). While a certain amount of labor surplus is necessary to keep labor costs low, political and economic instability can result when this level gets too high.

Population control offers a means of negotiating the tension between surplus labor and dwindling employment opportunities. The reduction of fertility slows the reproduction of redundant labor that may lead to (1) an increased level of need in a society and (2) political instability that may threaten future extraction of resources, labor, and profit (Bondestram 1980; Mass 1976; O'Brien 1983; Sobo 1990). The Central Intelligence Agency, for example, confirmed this concern in 1985 by linking birth rates to political instability, both of which they felt could create "security problems for the United States" (Sobo 1990:27).

In the case of South Africa, Barbara Brown (1987:262) pointed out that "to the government an ample population became 'overpopulation' when the labour reserve became too large, rather than when poverty and underemployment first developed." This relation also holds true when the case of Puerto Rico is assessed. It is no accident that Puerto Rico's U.S.-sponsored national program of birth control coincided with the stagnation of labor on the island (Bondestram 1980; Gibson-Rosado 1993; Mass 1976). Large numbers of unemployed people and potential unrest spurred the population establishment's interest in regulating fertility. Population control policies have also been directed toward reducing the possibility of labor organizing and political unrest. Mass (1976:69) describes the general principle:

> Population control programs in underdeveloped countries of the third world whether administered bilaterally or multilaterally, are racing to outflank social turmoil, working class movements and revolutionary currents.

At times, the short- and long-term aspects of population control profiteering merge. The link between this political strategy and economic interests was made even clearer with the testing of new contraceptives (e.g., the pill, the IUD, Norplant, RU486, Depo-Provera) on Puerto Rican women while, at the same time, locating some of the largest producers of these products on the island. As Ana Ortiz (1992:42) argues:

> Puerto Rican women were important not just in the testing but in the producing of these compounds. All the big companies, - Eli Lilly, Searle, Upjohn, Orthopharmaceutics - have plants there. They're on a tax holiday.

Thus, as in the Puerto Rican case, population control strategies allow for the manipulation of labor force size and its exploitation, simultaneously.

Dependent relations between core and periphery, exploiting and exploited nations, are strengthened through the administration of population control programs. In many instances, assistance for countries through USAID and the World Bank have been tied to their adoption of population control programs. This "aid" actually returns to the lending agencies and other entities that emerged from the beneficiaries of earlier, less sophisticated eras of colonialism. The relationship between the population establishment and local governmental apparatuses is intermediated by global financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

By attaching the creation of population control programs to the various loans and subsidies received by governments in the Underdeveloped World, the process of neocolonial control over Underdeveloped World labor is facilitated. Since up to 70 percent of the "foreign aid" that donor countries provide comes back to them in the form of salaries and contracts, the financial assistance provided to countries for population control has a profitable return. It also increases the foreign debt that Underdeveloped World countries must repay. As opposed to the crude expropriation of resources that characterized the earlier era of colonialism, debt servicing has now become a new avenue for draining the resources of the Underdeveloped World (Sklair 1991). Population control programs feed directly into this extraction process.

In addition, this increased access to women's labor in the Underdeveloped World which population control policies facilitate greatly profits foreign investors (O'Brien 1983). As Fuentes and Ehrenreich (1982:36-37) maintain:

> Crudely put, the relationship between many Third World governments and multinational corporations is like that of a pimp and his customers. The

governments advertise their women, sell them and keep them in line for the multinational "johns."

*Toward Reproductive Liberation and Self-Determination*

Reproductive imperialism acts in accord with international capital by regulating the immediate and prospective labor market. The links between international population control and international monopoly capital are more covert than they are overt.

As Brown (1987:273) notes, "The term 'population control' with its *double entendre* of population limitation and domination over people is the appropriate phrase to describe" current worldwide strategies for selective population reduction. The insatiable need and unquenchable thirst for new frontiers and cheap labor that characterizes the expansion of capital lies at the basis of the population control industry. To properly address these efforts, the program of population control must be contextualized within the reality of imperialism, global restructuring, and the racism, sexism, and class exploitation that interactively characterized them. From this basis, the race/class/gender polarization and rapid population growth in the Underdeveloped World speak to the need not for population control but to the necessity for fundamental social change.

Underdeveloped World women have not been passive victims of reproductive imperialism. Indeed, individuals and organizations internationally have embarked upon numerous strategies to counter the deleterious effects of mainstream population control policies. "Feminist criticisms of fertility control policies had been maturing throughout the 1970s and at the 1975 International Women's Year Conference in Mexico women denounced coercive practices in contraceptive research and services as human rights abuses" (Corrêa 1994:57). Actions against population control soon took more organized and activist proportions in 1984 with the emergence of the International Reproductive Health and Rights Movement, presently referred to as the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (Corrêa 1994). This coalition of individuals and organizations organized, lobbied, and educated around a broadened conception of fertility and reproduction, placing them within the context of women's overall health and well-being (Corrêa 1994; Sen and Grown 1987). Women have initiated and participated in organized actions against the transnational corporations that collaborate with the population establishment in countries with export processing zones such as Mexico, Taiwan, Thailand, and South Korea (Alexander 1990; Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1982). Since coercive reproductive policies often go hand in hand with repressive military state apparatuses, the confrontational actions in which women have participated in the Philippines and Chile also undermine reproductive imperialism (Alexander 1990; Mies 1986).

Efforts are also being directed against the international financial institutions that are holding underdeveloped countries in the deathlock debt grip. The structural adjustment programs (SAPs) being dictated by the World Bank and IMF have disproportionately negative effects on Underdeveloped World women and children (Hartmann 1990; Vickers

1991). These policies give "the Bank even greater leverage to promote population control in countries starved for foreign exchange" (Hartmann 1990:21). To counter the distinctive affects of international financial institutions, women have begun to organize internationally. The Platform for Action that was drafted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China calls for these institutions to assess the "friendliness" of their investment policies toward women (United Nations 1996:175). Organization such as "Women's Eyes on the World Bank" emerged from the Beijing Conference to monitor the activities of the World Bank and the IMF and to hold them accountable for the effects of their economic practices on women.

On more local levels, women have created numerous self-help and community-based organizations to challenge and offset the effects of SAPs. Examples of these collective efforts are the Mothers Clubs and Housewives Committees in Bolivia, the Self-Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA), the Jahaly Pacharr Smallholder (irrigated rice swamp) project in The Gambia, and the Southern Women's Organization for Rural Development in Dominica (Vickers 1991).

The grassroots activists and scholars in the area of reproductive liberation and women's health have encouraged and embarked on critical scrutiny of population control efforts (Akhter 1992; Alexander 1990; Hartmann 1992; Mass 1976; Mies 1987). The web of economic and political linkages that have been unearthed in this investigative process point towards the necessity of organizing globally by sharing information, creating strategic alliances, and simultaneously confronting the population establishment and international capitalist-patriarchy on multiple fronts (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1982; Hartmann 1992; Mies 1987; Vickers 1990). An example of the use of research and scholarship as resistance against oppressive population control strategies has been the work of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). This collective of activists, researchers, and policy makers offers a critique of mainstream population policies and advocates a holistic approach to women's reproductive health.

Also important in this process is the appreciation of the movement against population control as part of a larger power struggle. Jacqui Alexander (1990:50), Underdeveloped World feminist scholar-activist, reminds us that "reproductive freedom must be situated within this broader arena if it is to be a truly transformative movement." Oppressive population control policies emerge from and are integral to global accumulation processes that have resulted in skewed global socioeconomic development. A more equitable distribution of political, social, and economic resources is a necessary condition for the achievement of reproductive liberation. The struggle against reproductive imperialism and for reproductive liberation and self-determination transcends the politics of reproductive rights, feminism, and nationalism. It is fundamentally and completely an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist process.

## Notes

1. My use of Underdeveloped World, in contrast to the more common "developing" or "Third World," is meant to emphasize the relational nature of the social development process. This term implicates the exploitative relationship with the Western or Overdeveloped World for the conditions that characterize the Underdeveloped World. The upper case usage counters the usual marginalization of this constellation of nations. For a more complete description of the concept of underdevelopment see Rodney (1972) and Mies (1986).

2. The demographic transition theory, introduced by Kingsley Davis, posits a close relationship between economic development, modernization, and demographic processes. The theory asserts that as societies move from less to more developed, demographic trends move through three stages and result in population growth, stabilization, and lowered fertility levels. The first stage, that of "high potential growth," characterizes traditional societies with high and stable rates of fertility, high and stable rates of mortality, short life expectancies, and fluctuating population growth. In the second or transitionary stage, mortality levels are drastically reduced due to improvements in public health, nutrition, and sanitation. The widened difference between birth and death rates results in high rates of population growth. This rapid population growth stabilizes in the final stage, when fertility rates lower to meet the already declined mortality rates. For a more detailed discussion of the demographic transition theory, see Davis, 1970.

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