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# Reproduce or Perish? The Artefact of the Fertility Concept and the French School of Demography

*Sandrine Bertaux*\*

**Abstract:** »Sich reproduzieren oder untergehen? Das Artefakt ‚Fertilität‘ und die ‚Französische Schule‘ der Demographie«. This article investigates the complicated and intertwined history between the scientific discipline of demography, the depopulation debate and the pronatalist lobby, and French republican policies from the late nineteenth century till the eve of the Second World War. I suggest that central to this history is the concept and codification of fertility.

**Keywords:** France, fertility, immigration, demography, fascism.

## Introduction

Since the mid-eighties, there has been a radical shift in focus in the global demographic discourse: world fertility trends no longer fuel an alleged overpopulation problem but one of alleged coming depopulation. According to the United Nations World Fertility Report (2010, xi), since the 1970s fertility trends have fallen to “unprecedented rates and unprecedented levels”. However, such shift in focus does not signal a change in paradigm from “overpopulation” to “depopulation;” as Ian Hacking (2002, 18) underscores the “population problem” is always posited in relative terms for it “denotes both the population explosion of other peoples and too low birth rate of one’s own people”. Indeed, the UN World Fertility Report does not so much stress world homogenous level of fertility rates than it emphasizes, instead, differentials in fertility between “developed,” “developing” and “less developed” areas. The “developed world,” the report states, is the avant-garde of declining fertility trends and “59 countries or areas had a total fertility below 2.1 children per woman, the level required to ensure the replacement of generations in low mortality populations” (UN 2010, xi). Echoing the UN Population Division, the EU’s statistical agency Eurostat (2008, No page number) declared that it is only a matter of years before the aggregated death rate of the 27 member states that composed the European Union outnumbers its aggregated birth rate. Since “today all European nations have fertility rates below the long-term replace-

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ment rate,” some demographers contend that “many European countries increasingly face the prospect of absolute population decline in the coming years or decades” (Bloom and Sousa-Poza 2010, 129-130).

The prospect of imminent depopulation is not a new discourse to Europe (Teitelbaum and Winter 1985). It first emerged in France as a discourse of national decadence but by the 1930s, although US scholars and private foundations played a major role in the conversation on declining fertility, the “population problem” was viewed as a specific European one. In the late 1920s, a novel codification of fertility prophesied the extinction of Western and Northern Europeans (Kuczynski 1928) – if not the entirety of the white race (Boverat 1931) – within a few generations, herein granting further legitimacy to public discourse on “race suicide”. Because the history of demography, the depopulation discourse and the endorsement of the concept of fertility are much intertwined with French history, I will focus specifically on France. There is however an additional reason to explore fertility through French history in regard to contemporary fertility discourses in the West. While a recent Eurostat report (2011) underscores that “in many EU Member States immigration is not only increasing the total population but also bringing a much younger population,” and credits 70% of population growth in the EU in 2008 to the coming of immigrants, some demographers argue for twenty years, even massive immigration would not suffice to counter the down trend (van de Kaa 1987). Whatever changes will occur in fertility trends “negative population momentum has set in” (Reher 2007, 191). Because France was the only massive immigration country in Europe in the early thirties, with nearly 3 million non-French citizens representing around 7 per cent of the metropole’s population (without overseas possessions), a debate connecting fertility rate and immigration was an essential ingredient of the depopulation conversation. And even more so, it is my claim that, besides the wish to oppose the birth control movement, immigration was the very reason for the creation of a nativist movement whose claim to authoritative discourse derived from the reduction in family size. If France offers a specific focus, my broader aim in this special issue is to underscore the racial and gendered ontology of the concept of fertility.

### Demography, the Depopulation Question and the Citizenship/Nationality Nexus

While prevailing historiography in France equates the discipline of demography with the pronatalist doctrine, and pronatalist demography with an alleged Republican political culture (e.g. Huss 1990; Rosental 2003, 9), neither was demography born pronatalist out of fear of depopulation nor did Republican elites endorse the nativism of the familialist pronatalist lobby beyond its mere rhetoric. Rather, I suggest that the adoption of a nativist pronatalist demographic doctrine sealed in the creation of the National Alliance for the Growth

of French Population (hereafter Alliance) in 1896. If it did buttress Republican social policies focused on the question of motherhood, its major proposals remained a dead letter, and furthermore, it stood against the republican citizenship assimilationist policy towards foreign immigrants and their children.

When the French botanist and republican political activist Achille Guillard coined the term demography, he did not have in mind the declining birth rate; rather, by explicitly taking his inspiration from Auguste Comte's constitution of the scientific discipline of sociology a few years earlier, Guillard (1855) had a specific target: his aim was to refute the theoretical view and practical solutions formulated by Thomas Robert Malthus in his *Essay on the Principle of Population*. In his anti-revolutionary pamphlet anonymously published in 1798, Malthus (Malthus 1976 [1798]) elaborated the first comprehensive and systematic theory of population which, with its subsequent enlarged edition now duly signed, made its author influential and the first to hold a chair of Modern History and Political Economy in England in 1805 (Collini, Winch, Burrow 1983, 67). Malthus' "Principle of Population" rested on the fundamental axiom of the imbalance between the means of subsistence, or production, he believed to follow an arithmetic rate of growth, and population growth, or reproduction, he viewed as progressing according to a geometrical rate. Accordingly, this law of population shaped his view on poverty: any attempt to relieve poverty, he claimed, aggravates the ill it seeks to eliminate by encouraging the poor to marry and procreate (Malthus 1976 [1798], 97). In the second enlarged edition, Malthus stated that:

A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, has no claim of right to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. (Malthus 1992 [1803], 249)

Although Malthus' infamous passage was removed in subsequent editions, it captures Malthus' fundamental statement that the roots of poverty were not in human institutions as the *philosophes* of the French Revolution contended but in biology. The Anglican priest morally condemning the disconnection between sexuality and procreation as a vice advocated a "moral restraint" which amounted to assigning the English popular classes to sexual abstinence in the premarital period or even to life-long abstinence and abandonment of marriage (Malthus 1976 [1830], 250).

With the novel scientific field for the study of the *dēmos*, Guillard sought to debunk such naturalization of poverty. The first occurrence of *démographie* issued from Guillard's pen in 1854 (Schweber 2006, 44) and he established the new scientific field in his book explicitly titled *Eléments de statistique humaine ou démographie comparée* (*Elements of Human Statistics or Comparative Demography*) published in 1855. Whereas according to Libby Schweber (2006, 44) Guillard assigned demography the task "to replace political economy," it

was in the shadow of anthropology that demography first gained recognition in France. Guillard's disciple and son-in-law, doctor Louis-Adolphe Bertillon, the man with whom he had spent some time in jail in the wake of Louis-Napoleon's coup, held the chair of Demography and Medical Geography, one of the six chairs created within the school of Anthropology of Paris founded in 1876 under the leadership of Paul Broca (Clark 1973, 118). Bertillon initially taught "statistics of races" then "intellectual and moral qualities of social groups" (Clark 1973, 118). Bertillon became the head of the bureau of statistics of Paris and founded an international journal of demography and organized the International Congress of Demography during the 1878 Universal Exhibition in Paris (on the development of statistics, see Clark 1973, ch. 5 "The Social Statisticians", 112-146).

Admittedly, the defeat of French armies at Sedan before the Prussian armies, and the loss of the French Eastern territories of Alsace and part of the Lorraine, informed the pronatalist turn in France: indeed, the head of the French bureau of Statistics, Alfred Legoyt who, inspired by Malthus' thesis, lauded the French working class for its prudential procreation, lost his position (Cole 2000, 4). However, if France's military defeat opened up a space to pronatalist discourse, it was some twenty-five years later, in 1896, when Jacques Bertillon – Louis-Adolphe Bertillon's son who had taken over the Bureau of statistics of Paris at his death (Clark 1973, 139) – founded the National Alliance for the Growth of French Population (*Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française*) a pronatalist and nativist lobby.

Joshua Cole (2000) forcefully demonstrated how republican social policies focused on motherhood were implemented prior the depopulation debate became widely endorsed, and helped Republicans to pass social policies that radically altered the relation between the state and the family enshrined in the patriarchal Civil Code of 1804 by undermining paternal authority. According to Cole (2000, 150-151), it was a paper written in 1858 by Bertillon on infant mortality and wet-nursing which was instrumental in the creation of a chair of demography at the School of Anthropology of Paris, with the strategic aim at proving the power of statistics to a skeptical audience. Bertillon blamed French women's abdication of "their natural function as mothers," but his paper was only and timely published at his death in 1883 in the *Annales de démographie internationale* legitimizing the Republicans policies on motherhood without connecting them to "the troubling issue of women's labor" that Bertillon had failed to mention (Cole 2000, 155). Therefore, when the Alliance was created, motherhood was already a republican policy albeit disconnected from the depopulation debate. Created in the midst of the Dreyfus Affair and in the Dreyfusard camp (Clark 1973, 140), the Alliance was anchored within the republican élite. However, even when the depopulation question pervaded France's *fin-de-siècle* discourses, the republican elite had only paid lip service to pronatalist reformist demands. The nomination of an extra-parliamentary commis-

sion on depopulation in 1902, subsequently enlarged, failed to pass any legislation, even though the Alliance received the coveted status of Association of Public Utility on the eve of the First World War.

Nevertheless, Bertillon father and son were influential in framing motherhood as the “biological destiny” of French women (Cole 2000, 187). Louis-Adolphe Bertillon appropriated the distinction between “fecundity” and “fertility” proposed by the Scottish doctor J. Matthews Duncan (Cole 2000, 189-192). While fecundity is the child-bearing period for women, a concept which can be traced back in the seventeenth century, fertility is the effective reproduction of women. The two terms entered French language in a twisted mode for the French bureau of statistics used the term fertility to designate the number of birth for 1000 inhabitants which is commonly designated today as birth-rate (Cole 2000, 188). The adoption in French of fecundity for what the English termed fertility is epitomized by Emile Zola’s novel *Fécondité* (literally fertility) – a prominent member of the Alliance – written during his exile in London after having launched his famous *J’accuse!* (1898) in support of Captain Dreyfus. The measurement of “marital fertility” revealed that French wives had fewer children than their counterpart in neighboring countries. If pronatalism stood in staunch opposition to the birth control movement, it shared eugenics concern about the future quality of the population. Paul Weindling (1989, 243) identifies Jacques Bertillon as a precursor of the exploration of fertility differential across social classes when he conducted a survey on urban “fecundable” women and their effective “fertility” in a transnational European comparison at the eve of the twentieth century which showed that lower social classes were the most prolific, hence providing the biological future of nations. But while the evidence of declining fertility became associated solely with women, as Karen Offen (1984, 648) pointed, for Jacques Bertillon the depopulation problem was a “man’s issue...Bertillon argued that the trend could be reversed simply by amending tax laws that affected men’s property and patrimony and thereby bolstered patriarchal pride”. This gendered construction of a “female” evidence and a “male” solution undermined pronatalist claims, and Gaston Bouthoul (1922, TBA) mocked the internal contradiction of pronatalist familialism inspired by the Le Play school vaunting the patriarchal model of family for, he argued, it had the effect that many men and women never married. Not only pronatalism was not getting on well with familialism but the latter appeared to preclude the former.

In contrast to Terry N. Clark (1968) who considered Jacques Bertillon “as one of the most prolific and influential quantitative social scientists,” Libby Schweber (1997, 21) contends that he was foremost a “militant” uninterested in the pursuit of the “promotion of demography as science or its theorization”. This a posteriori exclusion of the militant activities of Jacques Bertillon – that is, the creation of the Alliance – appositely upholds demography’s claim to science by conveniently redrawing the boundaries of a pure scientific field of

demography in opposition to militant propaganda. What Schweber fails to take into account, however, is that it was the very understanding that the declining trends in “marital fertility” had its roots in the will of legitimate couples which grounded the call for pronatalist reforms as much as for a propagandistic organization. Whereas social inequalities were central to Guillard’s project of a science of demography and republican militancy, his grandson Jacques Bertillon called instead for a propagandistic organization to fight against claims for equality of women and homegrown birth control movements. Indeed, the immediate concern that triggered the creation of the Alliance was the creation, in 1896, by Paul Robin of the League for Human Regeneration, a neo-malthusian league (Offen 1984, 658-659), which unlike Malthus’ view, campaigned for what soon was termed birth control at a time in which both the manufacture and sale of contraceptives, and the dissemination of contraceptive information were allowed (Watson 1952, 261). As the British demographer David V. Glass noted (1940, 150) the immediate post-World War I period witnessed the official recognition of the pronatalist propaganda. In 1920, a High Council for Natality attached to the Ministry of Health was created and in 1921, a Federation of Associations of Large Families of France, an umbrella organization aiming at organizing nationwide propaganda that held an annual National Congress of Natality. Adolphe Landry who had taken over scientific leadership of the Alliance after the death of Jacques Bertillon in 1922 and became its vice-president, also presided over the parliamentary Group for the Protection of Family, while energetic Fernand Boverat, the Alliance’s general secretary, was member of the High Council on Natality and became soon its vice-president. A special holiday celebrating motherhood was proclaimed (see also Koven and Michel 1990). While the question of “natality” was institutionalized, it had a legal upshot in the 1920 law which banned the manufacture, sale, advertisement and use of female contraceptives (Watson 1952, 261-262) and in 1923 punishment concerning abortion, which was already mentioned in the Penal Code, was aggravated (Watson 1952, 265). Although the repression of abortion was reluctantly enforced by the judiciary, it nevertheless served as a legal instrument to repress the French birth control movement. Moreover, this postwar development cannot be credited to the huge French loss during the war. Rather, the Great War was at the origin of a curious accounting according to which, in addition to dead soldiers and civilians, deficit in births or the births that did not take place were added. Adolphe Landry (1934, 11) asserted bluntly that France had lost 2 million and half inhabitants, “as much caused by death than by birth it prevented”.

Paul Smith (1996, 214) contends that before the mid-thirties, “the state refused to take on board demographic anxieties,” and similarly, Susan Pedersen (1995, 357) situates the emergence of a pronatalist consensus in the thirties in what she terms the “parental welfare state”. However, the twenties and early thirties were fundamental for the pronatalist movement to invest Republican

institutions. Alliance members continued to build in pronatalist familialism within political institutions and invest both state institutions and parliamentary instances. Notwithstanding the fact that the Conseil National des Femmes Françaises (CNFF, National Council of French Women), a secular feminist organization created in 1900, joined the patriotic call for the war, there was a postwar backlash to feminist organizations (Thébaud and Bard 1999, 149-166). As Laura Lee Downs (1995, 168) underscores “as the demand for women’s labor continued to rise,” during the First World War, furthermore in occupations traditionally the preserve of men such as metalwork, the question that concerned policymakers about the “home front” was not women’s wage but how to protect “women’s maternal capacity” in war industries. The French pronatalist state sought, with the introduction in factories of nursing rooms, to conciliate labour and motherhood and also to discipline and control practices of breastfeeding and hygiene, impacting women’s practices (Downs 1995, 169-170). During the war, the CNFF collaborated with Albert Thomas, the State Under-Secretary to the Ministry of Armament and Munitions, to set up in 1916 a Section d’Etudes Féminines (SEF) at the Musée Social from which organization Albert Thomas drew ten members to compose the same year his Comité du Travail Féminin under the auspices of his Ministry which would find employment in war factories for women displaced from the war zone. But after the war the SEF was closed down by the Musée Social’s president Georges Risler, a prominent figure of the pronatalist movement, on the ground that it was too political (Smith 1996, 15).

To advance its cause, the Alliance revived the old idea of the family vote, a family-based form of plural suffrage, and in 1919, in a public rally attended by both Jacques Bertillon and Adolphe Landry signaled the start of their campaign (Bertaux 2001, 46-48). As the Alliance considered the monogamous heterosexual family the primary social unit and legitimate norm, they claimed that it also ought to be the unit for political representation. However, this was against the background of demand for political citizenship by feminist organizations. Unlike other conceptions of the family vote, the Alliance argued that it would help implement pronatalist politics of population, and included in the family vote women’s suffrage under specific conditions. Thus, the family vote in the hands of the Alliance after the Great War became a weapon to oppose the granting of political rights to French women as individuals while it was framed as progressive. Herein, they promoted the incorporation of women into political rights conditioned by their civil and reproductive status.

The authority of their argument was derived from statistics. The imbalance between the sexes aggravated by the Great War was invoked to bar women from individual access to political rights. They calculated that the family vote would give suffrage to 25,700,000 men and 13,500,000 women, or two-third for men and one-third for women (cited in Bertaux 2001, 47). It was on this “statistical” ground that they rejected political rights to French women even if

granted at age 30, for it would leave French men “only a small majority” (cited in Bertaux 2001, 47). It was deputy Henri Roulleaux-Dugage who brought before the parliament, in 1916 and in 1920, the proposal of the family vote. Although the proposal considered female suffrage, strikingly, the mother would vote for her children only if the husband was dead – that is, as widow – but if he were alive, he would vote for his children. However, while in the 1916 proposal the married wife had no suffrage, in 1920 the proposal stated that she could vote for herself (Smith 1996: TBA). The family vote seemed such an influential proposal that one US scholar commented in 1926 that “its adoption in a reasonably near future is by no means unlikely” (Gooch 1926, 300). This proposal survived the political rights granted to women in 1944 when in the publication in 1945 of the High Consultative Committee of Population and Family revealed that the family vote was still seriously considered for all elections at universal suffrage (Bertaux 2001, 48). And it is still entertained by some demographers to “solve” the depopulation problem (e.g. Demeny 1986, 354).

Pronatalism has been interpreted as a response to French cultural anxiety in the face of its declining power and prestige in Europe, hence shaping a specific French republican political culture. However, its most fervent supporter Jacques Bertillon opposed the republican deliberate policy of assimilation into French citizenry of second and third-generation immigrants enshrined in the 1889 Nationality Code, or what Rogers Brubaker (1992) identified as the very core of republican French self-understanding of nationhood. The nationalist and xenophobic tone in Bertillon’s work and the Alliance put the pronatalist movement at odds with Republican policies. Gérard Noiriel (1988, 35) underscored how the very term immigration emerged with the novel field of demography in the late nineteenth century. In 1851, a novel category of “foreigner” was introduced in the French census classification and a double *jus soli* provision in French Nationality law which provided that children born in France of a foreign father born in France would have French nationality at birth, albeit with the possibility to reject it at majority age. In 1889, the Nationality Code modified the double *jus soli* (article 23) by nullifying the possibility to reject French citizenship at majority age and added a simple *jus soli* provision (article 44) granting French nationality to children born in France of foreign citizens at their majority age (Brubaker 1992, 210). The law also aimed at facilitating naturalizations. As structural demand for foreign labour drew an increasing number of foreigners and turned France into a country of massive immigration, the law was crucial to turn second and third-generation immigrants into French citizens in the French metropole as well as to sustain French colonization in Algeria where half of the settlers were foreign citizens, and the indigenous subjects French nationals, albeit excluded from French citizenship rights (on Algeria see Shepard 2006).

While Bertillon (1897; 1911) lamented France's loss of power, he nevertheless rejected the deliberate assimilationist policy underlying the 1889 Nationality Code. Foreigners, Jacques Bertillon contended, were endangering France by creating foreign colonies on the French territory susceptible of irredentist claims when located at French borders, and the Nationality Code, far from solving this question, created instead "artificial French" that is, citizens who may not be "culturally French" (*francisés*). Instead, Bertillon (1911) advocated membership in the French nationality only for those "who ask for" and "deserve it". Immigration, he argued, could never replace a strong pro-natalist policy, which alone would be able to ensure "the future of a nationality" (Bertillon 1911). By nationality, he did not mean the codified and institutionalized membership in a state, but referred to an alleged plurigenerational French national identity. In 1916, the Alliance warned, once again, about the "pacific invasion" of foreigners, which they believe was more dangerous than military invasion (cited in Bertaux 1997). However, in the 1920s, as Elisa Camiscioli (2001) underscored, the Alliance radically shifted position on immigration by promoting the naturalization of immigrant families.

For French women, nationality did not equate to citizenship rights but even more, it was also productive of foreignness as the French woman who married a foreigner had to follow the patriarchal rule enshrined in European civil codes – that is, it entailed the loss of her French nationality even if she still resided in France. The civil incapacity of the French married woman was high on the agenda of feminist organizations, and nationality was an important item in a country which had close to 3 million non-national residents in 1931. Because the Alliance had rallied the republican camp, in 1927 reform of the Nationality Law granted French women married to foreign men the right to keep their French nationality (Camiscioli 2004) and was considered an important victory for feminist organizations. In 1932, when Adolphe Landry passed the law which made family allowances mandatory and extended it over several work sectors in France (albeit dysfunctional in practice), foreigners were included in the schemes as workers (Glass 1940, 120).

In the thirties, France became the first immigration country in the West not only because of a structural demand for a foreign and colonial cheap labor force, but because the outlets in the United States – and more generally on the American continent – were closed and justified on eugenics grounds. It was Georges Mauco who, after defending his doctorate on the question of foreigners in the French economy in 1932 under the supervision of geographer Albert Demangeon, became France's major expert and was instrumental in repositioning the issue of settlement and that of labour in racial terms (Bertaux 2000). Rallying the prevailing pronatalist discourse, Mauco (1932) argued that if only a strong pronatalist policy would help raise the French birthrate, what was needed in the meantime in the face of massive immigration was a policy of immigration based on ethnic selection. The strength of Mauco's argument was

to reconcile the demographic and economic arguments which appeared then to be in opposition. Drawing from surveys in car factories, Mauco argued that those racial groups which were considered by employers as the worst workers were also those who could not be assimilated in France. He defined assimilation not as a social process but as a racial given: only the immigrant racial groups already represented in the French harmonious multi-ethnic mosaic could be assimilated. Furthermore, Mauco added that if France needed workers in industries, mines and agriculture, it needed not an urban immigrant class of shop owners and artisans in competition with the French urban middle class. These two lines of reasoning provided which groups were to be barred: the Armenians, the colonial workforce, and the Jews (Bertaux 2000). By the same token, it indicated that if Jews were no part of the French harmonious racial complex, and by singling out the Armenians as bad workers in French industries, and “Levantines” as undesirable shop owners, Mauco in fact called for stopping the arrival of refugees. Yet his call for ethnic selection remained a dead letter but as the economic crisis hit France, deportation of immigrants accelerated, and restrictions in their residence and citizenship status were passed (Lewis 2007). When Susan Pedersen (1995, 358) contends that the thirties were the foundational moment of a French welfare state of redistributive justice centered on children, she overlooks the fact that the provisions in the 1939 Family Code excluded non-French families (Glass 1940, 110).

### Fertility and the Transnational Politics of Depopulation

French feminist organizations did not oppose Republican motherhood policy and although birth control activists continued their propagandistic work the failure of the birth control movement in interwar France, where family planning was widely practiced without modern birth control devices, could not be attributed to the sole repression and a fortiori alleged pronatalist political culture. Rather, as Cicely Watson (1952, 263) remarked, it was because “the birth control movement has failed to integrate its propaganda into the general development of family and welfare legislation”. Karen Offen’s contention (1984, 674-675) that the widespread endorsement of pronatalist concerns by French feminist organizations help to improve their conditions disregards how it placed the working class women between forced abortion, forced abstinence and unintended that is, forced motherhood. Furthermore, as Paul Smith (1996, TBA) underscores, feminists came from the same social elites than the pronatalists. Indeed, it was Adolphe Landry’s sister who took over the CNFF in 1932 when her brother was advocating the family vote.

Such anti-feminist and sexist politics were upheld, and legitimized, in the transnational politics of depopulation. In 1927, Margaret Sanger, the US leader of birth control – a term she coined organized a World Conference on Population in Geneva with the hope of putting on the League of Nations’ agenda the

question of overpopulation she actively supported on eugenics grounds (Sanger 1927; Sanger 1938). Although the Conference was a success in gathering scientists from different European countries and the United States, she was excluded on the grounds that birth control was regarded as matter of ideology, not of science by the male participants. The conference was crucial to legitimate the idea of a European depopulation problem. Not only did the Alliance members actively present at the Conference take credit for blocking any arrangement with the League of Nations, they were also influential enough to host the creation of the first-ever international professional organization for the study of the population problem, the International Union for the Scientific Investigation of Population Problems (IUSIPP) in 1928 in Paris at the Musée Social, the same institution that had closed down its “feminine” section few years earlier (see the status of the IUSIPP, IUSIPP 1932). The IUSIPP triggered the creation of national committees. The French Committee chaired by Léon Bernard, a eugenicist and the president of the Higher Council on Public Hygiene, included among its members many of the prominent Republican figures, both those advocating strict pronatalist policies as well as the “hygienists” concerned with the quality of the French population (on French eugenics see Schneider 1990).

The French were also massively present at the International Congress on Population held in Rome in 1931 under the leadership of Corrado Gini, the head of the Italian Bureau of Statistics, renowned statistician and promoter of politics of population as “the scientific basis of fascism” (Gini 1927), and under the honorary presidency of Benito Mussolini, and this in spite of the fact that the congress was no longer the official IUSIPP congress (Bertaux 1999, 588). Indeed, the IUSIPP congress was relocated to London after Gini quarreled with US biologist Raymond Pearl who was IUSIPP’s president since its creation. The Rome congress was not only a success in gathering scientists and militants on the “population problem” at which mentioning birth control was officially banned, and even Gini’s mentioning of the name of Malthus provoked Mussolini’s censorship; it was a success for the novel fascist regime as well. After the congress, the Alliance’s journal lauded Mussolini’s “pronatalist” politics of population, and remained silent on its repressive, coercive and racial aspect in the colonies and the Italian peninsula against Italy’s national minorities. And while Mussolini had initially heavily drawn from French pronatalist rhetoric, it was now the French pronatalists who borrowed from Mussolini’s rhetoric: The journal of the Alliance adopted Mussolini’s slogan “Strength in numbers”.

The transnational politics of depopulation was sealed by the novel codification of fertility in the late 1920s attached to the names of Alfred J. Lotka (co-authored with L. I. Dublin 1925) and Robert R. Kuczynski (1928). They shared the same contention according to which the fertility of a population cannot be derived from the difference between the birth and the death rates, and that fertility is best calculated solely on women and by excluding migration move-

ments; but they differed in how to reach the “intrinsic natural rate of increase” for Lotka, or the “net reproduction rate” for Kuczynski. These scholars established the novel concept of “natural reproduction” and what is known today as the “one-sex model” in demography. In 1925, Lotka with Louis I. Dublin, his colleague at the New York-based Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, published what is known today as a foundational article to demography. While Lotka had already published on demography, what made their article so relevant is the fact that from a mathematical model this could well become a reality. Indeed, the two authors contended that since the United States had closed its door to immigration, the question of the “natural increase” arises as a crucial one. But unlike what Dennis Hodgson contended (2001: 3494), Dublin and Lotka did not reveal that “the average American woman in 1920 was having only half a child more than was needed to maintain a stationary population” but their article explicitly dealt only with “white women”. Thus, what constitutes a population was also left to the choice of demographers, and needed not follow nationality where racial categories were available.

David Glass (1940, 149) noted that “although concentrating on the prospects and dangers of a declining population, [the Alliance] has also given considerable attention to demographic research”. For instance, it was the Alliance that commissioned Alfred Sauvy, in 1932, to produce the first-ever published French population forecast, and Fernand Boverat’s numerous propagandistic brochures helped the popularization of population projections and age pyramids as both a scientific and popular representation of the French population. In 1934, Adolphe Landry published *La révolution démographique. Etudes et essais sur les problèmes de la population* (*The Demographic Revolution. Studies and Essays on the Problems of Population*) that gave the French school its “classic” (Landry 1982 [1934]). Landry provided the suitable theory that would help unlock French pro-natalism and strengthen its pretence to science. Like his disciple, state statistician Alfred Sauvy, Landry is labeled a “demographer” today but both considered themselves political economists. Landry defended his doctorate thesis in 1901 on “The social utility of individual property” in which, much against the liberal credo, he asserted that individual property may not lead to the general wealth but even contribute to its diminishment, while furthermore having a decreasing effect on the population (Girard 1982, 4). Besides being the leader of the parliamentary arena of pronatalist lobbying, he held a chair of the history of economic thought at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, and in 1936, became president of the Societe Statistique de Paris, which hosted a discussion of demographic methods and theories in France. The novelty of Landry’s argument was to stress fertility decline as a new social norm, or a new stage in civilization, one disconnected from the question of production that has been central to various authors, both before and after Malthus. In the new demographic regime, the population was no longer regulated by late marriage and high celibacy in order to delay birth – Malthus’

preventive checks – nor by an “abnormal” death rate due to war or epidemics but by the fact that sexual intercourse was no longer geared towards procreation. The “demographic revolution” was that married couples, or marital fertility, were subjugated to “the rationalization of life”. Landry’s demographic model is thus fundamentally the passage from a “natural” or “physiologic” fertility of women to one driven by “psychology”. Disconnected from the question of production or subsistence, the question was nevertheless one of political economy: the rise in “welfare” for all social classes, he argued, impacts regimes of consumption and creates new needs. Progress brings by technologies, production and hygiene is just apparent: it creates a materialist civilization. Landry acknowledged the universality of the phenomenon yet stressed that European populations were in a stage of virtual depopulation that preceded its effective depopulation. Sooner or later all populations would undergo the same process, but in the meantime, the European civilization was ageing, and would disappear first. The ageing of the French population was theorized by Sauvy, who argued that it had not only economic and financial consequences but psychological ones as well. Landry’s *Demographic Revolution* lies in its twofold meaning: according to Landry, the French revolution, or democracy, had brought new individualistic attitudes that had led to the decline of the birth rate, so that a new revolution was needed in order to counteract this civilization without progress. In 1936, the Alliance, taking account of the novel universalistic discourse and the excess of death rates over birth rates, changed its name to the Alliance for the Struggle against Depopulation.

Lotka’s model of stable population and Kuczynski’s net reproduction rate were introduced in France by Raoul Husson a state statistician in 1931 (see Véron 2009). Landry (1982 [1934], 5) argued that the “ancient France” had a natality of the type of stable population that is, defined by constant biological conditions, and he (1982 [1934], 216) presented the new codification of fertility by Lotka and Kuczynski. Husson criticized Sauvy’s population projections for not relying on Lotka’s model, pointing that Lotka’s model, as Jacques Véron (2009, 323) notes “could also incorporate net immigration rates by age that do not vary with time (but do vary with age), thereby extending the survival law to a ‘law of presence in the country at each age’”. But it was this path which was not taken. Instead, Sauvy who had already calculated in 1927 the demographic input by immigrants would, like his colleagues, considered immigrants and their descendants as a separate population. With the eugenic concept of assimilation introduced by Mauco, it provided the basis to the racialization of the French population which excluded specific groups that were rejected as of non-French descent and not one that could account them as fully part of the French population. Thus a politics of ethnic selection of immigration would have the task to maintain Frenchness and further biological homogenization (Bertaux 2000).

## The French School of Demography, Nazism and “Race suicide”

Hitler followed in the footsteps of his role model, Mussolini, by turning the “population problem” as the major issue the novel National Socialist regime would resolve. Nazi Germany became the Alliance’s focus point of foreign experiment in population politics, all the more so once the regime claimed to be successful in raising the German birth rate. However, far from viewing Nazi Germany as a threat, as some scholars suggest (e.g. Rosental, 9), the Alliance members described Nazi politics of population as a model to be imported into France. Although, as Gisela Bock (1983) underscored in her seminal article how Hitler’s politics of population explicitly mixed pronatalist, anti-natalist, eugenic, racist and anti-Semitic provisions depending on the category of “population” it constructed and targeted, French demographers reduced it to a “pronatalist” policy (Bertaux 2005, 119).

By misrepresenting Nazi politics of population as “pronatalist,” the French pronatalist lobby turned what was incipiently politics based on the intricacy of sexism and racism in a context of violent repression into an acceptable model for France. In his *Demographic Revolution*, Landry ([1934] 1982, 93) noted that Germany had engaged in “familialist and pronatalist politics,” likely to be a “vigorous” program, adding that this policy not only had legal foundations but also included “a direct psychological action”. The pronatalist lobby also lent official support to the Nazi regime when, in 1935, the IUSIPP International Population Congress was held in Berlin and marked, as Stefan Kühl (2001, TBA) underscored, the “apex of Nazi propaganda”. The French were not only represented as individual scientists, and IUSIPP’s member committee, but went as a governmental delegation (Bertaux 2005, 117). Adolphe Landry and Fernand Boverat represented the Ministry of Public Health and Henri Laugier, the Ministry of National Education. The Reich Minister Wilhelm Frick, in his opening address, endorsing the “white race suicide” rhetoric, underscored the centrality of marriage, family and class collaboration to Nazi politics of population while he insisted upon the necessity of not letting the empty space left by depopulation to the coming of “different races” (Cited in Bertaux 2005, 117-118). Fernand Boverat wrote in the Alliance’s journal that:

I am aware that Hitler and Mussolini’s demographic policy is part of their general politics, which is imperialist and expansionist (...) Yet the impartial scientist does not care about Hitler and Mussolini’s intentions: he only notes that they say the truth in denouncing the white race suicide,

and commenting on the 1935 Berlin congress wrote: “one of the words that many attendees were likely to have in mind was never pronounced: it is that of ‘Jew’” (cited in Bertaux 2005, 118-119).

In 1937, Paris hosted IUSIPP congress, and Adolphe Landry and Georges Mauco became respectively the IUSIPP president and general secretary. The

Germans were well represented in the “international committee” of the congress testifying of their good relation after the 1935 Berlin congress established by the French delegation, and no direct confrontation was to be engaged with Nazi politics. US anthropologist Franz Boas, who scientifically engaged against Aryan ideology, although he gave a paper saw his initial paper proposal rejected (Barkan 1996, 325-328). The penetration of Nazi ideology in French demography is at the heart of Landry’s civilization thesis. What is hailed as a “French classic” was in fact much inspired by the arguments developed by German statistician and demographer Friedrich Burgdörfer in his influential book *A People without Youth [Volk ohne Jugend]* first published in 1932 (Vienne 2000). Burgdörfer argued that the cause of declining fertility was the “rationalization of sexuality” and underscored the “aging of the German people” (Aly and Roth 2004, 26). Although the idea of a rationalization of sexuality was not Burgdörfer’s invention but was first introduced by Julius Wolf in his book *The Decline of the Birth Rate-The Rationalization of Sexual Life in Our Time* published in 1912 (Weingart 1987), with the Nazis in power it had assumed a new dimension: the rationalization of life had to be the preserve of the state. Burgdörfer, who was part of the Expert Committee on Questions of Population and Racial Policy set up by the new Nazi government and gathering “the elite of Nazi racial theory” (Proctor 1988, 95), as director of the Office of Population Statistics, organized the 1933 census at the order of the new Nazi government he had welcomed, and as Götz Aly and Karl Heinz Roth (2004) have stressed, the census was no longer to provide information on future population trends but “had become a vehicle for calculating the expected numbers of births by ‘biologically valuable’ women in the years to come” (Aly and Roth 2004, 17). Thus Burgdörfer’s cultural thesis served to adopt “a biological perspective” (Aly and Roth 1991, 17), to such an extent that he revised his thesis to now credit Jews of being the avant-garde of such “rationalization of sexuality” (Vienne 2000).

The penetration of Nazi ideology is striking in the short section titled “Vitality or the Power of Growth of a People,” Alfred Sauvy wrote in 1936 for the *Encyclopédie française*. Sauvy warned that, “except violent reaction to ageing and decline,” “German” and “German-Latin peoples” will enter an ineluctable process of decadence, one that “central Europe” seemed “to follow the same process of decadence with some delay” but that “yellow peoples” were not experiencing. He concluded on Russia that would be decisive for the “demographic and political future of Europe”. Framed as a racial struggle, Sauvy had incorporated the French into the “German-Latin” while he clearly pointed to a combined demographic and political threat from communist Russia rather than Nazi Germany.

The creation of a High Committee on Population and the passing of the Family Code in 1939 must be reappraised not as the achievement of a French republican pronatalist consensus since the Second Empire but as an attempt of

the fascination of the French politics of population. The Family Code included the doubling of legal penalties for abortion, and taxation of bachelors and childless couples; a cash bonus to married couples for each child born within the two years after the wedding, and state loans for agricultural equipment and livestock to French farmers on a ten-year basis, progressively cancelled with each child born, and provisions concerning inheritance of farm property that favored those with children against the childless owners (Watson 1952). As Glass (1940) noted, family allowances were now subjected to pronatalist goals, and there was perhaps no better evidence that the concern was no longer one that would fall under the category of social policy than the fact that foreigners, who in the previous expansion scheme of family allowances in 1932 were included as workers were now excluded as foreigners.

### Conclusion: The Politics of Reproduction

In the thirties, the French school of demography appraised women only through the gap between “fecundity” and “fertility” and reduced them to a biological fertility index while challenging their position as wage earners and citizens. While in Britain and Sweden, population experts endorsed the same codification of fertility and also warned of an imminent depopulation (see for instance Charles 1934; Myrdal 1941), the depopulation debate was never cut off from the “woman question,” or questions of standard of living. Alarming discourses about the imminent disappearance of Northern and West Europeans underlie by the novel codification of fertility did not lead neither to the same theories nor to the same politics of population.

Instead of raising concerns on questions of fertility, I suggest that we may raise concerns about the fertility of the question. The construction of “natural reproduction” posits immigration as an unnatural input in population growth. Immigrants are thus scrutinized through the biological lenses fostered by the fertility concept. But it does so, not only on incoming migrants but by considering them as a population different from that of the “natural population”. Demographic categories such as “French of French stock,” “immigrants” and “children of immigrants,” the two latter being official categories in the census since the 1990s, reinforce such fiction of two populations on the same territory, one of “immigrant” descent, and the other of “autochthony” (Bertaux 1997a; Bertaux 2011). In other words, fertility talk was concomitant of new instruments of calculus predicated on the concept of closed populations, excluding migration movements, and calculated on the reproduction of women alone. Thus fertility talk rests upon a “one-sex model” anchored in the “natural reproduction” of populations in which migrations are constructed as culturally and biologically different. Only this new codification could help project populations into the future the way the UN Population Division is displaying such material today, drawing from the scientific authority of the truth and objectivity that character-

izes the trust and use of numbers. From a mathematical model, it is given as a social representation of reality. Fertility is really not a good starting point from which to investigate the political economy of reproduction.

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