



THEME WORK

SUB-THEME:

Territory, populations and migrations

TITLE OF WORKSHOP

Degrowth and population



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14			29		
15			30		



THE DEBATE ABOUT THE FALLING BIRTH RATE IN ITALY

Daniela Danna

Paper Abstract

In 1992 Italy had a total fertility rate of 1,2 children per woman, the lowest in the world: it sparked a debate characterized by worried tones and the quest for solutions that is still very much alive today. The fact that the fertility rate has grown since 1992 was greeted with mixed feelings, since the contribution of migrant families is increasing. “A diminution of population is dangerous” was the framing utilized by the most powerful voices, a framing coherent both with racist and nationalistic stances and with the imperatives of capitalistic growth.

The data could alternatively be read as a relief for the current and growing ecological problems and as the result of the choice of women to have less children in a situation where they are less socially obliged to do so. But it is true that, on the microsocial level, the low birth rate could also be a consequence of the economic costs of children: the discrepancy between the desired number of children, usually 2, and the lack of a second child in many families is interpreted by experts as such, and a frustration of desires of the population.

The paper presents a review of the scientific and journalistic debate in the last two decades, keeping as guidelines the two different possibilities of interpretation of the falling birth rate described above: part of the problem or part of the solution. Additional questions will be what role women and men should have in reproduction according to experts and politicians, and which public policies about fertility were proposed and implemented.

Sources of the research are a press review of the two major national newspapers, books and articles by social scientists and popularizers, metaresearch on the questions about the desire of having children and their interpretation in the scientific literature.



DICTIONARY OF EXTINCTION— THE MYSTERY OF BIRTHS

Giuliano Cannata

Paper Abstract

What is really happening to humanity beyond the crisis that touches a part of western economy and beyond the transformation of energetic and communication technologies. Within a scenario of deep social uncertainty and structural crisis in advanced economies, there could be an underestimation of the preset real revolution: i.e. the *end of growth* of human species on earth. Actually this unexpected demographic degrowth is by far the most important event of our history. After reaching the peak of his expanding, of his domination and exploitation of the entire world and other beings, the leading species of the evolution decides not to beget anymore, driving the crude rate of births towards a level as low as that of deaths, even lower. Within the next 15 years the humans born every year will descend to a 1.5 percent compared to 1.4% of the stabilized number of dead: the growth will be over, the unimaginable *zero growth*, the not conceivable era of decrease (degrowth) would be on.

Obviously, demography and many related sciences could offer an explanation and a key of interpretation for degrowth. I have written several articles since 1992 on demographic diminution; an essay (*Dalla parte di Darwin*, 2007) and two books (*Si spegne signori si chiude* — Hurry up we are closing, 2008; *Dizionario dell'estinzione, il mistero delle nascite* — Dictionary of extinction, the mystery of births, 2012) quantifying the incoming inversion and trying to give a reason for it, the hesitation or the refusal to transmit life, focusing on cultural anthropology as a way to manage, an instrument for controlling this dramatic transition. Even more, technology theoretically offers (as it seems, because of dramatically increased yields) the possibility of reducing also consumption of commodities per capita as well as that of soil, space and carrying capacity. The urgent need of cutting off the present madness of pollution and waste, sometimes also hidden in the apparent ecological conversion. An example: agriculture as a whole uses up 70% of the entire amount of water of the world and produces almost twice as much the goods actually needed. It accounts for less than 3% of GDP and 3.5% of manpower.



The energetic crops, now being boasted by EC as a “green” sector of the economy, can consume 130% of the final produced energy. Pure nonsense.

But, as we said, apart from economic and material reasons, culture has the critical role in the human sudden refusal of growth; the pattern of diminishing clearly depends on women’s education and consciousness: not having in the past a way to avoid undesired maternity, even in a situation of poverty and scarcity. This obstacle has been recently removed: the lowest degree of school education itself makes enormous changes in the women status, of their intending to improve their culture and social condition. It is intensively debated today, the way for recovering at least the minimum natality for conservation of species for conservation of species or accepting easy diminution. Finding difficulty in taking care of a family is also very important, but it doesn’t seem to have any statistical effect.

Anyhow, the leading role of the feminine gender is causing a cultural change, a sort of new step in evolution. Furthermore, general philosophical theories and psychological situations also play a critical role in the unconscious refusal of giving birth to a child when that life is neither easy nor happy and eventually choosing death instead. Avoiding generating can be felt as a transfer of the refusal of our own life and death, as if we were never been born (nihilism).

A curious coincidence makes demography’s unexpected collapse to take place exactly when the conservation and survival of the planet seems to be critical: as if there was a reaction of Gaia to the human pressure on carrying capacity and global heating. For a nationalist, however, it is nothing else than the case, chance, or the apparent absence of causes or preestablished design.



FREEDOM, AWARENESS AND DESIRE IN FIFTEEN DIALOGUES WITH CHILDFREE WOMEN

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Keywords: awareness, women, childfree

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TACKLED ISSUES:

Daniela Danna:

- Manifesto delle donne metafemminili (www.xxdonne.net)
- Decreasing birth rate since 1920 (ecological crisis) -> leave space to wilderness
- Cultural proposal: “no children” or “less children” choice is to be valued
- Dorothy Stein: 1. Parenthood optional 2. Increase of debate on pros & cons 3. Maintenance of contraceptive and fertility service 4. Support/respect/solidarity with the childfree
- Critical approach to demographers approach — examples: extinction of Italy, something that may not even be there in 200 years; the contraception evolution (but family planning already existed); political consequences (Italian government to the UN 2002: birth rate insufficient)
- CEI (Italian Episcopal conference) connects the unborn to abortion
- Political proposal: tax system promoting a higher number of children
- “Sustainable demography”: pseudoscience

Giuliano Cannata:

- Women bore children because they didn't know how not to bear
- Drama of baby refusal (infanticide)
- Abortion has to do with the drama of death
- Choice of giving life is the choice of giving death as well
- For psychoanalysis the decision of not giving life is a refusal of life itself
- Non bearing as self liberation and as a transfer or projection of personal refusal (of life and death)
- For the first time ever man has an interest in being concerned about the human species
- No one lives for the future (evolution) -> Jacques Monod (*Le Hasard et la Nécessité*)
- Talking about childbearing means talking about the meaning of life
- A well spent life justifies one's own birth and childbearing a posteriori



- Planning to govern future without suffering (“steady state of economy”)
- Equations: pleasure = happiness; wellbeing = happiness; beauty = happiness
- Child: a selfish choice? A wonderful toy?

Ferdinanda Vigliani and Paola Leonardi:

- Self-consciousness: interview of over-60 women (artists, scientists, journalists, ...) about their motivation for not bearing a child
- Only 1 out of 15 sees a relation between non-motherhood choice and the limits of the earth
- Motherhood belongs to the personal sphere
- Resistance to pressure (e.g. fascist propaganda)
- No one felt fulfilled by motherhood
- Aspesi (journalist/writer): a happy mood does not rhyme with motherhood
- Each interview was a different scenario
- Symbolic motherhood approved by somebody or vigorously opposed by others
- Result of research: wide range of reasons
- Destiny or choice? Induced need or wish/desire?
- Why the women interviewed didn't give life to children: they gave life to something else
- Aims: say that motherhood is not necessary; stop the prejudices about motherhood
- Research on younger groups of women (25-40 years old) is starting to spread out

GIVEN ANSWERS:

- Wedding as a source of pleasure, not only for childbearing
- None of the women interviewed reported pressure by her partner to have a child (except for one)



- Risk of violence on pregnant women by their partner for fear of being no longer “the only one”
- Identity/role: grandmothers putting pressure on children to have children
- Relation between poverty and number of children to help the family
- Low birth rate as a positive factor
- Relation between gender and violence
- A mother’s hatred towards a second child
- Childfree \neq childless



UNANSWERED QUESTIONS, MESSAGES & COMMENTS:

- North Europe compared to Italy. There is a difference in fertility rate: why?
- How would you compare the choice of non motherhood of women belonging to the 70s post feminist generation (more specifically women who are now 50 years old and have a good job) with present women who don't have a permanent job?
- Next conferences: 5/6/7 october Paestum; 20 October Reggio Emilia "Mamma o non mamma: strategie di scelta"
- The group suggests that the theme should be taken into consideration in the next conference on degrowth and be "included" in the political position of the movement
- One of the participants suggests that personal commitment/involvement/awareness should become a practice during the workshops