

## **The formation and transformation of a transnational field**

Ole Jacob Sending

Norwegian Institute of International Affairs/

Chr. Michelsen Institute ([ojs@nupi.no](mailto:ojs@nupi.no))

*Draft, March 25, 2009. Please do not quote or distribute without permission. Comments are most welcome.*

### **Abstract**

Students of global governance have documented that non-state actors have become key players in world politics as they form part of transnational governance networks that constitute “spheres of authority” beyond the control of states. Research on expert groups in International Relations theory (IR) has specified a key mechanism through which such non-state groups can exercise influence as they persuade and teach states to change behavior and re-define their interests by reference authoritative knowledge claims. While these two strands of literature share a focus on the role of non-state actors, there is little cross-fertilization between them. This is unfortunate as a strong case can be made that advancing insights in one field will be greatly facilitated by drawing on the other. What is lacking is a conceptual apparatus that can bring the two strands of research together and move them beyond their current limitations. I argue here that field theory offers such a conceptual apparatus. Global governance theory lacks a meso-level theory of the units of analysis – transnational governance networks – that are said to be central to world politics. Focusing on fields as a structured set of positions and a social space of organized striving and competition can help provide such a theoretical focus. Research on expert groups, meanwhile, often over-sell the significance of “knowledge” in shaping policy, and typically focus only on their impact on states. They do not analyze how expert groups also operate as part of global governance networks and how these networks evolve over time. By situating expert groups within field theory, it is possible to move beyond a sole focus on knowledge as a causal factor, and to unearth their role in shaping the evolution of governance networks over time. Analyzing the formation, institutionalization, and transformation of population as a transnational governance field I seek to show how field theory can improve our understanding of global governance and the role of expert groups within it.

## Introduction

Since the mid 1990s, global governance has come to form a central area of research for International Relations (IR) scholars. The literature on global governance aims to account for the sources, nature and effects of governance efforts organized by networks of state and non-state actors operating beyond state borders.<sup>1</sup> It thus differs from the traditional focus of IR theory in that it focuses on a wider cast of actors (state and non-state actors), and is concerned with the “problem of governance” rather than the “problem of order.” It can be said to consist of a general claim about the diffusion of authority from states to functionally specific transnational networks.<sup>2</sup> It also typically contains a claim about the increased role and power of non-state actors in world politics. Here, the literature on expert groups – the epistemic communities approach in particular – have emerged to fill an important role in terms of specifying the mechanisms at work and documenting empirically the power of such non-state actors.<sup>3</sup>

But while there is extensive cross-referencing between the literature on global governance, and epistemic communities, there is very little cross-fertilization. The literature on epistemic communities only feature in accounts of global governance as *empirical* illustrations of the power of non-state actors, and there is little effort to theorize the dynamics of global governance as shaped by and integral to the power of expertise in modern society, but nationally and globally.<sup>4</sup> Students of epistemic communities, meanwhile, rarely reflect on how insights from the literature on global governance may, in fact, challenge their own presuppositions and/or open up new avenues for empirical research about the role of expert groups. This bifurcation is unfortunate: Building on insights from the literature on global

---

1 See Rosenau, James N., and Ernst-Otto Czempiel, eds. (1992) *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Martin Hewson, and Timothy Sinclair (eds) (1999) *Approaches to Global Governance Theory*, edited by, 287-301. New York: State University of New York Press.

2 Caparoso FIND FULL REF

3 Haas, Peter M. (ed.) (1992) “Knowledge, Power and International Policy Coordination” *International Organization* vol 46, no 1, pp 1—35. The literature on transnational advocacy networks (TANs) fill the same role in studies of global governance. TANs are found to teach, socialize and shame states into accepting new norms, resulting in changes in state behavior and/or interests. In this paper, I focus only on expert groups, but the argument developed here would in large measure also apply to the role of TANs. See Keck, Margaret and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) *Activists Beyond Borders. Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. For an overview, see Risse, Thomas (2002) “Transnational Actors in World Politics” in Carlsnaes, Walter, Thomas Risse and Beth Simmons (eds) *Handbook of International Relations*. Sage. pp 255—274. Similarly, the role of transnational corporations (TNCs) has received increased attention. TNCs are involved in global regulatory efforts by virtue of their power and position in global markets. TNCs are also relevant for the study of global governance because of how some corporations adopt and advance “corporate social responsibility”. For a statement along these lines, see Cutler, Claire, Virginia Haufler and Tony Porter (eds) (1999) *Private Authority and International Affairs*. Albany: SUNY Press. For an overview, see Ruggie, John G., (2004) “Reconstituting the Global Public Domain: Issues, Actors, and Practices” *European Journal of International Relations* 10 (4), 499-531.

4 A case in point is how professions (such as lawyers and economists) are establishing issue-specific authority or jurisdictions that may stretch beyond the state. For an account of the transnational professionalization of economics, see Fourcade, Marion (2006) “The Construction of a Global Profession: The Transnationalization of Economics” *American Journal of Sociology* vol 112, no.1, 145—194.

governance about, say, the pockets of functionally defined “spheres of authority” in world politics, students of expert groups may want to broaden their focus to include how expert groups operate to shape not only states but also non-state actors, and how they operate in and are able to influence on-going governance efforts in established governance networks.. Similarly, students of global governance have largely been content with showing *that* non-state actors are powerful and have focused on the implications of this claim for understanding the broader institutional transformations in world politics relating to the power of the state and the locus of governance. Lost here is an account of the relative power of different types of non-state actors, not to mention an effort to theorize the possibility of a *sui generis* political logic within and between transnational governance networks – one that is characterized as much by the competition and rivalry *between* different non-state actors as that between different states.

This paper is an attempt to provide a conceptual bridge between the literature on expert groups, exemplified by the epistemic communities approach, on the one hand, and that of global governance, on the other. I do so by introducing the concept of fields. I first discuss in some detail the key claims found in each strand of literature. I then introduce the concept of fields and discuss how it can provide a platform for a theoretically informed analysis of the role of expert groups within the dynamics of global governance. It does so, I argue, by providing a theoretical lens through which to treat global governance networks as social spaces rather than merely horizontal networks – as meso-level orders that constrain and enable different actors in different ways according to the positions they occupy and the resources they have access to. Thus understood, expert groups can be analyzed in relation to other groups both in the formation, institutionalization and transformation of such fields.

I apply the field perspective to a case that fall squarely within the confines of both the literature on epistemic communities and on global governance -- international population policy. I show that the story line of each provide accounts that miss out on the central “logic” of the establishment, institutionalization and transformation of this field. Its’ establishment was driven by advocacy groups, experts, and philanthropists, where public advocacy and elite contacts in different countries were key. Expertise, then, cannot explain *that* population policies were established. And yet, expert groups came to dominate the field as it was institutionalized globally during the course of the 1950s and 1960s. The so-called theory of demographic transition, formulated by Frank Notestein in different forms in the late 1940s, came to “anchor” and bring together groups that had different agendas and so served to define the field’s boundaries, internal hierarchy and central objectives. Because population control

was highly controversial, moreover, the field was institutionalized through investment in research and academic institutionalization in the developing world. Subsequent political debates about population policy, then, took place within a particular institutional context where demographers occupied a dominant position. The changes in population policy that took place in the 1990s – from family planning to reproductive health – must thus be understood with reference to how previously marginalized groups inside the field – such as health professionals and women’s groups – emerged to re-direct knowledge-production towards a focus on women’s health, on the one hand, and to forge alliances with women’s groups outside the population establishment, on the other.

### **Global governance**

Regime theory and the earlier work by Keohane and Nye on transnational relations are important precursors to the current literature on global governance.<sup>5</sup> What sets it apart from these earlier conceptualizations is its insistence on more fundamental transformations in world politics as non-state actors are seen to become much more important relative to states. Rosenau suggest, for example, that “The weakening of states has not been followed by authority vacuums [...] so much as it has resulted in a vast growth in the number of spheres in which authority has moved.”<sup>6</sup> Following Rosenau’s lead, more recent work on global governance has turned their attention to what Rosenau called “the disaggregation of the loci of governance” and the attendant focus on “spheres of authority” as the central unit of analysis. In so doing, analysts have focused very much on the role of non-state actors as being increasingly powerful. In reviewing the field Thomas Risse thus notes that “There is a growing consensus” about the fact that non-state actors make a difference in world politics: “Scholars have collected evidence that advocacy networks, epistemic communities and other TNAs (transnational actors) can have a substantial impact on state policies, on the creation of international norms, and on the diffusion of these norms into domestic practice.”<sup>7</sup>

As students of global governance reference the role and power of these non-state actors<sup>8</sup>, they not only seek to provide a foundation from which to theorize what world politics looks like when authority is dislodged from the territorial state. They are also suggesting that the

---

5 Krasner, Stephen D. (1982) “structural causes and regime consequences: Regimes as intervening variables” *International Organization* vol 36, no.2, pp. 185—205. Keohane, Robert O. and Joseph S. Nye (eds) (1971) *Transnational Relations and World Politics*. Harvard University Press.

6 Rosenau, James (1999: 293)

7 Risse, Thomas (2002: 266)

8 A set of actors considered central to global governance that is not analyzed here is that of multi-national corporations (MNCs). For an overview of MNCs in global governance, see

nature of world politics assumes a new form: The separation between state and non-state actors that is so central in these accounts maps onto a distinction between political conflict and competition in the realms *between* states, and a realm of progress, coordination and cooperation towards collectively agreed upon goals in the transnational networks of governance.<sup>9</sup> Global governance is thus not only about the power of non-state actors, or the diffusion of authority, but also about an alleged transformation where politics understood as struggle, competition and contestation is less prominent. As Barnett and Duvall have noted in their critique of the global governance literature:

Scholars of global governance often define it as the institutionalized coordination or collaboration of people's and states' activities in ways that achieve more desirable—positive sum—outcomes. Because of this tendency to tie global governance to institutionalized cooperation, coordination of convergent interests, and the production of collective goods, many scholars diminish or overlook the role of power.<sup>10</sup>

This tendency to emphasize governance as a relatively frictionless activity with agreed upon goals has a lot to do with the empirics that students of global governance lean on when they theorize how world politics is transformed by the emergence of transnational governance networks, as evidenced by the literature on epistemic communities and transnational advocacy networks. The bulk of this literature has focused on the promotion of “good” causes such as epistemic communities’ and/or advocacy groups’ efforts to institutionalize human rights norms, to establish nuclear arms control and global environmental policy, to ban apartheid and so on.<sup>11</sup>

Students of global governance have been primarily interested in analyzing the emergence of non-state actors and transnational “spheres of authority” from which

---

9 For a critique of the dualism of state/non-state in the governance literature, see Sending, Ole Jacob and Neumann, Iver B. (2006) “Governance to Governmentality: Analyzing States, NGOs, and Power” *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 50, no. 3, pp 651—672. For a more general critique of the claim that states are becoming less powerful, see, for example, Sassen, Saskia (2006) *Territory, Authority, Rights*. Princeton University Press. For a critique of the claim that non-state actors are able to shape policy outcomes, see Drezner, Daniel (2006) *All Politics is Global*. Princeton University Press.

10 Barnett, Michael and Raymond Duvall (2005) “Power in International Politics” *International Organization* vol. 59, no 1., pp. 39–75. p. 57.

11 See Risse, Thomas, Stephen Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink (1999) *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Political Change*. Cambridge University Press; Adler, Emmanuel (1992) “The Emergence of Cooperation: National Epistemic Communities and the International Evolution of the Idea of Nuclear Arms Control” *International Organization* vol 46, 1, pp. 101-145; Haas, Peter (1992) “Banning Chlorofluorocarbons: Epistemic community efforts to protect stratospheric ozone” *International Organization* vol. 46, 1, pp.187—224; Princen, Thomas and Finger, Matthias (1997) “Environmental NGOs in World Politics: linking the local and the global. Routledge; Klotz, Audie (1995) *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle Against Apartheid*. Cornell University Press.

governance takes place, and these networks' effects on the character and power of states, including normative questions of the legitimacy and accountability of such networks.<sup>12</sup> They have not, however, been concerned with unpacking and theorizing what these governance networks look like on the inside -- through what mechanisms they change or are stabilized, how the different actors within them relate to each other etc. Indeed, it is striking that a recent volume dedicated solely to analyzing different forms of power in global governance does not contain any attempt to define or to formulate a theoretically oriented typology or framework for what global governance networks are and how it should be studied.<sup>13</sup>

It is in this sense that it makes sense to charge that we lack an account of the anatomy and politics of the transnational networks involved in global governance. This is important in and of itself, but it is also important in an effort to theorize how such transnational governance network are institutionalized and transformed over time. As I argue below, conceptualizing transnational governance networks as fields, will make it possible to analyze the anatomy of and political dynamics within such networks. If political authority is indeed diffusing to transnational governance networks, it seems important to unpack how that authority is produced and sustained by reference to the different types of resources that different actors have at their disposal and how the source of governance networks' authority shapes the network's mode of operation and genesis over time.<sup>14</sup>

### **Expert groups**

Peter M. Haas and his colleagues presented the "epistemic communities approach" in an attempt to address a question that was to define much of the research-agenda in International Relations theory during the 1990s, namely, how ideational factors such as norms and knowledge, may regulate the behavior and constitute the interests of states.<sup>15</sup> It is still the most widely used theoretical account of the role of expert groups in IR theory, and also of the mechanisms of policy diffusion.<sup>16</sup> As noted above, epistemic communities figure in the

---

12 See Koenig-Archibugi, Mathias (2002) "Mapping Global Governance", in *Governing Globalization*, edited by David Held, and Andrew McGrew, 46-69. Cambridge: Policy Press.

13 Barnett and Duvall (2005). *op. cit.* While their discussion of the different dimensions of power involved in global governance clearly implies a view of global governance as inherently political, they do not provide any analytical framework for understanding what global governance is as a distinct set of practices or processes. In that sense, global governance here function primarily as a heading within which different analyses of power in world politics more generally can fit in.

14 Following Weber, analyzing a polity's source of authority is important for understanding its mode of operations and institutional form. For an application to IR theory, See Barnett, Michael and Martha Finnemore (2004) *Rules for the World*. Cornell University Press; Hurd, Ian (1999) "Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics" *International Organization* 53, 2, 379—408.

15 Haas, Peter M. (ed) (1992) "Knowledge, Power and International Policy Coordination". Special Issue, *International Organization*, vol. 46, no. 1.

16 See, for example, the review of constructivism by Adler, Emmanuel (2002) "Constructivism and International Relations" in Carlsnaes, Walter, Simmons, Beth and Risse, Thomas (eds) (2002) *Handbook of International Studies*. Sage. pp. 95—118;

literature on global governance as ontologically given units whose operations' and ability to shape policy is assumed rather than theorized.<sup>17</sup> Critics of the epistemic communities approach have focused on the failure to differentiate between different types of knowledge,<sup>18</sup> for not considering the "disciplinary power" of knowledge,<sup>19</sup> and for not addressing how experts adjust their arguments to fit policy-makers' interests and concerns.<sup>20</sup> Yet these critics share with the epistemic communities approach a tendency to black-box "knowledge" from its socio-political production and to isolate its role from other ideational factors (such as norms). What gets lost here is, first, an account of how and why a particular phenomenon, such as economic growth, climate change or population growth, is defined and explained in this or that particular way. Second, and as a corollary, focusing on the operations and effects of groups that are recognized as authoritative begs the question of how and why this expert group emerged to have such a position in the first place. The field of development, for example, is fraught with examples of professional competition and what we could call "inter-epistemic" conflicts over what constitutes good development policy.<sup>21</sup> Third, by focusing primarily on a particular group of experts, these accounts of expert groups make strong assumptions about the *lack* of influence of other groups, such as transnational advocacy groups.

Moreover, the epistemic communities approach focus on states as the target of influence, intent on showing that this particular groups of actors can shape international policy.<sup>22</sup> While not at odds with its theoretical propositions, the role and relative power of expert groups in the establishment, institutionalization and transformation of *transnational* networks that involve a myriad of actors, and how they may operate in *on-going governance efforts* has yet to receive attention. More specifically, moving from a question of whether and

---

Rolf Lidskog og Goran Sundquist (2002) "The role of science in environmental regimes: the case of LRTAP" *European Journal of International Relations*, 8: 77-10

17 See Risse, Thomas (2002) "Transnational Actors in World Politics" in Carlsnaes, Walter, Thomas Risse and Beth Simmons (eds) *Handbook of International Relations*; Woods, Ngaire (2006) Adler, Emmanuel (2002) *op. cit.*; Haas, Peter M. (1999) "Social Constructivism and the Evolution of Multilateral Environmental Governance," in Aseem Prakash and Jeffrey A. Hart, (eds.) *Globalization and Governance*. New York: Routledge; Stone, Diane and Andrew Denham (eds.) (2004) *Think Tank Traditions: Policy Research and the Politics of Ideas*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Woods, Ngaire (1995) *Economic Ideas and International Relations: Beyond National Neglect* *International Studies Quarterly* 39: 161-180.

18 Dimitrov, Radoslav S. (2003) "Knowledge, Power and Interests in Environmental Regime Formation", *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 47, no. 1, pp. 123—150.

19 Litfin, Karen (1994) *Ozone Discourses: Science and Politics in Global Environmental Cooperation*. New York: Columbia University Press. See also Dimitrov, Radoslav (2003) *op. cit*

20 Eriksson, Johan and Bengt Sundelius (2005) "Molding Minds That Form Policy: How to make research useful", *International Studies Perspective*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 51—72.

21 See Abbott 1988, 2002; Garth and Dezalay 2002;

22 This is the case in the epistemic communities approach, but also in other contributions. See, for example, the discussion in Lidskog, Rolf and Göran Sundqvist (2002) *ibid*; Bieler, Andreas (2001) "Questioning Cognitivism and Constructivism in IR" *Politics*, Vol, 21 (2) pp. 93—100; Litfin, Karen (1994) *op. cit*; Adler, Emmanuel and Steven Bernstein (2005) "Knowledge in Power: The epistemic construction of global governance" in Barnett and Duvall (eds) (2005), pp. 294—318.

under what conditions experts can shape international policy to one that assumes that some form of knowledge is integral to global governance shift our focus towards i) what type of knowledge, or which expert group, emerged to become authoritative in an issue area; ii) assessing the importance of expert groups relative to non-experts (such as advocacy groups); and iii) accounting for how transnational and international policy evolve over time and the role, if any, of expert groups in this process. Answering these questions seems important not only for better understanding the role of knowledge and expert groups as such. It also seems important for making insights about expert groups integral to and supportive of efforts to better understand how transnational governance networks are formed, institutionalized and transformed over time.<sup>23</sup>

### **Field theory**

With its distinct relational ontology and its focus on actors' positions relative to others within a social space of "organized striving" or "self-organized contestation" field theory can provide new insights about the role of experts as part of the dynamics of global governance.<sup>24</sup> While field theory includes a broad range of nuances and approaches, I here focus only on certain elements.<sup>25</sup> At a basic level, field theory aims to specify and differentiate the character and dynamics of social life in distinct social spheres. Modern society is characterized by a high degree of differentiation into different spheres.<sup>26</sup> The idea of a field is meant to capture that while there are general features to the functioning of power and the dynamics of struggle and change, it must be understood at the level of and with reference to the *specific* to each field or sphere.

---

23 More recent contributions that focus on the role of knowledge in shaping global governance have identified how global governance necessarily operates within and are parasitic upon certain "epistemes" comprising both normative commitments and consensual knowledge claims. Adler and Bernstein note that these epistemes form a "bubble" – much, as the authors point out, like that put on display in the movie "The Truman Show" – shaping what is considered normal, appropriate, significant etc. In so doing, they bring attention to the importance of asking not whether knowledge shapes global governance, but what type of knowledge is or emerges as dominant and authority within particular issue-areas – or fields – of global governance. In drawing on insights from field theory below, I build on these insights but direct attention to a level of analysis below that of the structural features entailed by the concept of episteme. See Adler, Emmanuel and Steven Bernstein (2005) "Knowledge in Power: The epistemic construction of global governance" pp. 294–318, in Barnett, Michael and Raymond Duvall (eds) (2005).

24 For an application of the concept of fields as conceived by Bourdieu in IR theory, see Williams, Michael C. (2006) *Culture and Security: Symbolic Power and the Politics of International Security*. New York: Routledge. For an application to European defense policy, see Merand, Frederic (2008) *European Defence Policy Beyond the Nation State*. Oxford University Press. For a discussion of some of the general methodological principles underwriting Bourdieu's sociology and their application in IR theory, see Pouliot, Vincent (2007) "Subjectivism": Toward a Constructivist Methodology" *International Studies Quarterly* vol 51, no. 2 359–384.

25 For an overview, see Martin, John Levi (2003) "What is field theory?" *American Journal of Sociology* vol 109, no. 1, pp. 1–49.

26 Thompson, John B. (1991) "Introduction" in Bourdieu, Pierre (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*. Polity Press. pp. 1–31. p. 25.

As employed by Bourdieu, a field is “a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or ‘capital.’”<sup>27</sup> Fields are, moreover, social spaces within which different actors seek to vie for advantage, and where dominant groups seek to institutionalize certain rules in an effort to perpetuate their position vis a vis others.<sup>28</sup> As far as I can tell, field theorists are agnostic as to what type of resources are most important (economic, cultural, social) – it will have to be determined through empirical analysis of the specific field in question. As laid out by Bourdieu and others, it is thus a key methodological principle that one analyze the formation of a field historically, focusing on the production and use of different forms of capital or resources by different actors in their efforts to shape the rules of the game for relevant others.<sup>29</sup>

Symbolic power is here implicated in two different ways: as an intersubjective structure that contain dominant representations defining the rules of the game and what the field is “about” – what Bourdieu calls *doxa*; and as a symbolic resource that is unequally distributed within the field as a consequence of how the field is constituted by forms of symbolic power. When coupled with the concept of symbolic power, the concept of a field enables us, as Bourdieu notes, to “break with the idea that scientists form unified, even homogenous group” and to study the tensions and relations of power between different groups of with claims to knowledge as a symbolic resource.<sup>30</sup> Crucially, while all fields have similarities in their basic logic – in terms, for example, of structures that allocate certain types of capital or resources to actors occupying different positions within the field – Bourdieu insists on the need to reconstruct historically how the field emerged to assume its particular form and how it was differentiated from other fields.<sup>31</sup>

A note on the role of knowledge as a distinct form of capital is in order. Bourdieu builds on Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms and attempts to render it amenable to sociological analysis. Cassirer proposed that the sensed and experienced *changes* once it is related to concepts.<sup>32</sup> Or, as Wagner puts it, “Data can only be treated by imposing some sort of

---

27 Thompson, John B. (1991) “Introduction” in Bourdieu, Pierre (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*. Polity Press. pp. 1—31, p. 14.

28 Fligstein, Neil (2001) “Social Skill and the theory of fields” *Sociological Theory* vol. 19, no 2, pp. 105—125. p. 108.

29 See Fligstein (2001) p. 109. See also Bourdieu, Pierre (1991) *op. Cit.*; Bourdieu, Pierre (2005) *The Social Structures of the Economy*. Polity Press. Cf. Leander, Anna (2004) “The Cunning of Imperial Reason” COPRI Working Paper, 33.

30 Bourdieu, Pierre (2004a) *Science of Science and Reflexivity*. Cambridge: Polity Press. p. 45.

31 Bourdieu, Pierre (2005) *The Social Structures of the Economy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

32 For a good discussion of Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms, see Krois, John Michael (1987) *Cassirer: Symbolic Forms and History*. New Haven: Yale University Press. For the point made above, see p. 47 in particular. See also Birkeland, Åsmund (1993) *Cassirer – Rickert – Weber*. Magisteravhandling. Oslo: University of Oslo.

classificatory order on them that does not emerge from the data themselves.”<sup>33</sup> Bourdieu adds a clear sociological dimension to this view when he, extending Durkheim’s argument that symbolic forms are social forms,<sup>34</sup> argues that

... all knowledge of the social world, is an act of construction implementing schemes of thought and expression, [... B]etween conditions of existence and practices or representations there intervenes the structuring activity of the agents, who, far from reacting mechanically to mechanical stimulations, respond to the invitations or threats of a world whose meaning they have helped produce.<sup>35</sup>

This view of the “structuring activity of the agents” in formulating the categories and schemes through which the social world is given meaning seems to underwrite Abbott’s argument that the professions and their tasks are co-constitutive. I take him to suggest such a view when he notes that in the ecology of professions, “It is the process of constructing the relations between actors and locations (tasks) that in fact constitutes and delimits both actors and locations. Analytically and empirically, the relational process is prior.”<sup>36</sup> For Bourdieu, as for Abbott, then, the capacity to both “construct” and to “naturalize” the social world by imposing certain categories, models and conceptual schemes is a central part of the power of expertise inasmuch as these occupy positions that are accorded a general level of cognitive authority by reference to the institution of science.<sup>37</sup>

Below, I build on this idea of how a field may emerge and be stabilized in large through the active work by some groups to define, objectify and naturalize a governance object (in this case, “population”) and how both the governance object and the governance subjects emerge with distinct identities through this process. Put differently, fields emerge not only through how actors use pre-existing cultural resources,<sup>38</sup> but also in part by the active and transformative process of constructing governance objects. For the purpose of this paper, then, I am interested in fields that are organized around a governance “project”, the nature of which may be disputed.

---

33 Wagner, Peter (1994) *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline*. Routledge. p. 27.

34 Bourdieu, Pierre (1977) *op. cit.* p. 164. Emphasis added.

35 Bourdieu, Pierre (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press. p. 466-467.

36 Abbott, Andrew (2005) “Linked Ecologies: States and Universities as Environments for Professions” *Sociological Theory* vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 245—274., p. 249.

37 Wagner, Peter (1994) *op. cit.* p. 27. emphasis in original.

38 Fligstein (2001) p. 109.

The added value of bringing to bear these insights to the study of global governance and the role of expertise is, I think, the following: First, analyzing the formation of a field – and thus how its boundaries, logic and hierarchy was established – will yield important insights into how and why some groups have emerged to assume a dominant position relative to others. Second, by situating the role of expert groups within a structured social space where different actors have access to different types of (material and symbolic) resources, the role of expert groups relative to other types of actors can be more readily assessed. Third, fields are meso-level orders and as such changes in a field over time are neither attributed to overarching structures with its own logic, nor to the outcome of the interaction of independently constituted actors.<sup>39</sup> In stead, it is accounted for by attending to the on-going competition between different actors within the field -- each with access to a differentiated set of resources -- and to events external to the field that are always filtered and mediated by the field's distinct boundaries and set-up. Thus defined, fields provide us with an analytical apparatus to analyze the politics within and between relatively autonomous transnational governance fields, such as “health”, “development”, “security”, and, “population”.

## **A transnational field**

### Context

In historian Matthew Connelly words,

Population control was ... a transnational social movement. Population controllers tended to share both a sense of belonging to “world population” ... and a determination to remake their own societies, whether by eliminating ‘social problem groups’ or merely preventing unwanted children. Whether it was a faith or a science, they claimed their cause advanced the interests of all humanity.<sup>40</sup>

While certainly a “movement”, the different actors involved in efforts to control population growth also constituted a transnational network in the sense used by theorists of global governance. By the late 1960s, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) had been established, the World Bank was already involved, and USAID and other bilateral aid agencies funded population control efforts on a large scale. What is striking about efforts

---

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Fligstein 2002; Lewin 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Connelly, Matthew (2006) “Seeing Beyond the State: The Population Control Movement and the problem of sovereignty” *Past and Present* no. 193, pp. 197—233, p.232

to control population growth in the global south, however, is that a host of non-state actors had already institutionalized global population control efforts long *before* either International Organizations or states came to support them. That is: it constituted a transnational field populated by both non-state actors in the north and non-state and state actors in the south (notably India and Pakistan) that received training, advice, funding and direct assistance in setting up and running family planning programs aimed at lowering fertility rates in the name of economic development. When the US and other governments got involved the field was already “settled”, with distinct boundaries, positions and objectives. Indeed, the reason why this field was initially established without support from states and IOs was that it was considered highly controversial. An analysis of the dynamics of its emergence and transnational institutionalization thus seems important as a case in point for theorizing global governance. As I detail below, expert groups were central in giving form and content to the field.<sup>41</sup>

In his analysis of the history of the Population Association of America (PAA), Dennis Hodgson notes that the

The field of population in the United States early in this century was quite diffuse. There were no academic programs producing certified demographers, no body of theory and methods that all agreed constituted the field, no consensus on which population problems posed the most serious threat to the nation or human welfare more generally.<sup>42</sup>

Hodgson points to its “porous boundaries” and the central role and visibility of activists as shaping debates about how to regulate the quantity, quality and movement of populations. Those who labeled themselves “population specialists” in this period were thus concerned

---

<sup>41</sup> That the focus here is limited to certain group of actors in the United States is not to the disparagement of similar efforts, and influence, of actors and organizations in other countries that were central in establishing and institutionalizing population as a transnational field. Early on Japan, like India, established national policies to encourage “family planning”, and in Scandinavia, notably in Sweden, governments advocated fertility reduction as a means to attain collective, national objectives in terms of improved health and socio-economic development. Gunnar and Alva Myrdal and Elise Ottosen-Jensen were important in attracting wider support for regulating family size through “child spacing”. As early as in the 1930s, important figures in Britain, such as Marie Stopes, like Margaret Sanger in the United States, and Alexander Carr-Sanders were drawing attention to the problems emanating from high fertility at both the individual and family level. Nevertheless, the most forceful advocacy for placing fertility behavior under conscious control in the name of socio-economic development in the developing world originated in and was organized from the United States. The conditions that rendered the political agency performed by these non-governmental organizations in the United States possible must be understood within the context of what Olivier Zunz calls the characteristic “institutional flexibility” of American society, enabling – as we shall see, expert groups, advocacy groups and wealthy, well-connected individuals and philanthropists to marshal resources to mount a global governance project.

<sup>42</sup> Hodgson, Dennis (1991) “The Ideological Origins of the Population Association of America” p. 1, *Population and Development Review* vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 1–34, p. 1

with many different issues, such as "overpopulation, depopulation, uncontrolled fertility, excessively controlled fertility, unrestricted immigration, race suicide and race degradation."<sup>43</sup> While the establishment of the PAA in 1931 served to establish an arena for competition between different groups over the authoritative definition of "population" as an object of governance, it would take another two decades before these different groups converged around a specific conception, crystallized in the theory of demographic transition, of population as intimately related to economic growth, development, and the defense of US interest against the threat of communism. Analyzing the genesis of transition theory and its effects on the still unsettled field population in the 1940s and beyond is thus important for an appreciation both of the objectives, the mode of operations, and the relations between different actors that came to emerge during the 1950s.

During the 1930s, the study of population changes in the US was addressed to the dual goal of reducing family size in lower socio-economic classes as a means to improve family health and family welfare. A central concern was that the higher socio-economic classes had too few children and the lower socio-economic classes had too many.<sup>44</sup> Gradually, however, the researchers at the Milbank Memorial Fund came to define fertility behaviour in different terms, accentuating its broader significance for on-going debates about how to deal with the challenges of the Depression. These researchers formulated a set of concepts and theoretical tools that defined fertility behavior as an object of government in the name of both the health and economic welfare for the family, and initiated numerous research projects that explored how fertility rates were related to a host of broader socio-economic and health related problems at the time.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 1. See also Caldwell, John and Pat Caldwell (1986) *Limiting Population Growth and the Ford Foundation Contribution*. London: Frances Pinter; McCann, Carolyn (1994) *Birth Control Politics in America, 1916–1945*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; Reed, James (1978) *From Private Vice to Public Virtue. The Birth Control Movement and American Society Since 1830*. New York: Basic Books; Kevles, Daniel (1985) *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*. New York: Knopf.

<sup>44</sup> See the discussion of the role of public health and eugenics in the fusion of a health rationale with an economic rationale for fertility regulation in Reed, James (1978) op. cit. p. 212; and Lorimer, Frank and Frederick Osborn (1934) *Dynamics of Population: Social and Biological Significance of the Changing Birth Rates in the United States*. NY: Macmillan. p. 339.

<sup>45</sup> In 1938, Harvard economist Alvin Hansen devoted his presidential address to the American Economic Association to the stagnation of the US economy, singling out the decline in population growth as a central cause of what he termed "secular stagnation". Population decline reduced the demand for housing and furnishings – which according to Hansen was central in triggering capital formation and economic growth. Hansen was a follower of Keynes, and the latter also linked the depression to population decline via the conception of shortage of demand. See Hansen, Alvin (1939) "Economic Progress and Declining Population Growth", *The American Economic Review*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 1–15. Against this background, it is all the more interesting to see that the students of population change and fertility behavior identified reduced and consciously planned births as economically beneficial. This suggests that it was precisely the family unit as the central reference point that made possible the identification of an economic rationale for fertility control. See Reed, James (1978) *From Private Vice to Public Virtue. The Birth Control Movement and American Society Since 1830*. NY: Basic Books. pp. 208–209.

A new set of practical-political concerns about post-war planning emerged during WWII to change the focus of American demographers from the national to the international setting. This was to transform the interpretation and analysis of fertility behavior, as it became linked to the problem of “modernization” rather than to the health and economic welfare of the family unit at the domestic level. During the 1940s, both the League of Nations’ Transit Department, housed at Princeton University, and the US State Department commissioned studies on demographic characteristics of different regions as a basis, respectively, for post-war reconstruction and the formulation of US foreign policy. In this context, the same group of demographers at the Milbank Memorial Fund and at the Office of Population Research at Princeton University that had defined fertility behavior as something to regulate in the name of the health and welfare of the family within the US came to re-interpret it in light of new challenges. In so doing, they came to establish a very different interpretation of the meaning and socio-political significance of fertility behavior through the so called theory of demographic transition.

While proto-formulations of a theory of demographic transition existed before the 1940s, it did not resonate either in social scientific or policy circles.<sup>46</sup> Formulated during the 1940s, this theoretical formulation represented the essentials of a larger body of knowledge about the causal mechanisms of population change in relation to socio-economic development that found its most comprehensive and policy-relevant expression in the writings of Frank Notestein, then head of the Office of Population Research at Princeton University (OPR).<sup>47</sup> It is a testament to the central role of *international* or foreign policy considerations shaping the formulation of the theory of the demographic transition that it was first presented at a conference for policy planners and administrators of the envisioned Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations in 1943.<sup>48</sup> Referring to global population growth since the seventeenth century, Notestein noted that “the whole process of modernization in Europe and Europe overseas (colonies) brought rising levels of living, new controls over disease, and reduced mortality.”<sup>49</sup> While modernization quickly reduced mortality, however, its effects on

---

46 See Szreter, Simon (1993) “The Idea of Demographic Transition and the Study of Fertility Change”, *Population and Development Review*, vol. 34, no. 4, pp. 659–701; Caldwell, John and Pat Caldwell (1986) *Limiting Population Growth and the Ford Foundation Contribution*. London: Frances Pinter. p. 15.

47 The empirical material for Notestein’s formulation came from numerous studies performed at the OPR and commissioned by the Demographic Committee of the League of Nations and by the The Division of Geography and Cartography of the US State Department. See Notestein, Frank (1971) “Reminiscences: The Role of Foundations, The Population Association of America, Princeton University and the United Nations in Fostering American Interest in Population Problems”, *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 4 part 2, pp. 67–85.

48 Notestein, F. W. (1945) “Population—The Long View” in Schultz, Theodore W. (ed.) (1945) *Food For The World*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. pp. 36–57.

49 Notestein, F. W. (1945) *ibid.* See also Notestein, Frank. W. (1944) “Problems of Policy in Relation to Areas of Heavy Population Pressure”, *Milbank Memorial Quarterly* vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 424–44.

fertility was much slower.<sup>50</sup> The process of modernization thus necessarily produces, transition theory postulated, high population growth rates in the "transitional" period when mortality has declined but when fertility has yet to change in response to the process of modernization.<sup>51</sup>

### Constructing a governing object, institutionalizing a field

As I discuss in more detail below, transition theory constituted a framework that defined the object of governance of the emerging field of population, specifying why it was important (to generate economic development), indicating areas for more research (on the individual level causes of fertility decisions) and technological development (contraceptives). Transition theory, I submit, performed a "constitutive" role in simultaneously defining the object of governance (the "task" in Abbott's sense) and the very character or identify of the field of population. That is: precisely because it defined a rationale for population control and suggested a direction for future research on how to advance this goal, it also accorded specific roles to different types of actors and erected boundaries with other, adjacent fields, such as health. This theoretical framework gave an account that enabled American demographers – very much influenced by then-prevailing ideas about social engineering and a commitment to advance US values abroad – to initiate a global campaign aimed at establishing population control efforts in the developing world as a means to facilitate economic growth. It is a mistake, however, to attribute the "organizing power" of transition theory (as a form of symbolic capital) on the institutionalization of the field merely to its cognitive structure and degree of fit with a broad sense of American interests. Notestein and other demographers were funded and supported by a network of well-connected and wealthy individuals, who provided crucial support for the large-scale investment in further research and institution building both in the US and globally.

Transition theory effectively transformed fertility behavior from a national phenomenon to be studied according to socio-economic class, to a global and historical phenomenon categorized by degree of "development" at the national level. Crucially, it also effectuated a break with the broad view of public health prevailing in earlier, nationally oriented studies in that it identified a potential for high population growth rates in colonial areas in part *because* colonial rulers had invested heavily in public health-based interventions

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 40.

<sup>51</sup> Davis, Kingsley (1944) "Demographic Fact and Policy in India" Demographic Studies of Selected Areas of High Population Growth. Proceedings of the Round Table on Population Problems, Twenty Second Annual Conference of the Milbank Memorial Fund, April 12–13, 1944. New York: Milbank Memorial Fund. pp. 35–57, pp. 42–43.

to control epidemics, thus further increasing the gap between mortality rates and fertility rates. Public health efforts were, in short, now seen as integral to the problem of the “imbalanced modernization” that generated population growth.<sup>52</sup> This was, moreover, a period in which a conception of economic growth (defined as higher per capita income) was seen as both the *engine* and ultimate *objective* of “development” or “modernization.” In this context, a significant tension emerged between the health rationale and the economic rationale for fertility regulation, with the former being marginalized as fertility regulation became linked to the goal of facilitating and supporting national level economic growth and “development”. In this way, a new representation of fertility behaviour was constructed that highlighted certain dimensions (national economic growth) while marginalizing others (individual health).

Indeed, transition theory was re-worked in significant ways during the 1940s to accommodate the increased sense of urgency on the part of population control advocates both inside and outside demographic circles. The term “demographic transition” was not only reformulated from a *theoretical* formulation to grasp a complex set of socio-economic and demographic changes to a definitive *empirical* description of a universal process.<sup>53</sup> Its conceptual structure was loosened to enable these demographers to initiate a new line of reasoning about the possibility of speeding up the transition from high to low fertility – essentially aimed at engineering the process of modernization. Notestein asserted in 1947 that “[...] there is nothing inevitable about the exact amount of time [...] involved in the demographic transition. Careful planning, particularly in the early stages, might speed up the process”<sup>54</sup> This was done because “The problem [of high population growth] is too urgent to permit us to await the results of gradual processes of urbanization, such as took place in the Western world.”<sup>55</sup> Hence, he argued in 1949 that “economic development needs to be accompanied by *explicit efforts to reduce fertility* in the world’s major industrially underdeveloped but densely settled areas.”<sup>56</sup>

This was the thinking that prevailed among demographers associated with the MMF and the OPR at Princeton, and when John D. Rockefeller III and other wealthy individuals came to increase their funding to advance the cause of population control, it was these ideas

---

52 Notestein, Frank W. (1945) op. cit. pp. 50–51. see also Davis, Kingsley (1944) op. cit. pp. 56–57. Emphasis added.

53 Szreter (1996) op. cit.

54 Notestein, Frank W. (1947) “Summary of the demographic background of problems of underdeveloped areas” Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly vol. 26. no. 3 pp. 249–255, p. 250. Quoted in Szreter (1993) op. cit. p. 671.

55 Notestein, Frank (1947) Ibid. p. 250. Quoted in Szreter, Simon (1993) ibid. p. 671.

56 Notestein, Frank W. (1950) “The reduction of Human Fertility as an Aid to Programs of Economic Development in Densely Settled Agrarian Regions” in *Modernization Programs in Relation to Human Resources and Population Problems*. Papers presented at a round table at the 1949 annual conference of the Milbank Memorial Fund, November 16-17, 1949. New York: Milbank Memorial Fund. pp. 89–100, p. 89.

that provided the framework for how to operate and organize a push to advance the cause beyond the US. In 1950, the Rockefeller Foundation published a report that followed this line of reasoning. “The problem of reducing the fertility of peasant populations has two parts, one relating to motives and the other to means”.<sup>57</sup> The report emphasized that “both (means and motives) are amenable to attack and neither has received the attention it deserves.”<sup>58</sup> Pointing to the lack of any effective and easy-to-use method of contraception, the report stressed that investment in research on the physiology of reproduction aimed at producing better means of contraception is a challenge that “could be attacked immediately in the West. We doubt that any other work offers a better opportunity for contributing to Asia’s and the world’s fundamental problems of human welfare.”<sup>59</sup> With this, another tension emerged within the knowledge constructs that were to constitute the field of population: It did not concern the goals of fertility regulation (health v economics), but the means for doing so, expressed in a tension between supplying the technological *means* for fertility regulation or seeking to change the *motivation* to regulate fertility. These two policy options pointed in opposite directions: investment in socio-economic development, education and public information to change motives (“demand-side approach”), or developing and providing new and better contraceptives (“supply-side approach”).

The “supply-side” approach prevailed, not only because it seemed to represent a relatively inexpensive and technological solution to a large scale structural problem, but also because it gave to these would-be social engineers a tool with which to address the heightened sense of urgency with “the population problem” during the 1950s. The accentuation of the “means” dimension was to form the very essence of “population” as a distinct policy field within the multilateral system, as a full scale investment in motivational change would render the “population problem” one to be solved by investment in socio-economic development geared towards changing peoples “motives” to have fewer children.

The establishment of the Population Council by John D. Rockefeller III in 1953 can be seen as a “defining moment” for the institutionalization of the field in terms defined by transition theory. In preparing for the establishment of the organization, Rockefeller had gathered a group of “wise men” that held different views on the nature of “population problem”. There was general agreement that there was a “population problem”, but no agreement about the *specific* areas to be addressed in order to lower global population growth.

---

57 Balfour, Marshall, Roger F. Evans, Frank Notestein and Irene Tauber (1950) Public Health and Demography in the Far East: Report of a Survey Trip September 13–December 13, 1948. New York: The Rockefeller Foundation. p. 118.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid. p. 120.

Why some were concerned with the Malthusian problem and thus emphasized food production, energy and agricultural innovation, others were eugenicists. How, then, was it that the transition framework came to guide the work of the new organization? An important reason why a focus on food production, new sources of energy, agricultural innovation etc. did not materialize as a focus for the Population Council can be found in the specific function of a philanthropic organization: Its rationale resides partly in the identification of fields where little is done by other organizations – governmental or not – thus making possible an identifiable contribution to society. Both the Rockefeller Foundation and the federal government were already involved in efforts to identify new sources of energy and better technology to increase the efficiency of food production in the developing world.<sup>60</sup>

More importantly, however, was that Frank Notestein had already established himself as the central figure from which Rockefeller sought advice. Notestein had served as a principal resource person for Rockefeller's aide in his work of identifying the key persons to be invited to the conference.<sup>61</sup> According to a memo from a meeting between Rockefeller and his aides it was decided that one should "...obtain from Notestein individually any ideas that he might have that developed at the conference as to the areas of opportunity of particular significance."<sup>62</sup> Later, it was decided that the work of the new organization should, indeed, be organized in terms already suggested in 1948 by Notestein, Irene Tauber and others following a "Survey Trip" to Asia about how to address the population problem.<sup>63</sup> The recommendations of the Survey-trip pointed clearly to two fields of research relevant to the aim of reducing population growth: "Motives for the Reduction of Fertility", and "Means for the Reduction of Fertility". These two aspects of fertility behavior – its means of regulation and its motivational basis – had already been established as the central focus of debate and analysis among those demographers and sociologists who met regularly at the Milbank Memorial Fund's Annual Conferences. Thus, the Population Council – at its first Board meeting in April 1953 – identified its focus as threefold: the improvement and development of contraceptives, field testing of contraceptive methods, and studies in the psychology of acceptance in various areas. Over and beyond the focus on developing means to control fertility, and studying the problems related to motivation in terms of the "psychology of

---

<sup>60</sup> Memorandum from McLean, Donald, June 23, 1952 "Miscellaneous Notes on Population Conference" 1952. Box 81, Folder 674.

<sup>61</sup> Several others were consulted, such as Thomas Parran, former Surgeon General of the US Public Health Service, and Lewis Strauss of the Rockefeller Brother's Fund, but it was Notestein who seems to have carried most weight in determining which issues were to be addressed and what individuals should be invited. Memorandum from McLean January 29, 1952, Record of Meeting January 20, 1952 with Rockefeller, McLean, Strauss, Notestein and Parran. p.1, Box 81, Folder 674.

<sup>62</sup> Memo from McLean, Donald, June 23, 1952, Box 81, Folder 674.

<sup>63</sup> Memo from McLean, Donald, July 28, 1952, Box 81, Folder 674.

acceptance”, the Population Council was to look “...toward the practical application of knowledge for the control of the size and quality of human population in relation to total physical and cultural resources available in various areas and in the world as a whole.”<sup>64</sup> When the Population Council started its actual operations in September of 1953, it was established with two divisions that reflected this framework: the Demographic Division, and the Medical Division. The latter was to develop and test new contraceptives, whereas the former was to focus on the micro-level motivational and attitudinal aspects of fertility behavior, and on the macro-level relation between national population growth rates and economic development.

When the Population Council was established in 1953, therefore, it organized its work in two divisions, as suggested in Notestein and Tauber’s report from their trip: the Demographic Division was to continue the study of population changes and its effects on processes of development, while the Medical Division was to develop contraceptive methods suitable to be delivered through family planning programs. How the Population Council operated is here crucial, as it came, with the Ford Foundation, to be the principal architects and sources of funding for fellowship programs, international conferences, and the establishment of research centers and policy-oriented journals. When the US Government began to fund family planning programs in the late 1960s, and when the various multilateral agencies became involved in similar efforts, the Ford Foundation and the Population Council, together with other philanthropic and academic institutions, had *already* institutionalized, “settled” the field.

### Going global

The Population Council, together with the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation, produced a viable contraceptive technology, the Intra-Uterine Device (IUD), and had institutionalized the organizational form of population policy; that of family planning programs aimed at providing contraceptive advice and technology. In 1965, globally available funds for efforts to reduce population growth were provided primarily by the Ford Foundation (\$10.7 million), the Population Council (\$2.3 million) the Rockefeller Foundation (\$3.2 million), the US Agency for International Development (AID) (\$2.3 million) and the IPPF (\$0.9 million). It was to be 1968 before a governmental source, the USAID, was to surpass these non-governmental sources of funding. This is in itself a testament to the centrality of

---

<sup>64</sup> “Agenda for Discussion of Program”, April 20, 1953. Rockefeller Family Archives, JDR III papers, Series 1, Subseries 5, Box 81, Folder 675.

these organizations in establishing and shaping this policy-field.<sup>65</sup> The Council was, moreover, involved in establishing or funding specialized research programs in family planning and related fields at the University of Chicago, Columbia University, University of Michigan, University of Pennsylvania, Boston University, Princeton University, Cornell University, the University of Minnesota, and Dartmouth College.<sup>66</sup> This was in keeping with what had been the rationale or the very establishment of the Population Council, as set out in the first five-year program of its Demographic Division:

[the] intelligent resolution of the world's population problems requires the interests and initiative of trained people in the countries concerned, especially in underdeveloped areas. The Council has therefore worked to develop a small body of persons in important countries who can provide authoritative guidance on population problems to both the governments and the public, in their own language and in terms of their own values.<sup>67</sup>

Starting in 1953, the Population Council established a fellowship program for the study of demography or a related topic at US universities. By 1958, 69 fellowships had been awarded to individuals from 21 countries. During the 1950s, nearly half of these fellows attended Frank Notestein's course on the demographic transition, which he gave at the Office of Population Research at Princeton.<sup>68</sup> By 1961, 140 fellowships had been granted<sup>69</sup>, and, by 1968, the Population Council had awarded no less than 529 fellowships, 404 of which to individuals from the developing world.<sup>70</sup>

At the institutional level, the Population Council was involved in establishing and funding the UN's regional demographic research and training centers in Bombay (1957), Santiago (1958), and Cairo (1963).<sup>71</sup> Writing in 1961, Notestein – then President of the Population Council – could note to an official at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund that the Population Council was now the “principal source of technical assistance” in the field of population policy internationally.<sup>72</sup> The governments of both India and Pakistan – the first governments in the developing world to establish family planning programs – requested

---

<sup>65</sup> Harkavy, Oscar, Lyle Saunders and Anna L. Southam (1968) “An Overview of the Ford Foundation's Strategy for Population Work” *Demography*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 541–552, p. 545. See fig. 3. In 1968, the USAID provided an estimated \$35 million. *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> See Critchlow, Donald T. (1999) *op. cit.* p. 240. Note 26.

<sup>67</sup> The Population Council (1958) “Present Activities and Future Needs of the Demographic Division” *Five Year Program of the Population Council*. p. 1. , RAC: Record Group 5, Series 1- OMR Files, Box 81, Folder 679.

<sup>68</sup> Caldwell, John and Caldwell, Pat (1986) *op. cit.* p. 12.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from Frank W. Notestein to Dana Creel, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Sept. 22, 1961. RAC, IV3B4.2 Box 4, “Demographic Division 1957–1966”, Folder 41.

<sup>70</sup> Notestein, Frank W. (1968) “The Population Council and the Demographic Crisis of the Less Developed World” *Demography* vol. 5, Issue 2, Progress and Problems of Fertility around the World. pp. 553–560, p. 554.

<sup>71</sup> Critchlow, Donald T. (1999) *Op. cit.* p. 25.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

assistance from the Population Council in formulating and organizing their population policies. In 1955, Frank Notestein and Leona Baumgartner went to India. In 1959, the Population Council and the Ford Foundation provided similar assistance to Pakistan. Caldwell and Caldwell note, as an example, the establishment of national population policy in Ghana: “[its establishment] depended at every stage on committees, reports and calculations made by persons associated as faculty, students or both with the demography program at the University of Ghana, which had links with the London School of Economics and which was funded by the Population Council”<sup>73</sup> The Population Council moreover served as key advisor to the governments of Taiwan, South Korea, Turkey, Tunisia, Thailand, Kenya and Pakistan when these established national population policies in the 1960s.<sup>74</sup>

Almost without exception, these fellowship holders studied at American universities with specialized population research centers established with funding from the Population Council, the Ford Foundation or the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1963, the Council established a new division, the Technical Assistance Division, in response to the high demand from developing countries to provide expertise and knowledge in establishing and organizing family planning programs.<sup>75</sup> Many of the research centers established at different universities themselves began to provide technical assistance to developing countries. The population research centers at the universities of Michigan, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, North Carolina, Chicago and Pittsburgh were all involved directly in providing technical assistance, in giving courses and seconding personnel to help establish population programs in the developing world.<sup>76</sup> The involvement of US universities in the formulation and execution of population policies was transmitted to Asia. For example, in 1972, 20 universities from Asia met in Jogjakarta, Indonesia, “to discuss the role that universities *should* play in formulating and carrying out national population policies”<sup>77</sup>

Even as late as 1960, population growth and fertility regulation were considered so controversial that no inter-governmental organization provided any form of technical assistance to, much less funding for, efforts to reduce population growth. Through a knowledge-based mode of political agency, this group of experts and population professionals came, by virtue of the body of knowledge upon which they operated, to define the basic

---

<sup>73</sup> Caldwell John and Pat Caldwell (1986) op. cit. p. 141. See also their description, on page 142, of similar examples from Taiwan, the Philippines, Turkey and Thailand.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 43

<sup>75</sup> Folder 2366, IV3B4.6 Box 128 “Population Subject File” Rockefeller Archive Center. (RAC).

<sup>76</sup> Minutes, meeting at the Population Council October 5–7, 1965. p. 1. Folder 2364, Box 128, IVB4.6 “Population Subject File”. RAC.

<sup>77</sup> Demeny, Paul (1972) “Asian Universities and Population Policy”, *Studies in Family Planning* vol. 3, no. 10, pp. 249–50, p. 249. Emphasis added.

parameters of the field of population *before* it was politically validated by governments. Thus, when the UN established its Trust Fund for Population Activities (later UNFPA) in 1969, and when UNESCO, UNICEF, FAO and WHO became involved in providing funds and technical assistance, the content and boundaries of the field of population had already been defined. This feature of the formation of the field of population is of central importance, as it helps account for the structure and logic of the field in terms of its knowledge-driven character and the attendant position and symbolic resources of the Population Council and other academic institutions in setting the terms for political debates about population policy.

Below, I turn to a more detailed exploration of the logic of the field of population since its establishment in the late 1960s and to the mid 1990s. It will necessary be with a broad brush, but I show how the future trajectory of the field was thoroughly shaped by the structured set of positions that emerged as a consequence of the institutionalization of the field in the image of transition theory.

#### The boundary of the field and the hierarchy of professional groups

Why did not “population” emerge as a sub-field within the already established efforts to promote health or, more generally, “development”? The answer is found in the structure of transition theory: Because population growth was assumed to usurp and render futile all other efforts to promote development, it could not be addressed through development projects themselves aimed at fostering motivational change. The identification of a “supply-oriented” approach privileging the delivery of contraceptive technology through family planning programs effectively established “population” as a separate, single purpose policy field distinct from that of “development”. More importantly, transition theory defined fertility regulation, and population control, as an instrument of economic policy and gave little consideration to health aspects. This helps explain not only the boundaries and tensions between “health” and “population” since the establishment of population control policies, but also the hierarchy between demographers and health professionals within the field of population. The subordination of health to economics that had emerged with transition theory was to shape access to symbolic resources between different professions and expert groups, where medical doctors, public health experts and midwives (typically the staff of family planning clinics) had few resources with which to challenge the goals and modes of operation of these very programs as part of the field of population.<sup>78</sup>

---

78 For a discussion of this feature of population policy, see Whitney, Vincent Heath (1976) “Population Planning in Asia in the 1970s”, *Population Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 337–351,

In fact, it was precisely the potential for health concerns to override the concern with the negative effects of population control on economic development that made advocates of population control wary of the prospects of having family planning programs run and administered by Ministries of Health.<sup>79</sup> While public health professionals and obstetricians and gynecologists were readily involved in the running of family planning programs in the developing world, the terms of policy debates were heavily tilted towards the hegemony of demographers emphasizing the economic rationale for fertility regulation. This structure of the field of population also implied “struggle”, however, expressed in terms of ongoing efforts by health experts to invoke arguments grounded in a commitment to health to challenge the primacy of economic considerations in family planning programs. Writing in 1976, Finkle and Crane reflected on this tension within the field of population as they explored the role of the WHO in population policy:

The role of health organizations in making and carrying out population policy has provoked sharp controversy among population specialists [...] The controversy begins with the question of whether birth control information and services should be delivered in conjunction with health services or separately from them. WHO [...] hold the position that regardless of the demographic aims of family planning programs, these programs should be integrated as closely as possible with health services. Others, including many population specialists, take the view that fertility limitation is too urgent a task to leave to health organizations [...]<sup>80</sup>

It was the shadow of transition theory that gave demographers, rather than health experts, the position, and the attendant symbolic resources, with which to authoritatively define economic goals as superior to those pertaining to health. For example, efforts by the WHO to channel investments in population control efforts into the field of health were unsuccessful despite the general authority of health experts, and the WHO, in matters relating to health. Director-General of the WHO M.G. Candau lamented at the 19<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly in 1966 that “Countries are deviating funds from public health in order to carry out family planning. ... I think we should continue to fight in the World Health Organization for improvement of health

---

79 Finkle, Jason L. and Barbara B. Crane (1976) “The World Health Organization and the Population Issue: Organizational Values in the United Nations”, *Population and Development Review*, vol. 2, no.3/4, pp. 367–393

80 Finkle, Jason L. and Barbara B. Crane (1976) *op. Cit.*, p. 368.

services and not for deviation of funds to other types of services.<sup>81</sup> It is a testament to the subordination effectuated by the logic of the field, however, that health professionals were still central actors within the field of population as they were charged with the task of administrating and running family planning programs. The 19<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly reflected this ambiguous position as it stated that the WHO could “give technical advice, upon request, in the development of activities in family planning, *as part of an organized health service, without impairing its normal preventive and curative functions.*”<sup>82</sup>

The contestation of health experts against the hegemonic position of demographers and economic considerations behind family planning did result, however, in a reform-oriented exploration of how the *efficacy* of family planning programs could be increased *if* they became more sensitive to the immediate health concerns and needs of individuals, especially women.<sup>83</sup> Reviewing the state of affairs in 1979, Watson et al. noted, for example, that “Prevention of [high risk] pregnancies has an impact, in many instances substantial, by lowering rates of fertility and population growth and improving health through the reduction of mortality and morbidity associated [...] with such pregnancies.”<sup>84</sup> As I discuss in more detail below, these developments in knowledge production was to provide women’s health advocates symbolic resources in their efforts to challenge existing population policy in the 1990s.

### Political mobilization and the organization of knowledge production

The establishment of family planning programs were predicated on the possibility that targeted interventions aimed at disseminating information about, and services for, fertility regulation, could override culturally established mores and practices relating to reproduction. But the belief in this causal relation did not assume a totalizing and doxic character. Rather, fertility behavior – once liberated from its structural explanation in the original version of transition theory – become identified as an object of regulation, the specifics of which were subject to intensive research. Because of the tight inter-lock between knowledge production

---

81 Candau, M. G. (1966) “Programme Activities in the Health Aspects of World Population Which Might be Developed by WHO”, remarks to the 19th World Health Assembly, Committee on Programme and Budget. Geneva, Switzerland. May 18, 1966. IRD/OIH/PHS, June 1966. p. 2.

82 World Health Assembly Resolution 19.43, May 1966. Quoted in Finkle, Jason and Barbara Crane (1976) op.cit p. 375, note 22.

83 The WHO published a report in conjunction with the Bucharest Conference in 1974 in which such a definition of health was advanced. It emphasized that health concerns physical, mental and social well-being. WHO/UN (1975) “Health and Family Planning”, *The Population Debate: Dimensions and Perspectives*. New York: Papers of the World Population Conference, vol. 2, 1975, pp. 461–479.

84 Watson, Walter, Allan Rosenfield, Mechai Viravaidya and Krasae Chanawongse (1979) “Health, Population and Nutrition; Interrelations, Problems and Possible Solutions”, in Hauser, Phillip M. (ed.) (1979) *World Population and Development: Challenges and Prospects*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press. pp. 145–173, p. 150.

and policy debate within the field, the tension between “means” and “motives” came to be expressed in on-going discussions about ways to improve the efficacy of family planning programs. This was most clearly expressed in the fact that a sub-discipline of “family planning studies” emerged within the field of population studies to address this particular issue.<sup>85</sup> In this way, the motivational aspect of fertility regulation was present in on-going policy discussions, but it was accorded a marginal position by virtue of the fact that they were addressed to the question of how to increase the efficacy of family planning programs by supplementing them with targeted efforts to increase the “demand” for their services. The genesis of the study of family planning programs is significant as it brings out how the symbolic power of transition theory shaped not only the hierarchy of professional groups, the goal and the boundaries of the field, but also the focus and organization of knowledge production within it.

The so-called Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) studies were focused on measuring the size of the “unmet need” for family planning services in the developing world. These studies were thus to provide the grounds for persuading reluctant political leaders by reference to the demands of its citizens, and also for assessing the size of the “market” for family planning programs and services.<sup>86</sup> These studies also addressed, however, the efficacy of family planning programs.<sup>87</sup> In fact, as early as 1967 Kingsley Davis launched a devastating critique of the belief that simply providing contraceptives – however safe, effective and user-friendly – would substantially reduce fertility rates in the developing world.<sup>88</sup> The debate triggered by Davis’ article accentuated the motive–means tension and served to increase the focus on ways to increase the efficacy of family planning programs inside the field.

However, and this is a key point, the debate triggered by Davis’ criticism of family planning programs did *not* mobilize groups outside the immediate circles of professionals.

---

85 This new field of research was institutionalized through the establishment (in 1964 and 1968, respectively) of two journals: *Studies in Family Planning*, published by the Population Council, and *Family Planning Perspectives*, published by the Alan Guttmacher Institute. In 1975, the latter institute established *International Family Planning Perspectives*.

86 For other references and analyses of the central role of the KAP studies in providing the grounds for action programs, see Casterline, John B. and Steve Sinding (2000) “Unmet Need for Family Planning in Developing Countries and Implications for Population Policy” *Population and Development Review*, vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 691–723; Warwick, Donald P. (1983) “The KAP-survey: Dictates of mission versus demand of science” in Bulmer, Martin and Donald P. Warwick (eds.) (1983) *Social Research in Developing Countries: Surveys and Censuses in the Third World*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons, pp. 349–363; Warwick, Donald P. (1994) “Politics of Research on Fertility Control”, *Population and Development Review*, vol. 20, Issue Supplement, pp. 179–93; Stycos, Mayone J. (1964) “Survey Research and Population Control in Latin America”, *Public Opinion Quarterly* vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 367–372; Mauldin, W. Parker (1965) “Fertility Studies: Knowledge, Attitude, Practice”, *Studies in Family Planning*, vol. 1, no. 7, pp. 1–10.

87 Donaldson, Peter J. and Charles B. Keely (1988) “Population and Family Planning: An International Perspective”, *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 20, no. 6, pp. 307–311+ 320, p. 309.

88 Davis, Kingsley (1967) “Population Policies: Will Current Programs Succeed?” *Science*, vol. 158, no. 10 (November), pp. 730–739.

The family planning approach to population control remained firmly in place, and was adopted by an increasing number of developing countries in this period.<sup>89</sup> One plausible interpretation of this development is that because of the firmly institutionalized standards of what constitute proper population policy – family planning programs – this criticism of its basic assumptions resulted in a more concerted effort to render family planning programs more effective by identifying how best to heighten awareness, information and use. The positions within the field, and the logic of its operations, were such that both the production of knowledge, the focus of policy debates, and the reception of new theories, facts and policy proposals were heavily structured by the positions and symbolic resources of a few key institutions.

Already in the late 1960s, for example, there had emerged a line of theorizing within development economics that challenged the empirical foundation for the privileging of an economic rationale for population control. In 1967, in two separate publications, economists Kuznets and Easterlin argued that the claim about a strong causal relation between population growth and economic growth was unfounded.<sup>90</sup> Such criticism was excluded from serious consideration and debate within the field, however. Paul Demeny lamented this feature of the relation between social scientific research and population policy change as the “population industry” took command over social scientific research:

The industry, in effect, has sought to assign to social science research on population matters the *role of handmaiden in family planning programs*. Since the late 1960s, the population industry can claim increasing success in attaining this goal. Its approach towards social science eventually solidified into a predictable pattern. Resource allocation for social science work as mandated by the large funding agencies puts highest priority emphasis on “program evaluation”, or what in time came to be called [...] “operations research.”<sup>91</sup>

In 1974, however, the stage was set for the World Population Conference in Bucharest. It was anticipated as a venue for strengthening population control programs in the developing

---

89 Blake, Judith (1965) “Demographic Science and the Redirection of Population Policy”, in Sheps, Mindel C. and Jeanne Clare Ridley (eds) (1965) *Public Health and Population Change*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 41–69, p. 41.

90 Kuznets, Simon (1967) “Population and Economic Growth”, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 111, pp. 170–193; Easterlin, Richard A. (1967) “Effects of Population Growth on the Economic Development of Developing Countries” in Durand, J.D (ed) (1967) *World Population, Special Issue, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 369. pp. 98–108.

91 Demeny, Paul (1988) “Social Science and Population Policy”, *Population and Development Review*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 451–479. p. 466.

world.<sup>92</sup> Instead, the Bucharest Conference introduced a split between governments from the developing world and from the West over the question of whether means or motives formed the best policy-approach to population control. While Western governments advocated population control through family planning programs, most developing countries introduced an argument – since long marginalized within the field – that threatened to undermine the very unity of and rationale for a separate policy field of population: Successful curbing of population growth, they argued, required large-scale investment in economic development that would alter the socio-economic and cultural conditions that fostered high fertility rates. In short, they challenged the hierarchy of “means” over “motives”. This position was epitomized by the Indian Minister of Health, Dr. Karan Singh, who claimed that “Development is the best contraceptive”.<sup>93</sup>

By invoking the already existing tension and debate about motives and means in a space whose political logic was very different from that found in the policy-oriented journal and conferences through which the field evolved, the developing countries effectively transformed what had long been a question about policy efficacy into a question about the very rationale of a separate policy field of population. Invoking a set of symbolic resources accruing from normatively grounded calls for a re-distribution of wealth in the international system, including calls for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), governments from the developing world introduced a new dimension to the field of population, thereby increasing the resources for those that called for a more sustained focus on addressing motivational aspects. The argument that “Development is the best contraceptive” had, as I show below, important repercussions for the politics of population policy in the years that followed, precisely because it made the exploration of the causal significance of motivational change and of the provision of contraceptives a question of the underlying *normative and political* commitments of a “supply-side” approach.

However, the immediate reaction to the Bucharest Conference of such organization as the Population Council brings out a key point concerning the self-understanding and view of those actors and institutions that dominated the field. Reflecting on the effects of bringing the population problem to an inter-governmental conference such as that at Bucharest, the 1974

---

92 All prior international conferences on population had been held before many developing countries had much experience with national population policies. Both the 1954 Rome conference and the 1965 Belgrade conference were non-governmental, organized by the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP). Moreover, these were organized before much experience had been gained about population policies.

93 For a review of the evolution of these debates, see Sinding, Steve (2000) “The Great Population Debates: How Relevant are they for the 21st Century?”, *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 90, no. 12, pp. 1841–1845. See also Hodgson, Dennis (1988) *op. cit.*

Annual Report of the Population Council observes that the political mobilization that such gatherings generate represents a problem. Once governments get involved in such debates, the report notes, the issue inevitably becomes “politicized”.<sup>94</sup> The President of the Population Council, noted: “To a large extent, the debate at Bucharest was dominated by a Third World definition of the ‘problem’ and a Third World designation of the ‘solution’. Through it all, the demographic trends go on, and so does the work of this organization.”<sup>95</sup>

The politicization of the tension between means and motives that occurred at the Bucharest Conference did not result in policy change, in large because of the resistance of the key actors within the field itself. But it did result in a stronger emphasis on exploring the limits of relying solely on family planning programs. It resulted, *inter alia*, in a change of leadership at the Population Council. In introducing George Zeidenstein as the new president, John D. Rockefeller III (serving as Chairman of the Board) underlined his commitment to a re-orientation of population policy: “Family planning will remain the bulwark of most population programs in most countries,” but emphasized that “We know much more clearly than before that any significant lowering of birth rates cannot be achieved by technology or propaganda or force.” A careful reading of the Annual Reports of the Population Council before and after the Bucharest Conference, reveal a distinct shift towards a focus on the exploration of the motivational aspects of fertility regulation, and also on the role and concerns of women.<sup>96</sup>

Indeed, during the course of the 1980s, the Population Council deliberately hired more female researchers – such as Judith Bruce and Beverly Winnikoff – which were to play a central role in introducing a focus on both the role, concerns and rights of women and on the health aspects of reproduction as goals in their own right within family planning programs. Here, then, we see how symbolic resources accruing from outside the field (women’s rights, global inequality etc) were used to loosen the hold of the orthodoxy that had constituted the field. The continual exploration of the efficacy of family planning programs gradually opened the door for more critical studies of how to render existing programs more effective, pointing towards the motivational aspects of fertility regulation and in this context, the perceptions and concerns of women.

---

94 Population Council (1974) Annual Report 1974. New York: Population Council.

95 *Ibid.* p. 21. See also p. 24.

96 Population Council (1976) Annual Report 1976. New York: The Population Council, p. 19. See, also Wolfson, Margaret (1983), and Sinding, Steve (2000) *op. cit*

### Contestation, alliances, policy change

The analysis above has sought to chart the boundaries of the field, the relation between different groups, and the specific logic of the field in terms of its knowledge-driven character. These features help explain *policy stability* in the face of mounting criticism both from inside and outside the field. By way of concluding the case study I want briefly to show how the preceding analysis provides a crucial element in the account of the *policy change* that occurred in population policy in the 1990s. Health professionals, and, institutionally, the WHO, had since long sought to introduce, as noted above, a clearer focus on the health of individuals in population debates. The WHO, for example, established research programs aimed at establishing maternal health as an end in its own right related to reproduction. Moreover, as a result of the official criticism by many developing countries at the 1974 Bucharest Conference, family planning research had extended beyond service delivery and towards motivational aspects. Thus, by the mid- to late 1980s, new bodies of knowledge had been produced at the “margins” of the field, which pointed to a health rationale for fertility regulation and to a much stronger role for motivational concerns. It was in this context that women’s groups began to assert themselves ever more forcefully within the field of population. Women’s groups had been accorded a marginal position within the highly professionalized field of population. Women in the developing world were accorded importance primarily as conveyers of empirical data from which to seek to improve the efficacy of family planning programs. The logic of the field was such that authority was derived from knowledge-production, not from advocacy based on individual needs, concerns and rights.

However, the period between the formative phase of the field of population and the mid- to late 1980s witnessed broader political-institutional changes that were to accord a much higher premium on the needs, preferences and rights of the *subjects* of governmental efforts. Modernization theory lost its sway over development-policy, and rational, knowledge-based planning and social engineering had been heavily conditioned by the emergence of human rights norms as something of a normative master-discourse, according the individuals targeted by family planning programs access to a set of normatively grounded symbolic resources with which to challenge the constitutive norms and understandings within the field of population.<sup>97</sup> In lieu of the previously authoritative role of the social sciences in providing the grounds for policy-formation had emerged a view in which social scientific knowledge

---

97 For a more in-depth discussion of this dimension, see Sending, Ole Jacob and Iver B. Neumann “Governance to Governmentality: Analyzing States, NGOs, and Power” *International Studies Quarterly* (Forthcoming)

was to be *mediated, conditioned and rendered useful by political subjects endowed with rights*. As Donald Critchlow observes, “the mobilization of grassroots groups meant that power shifted from elite interests, which had played a critical role in the shaping family planning programs policy in the first three decades following the Second World War, to social movements organized at the community level.”<sup>98</sup> No longer could the research institutes, the philanthropic foundations and national and international bureaucratic institutions singularly define authoritative interpretations and explanations of the most effective and appropriate ways to govern fertility behavior.

These normatively grounded symbolic resources enabled women’s health and rights advocates to challenge much more forcefully than before both the objectives and contents of family planning programs. They developed a set of arguments for what became called a “reproductive health and rights approach”, allying with health professionals and with significant group of family planning researchers that had begun to explore the relevance of individual health aspects of reproduction for the efficacy of family planning program. In linking up with professional groups inside the field of population, these women’s health advocates gained access to symbolic resources in the form of new research that established their calls for a new approach on a footing that also provided a level of cognitive authority inside the field. Two such bodies of knowledge were important.

First, the WHO’s Special Programme in Human Reproduction (HRP) had by the early 1990s developed a sociologically oriented concept of human reproduction. Specifying the “cornerstones of reproductive health”, Jose Barzelatto had noted in the special biennial report of the HRP for 1986–87 that it included family planning, maternal care, infant and child care and control of sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>99</sup> Throughout the 1980s, especially maternal health care was becoming increasingly important within the context of the organization and focus of family planning. Two major international conferences were held to discuss these issues: the “International Safe Motherhood Conference” held in Nairobi in February 1987 convened by the UNFPA and the WHO, and the “Better Health for Women and Children through Family Planning”, also in Nairobi, in October 1987 convened by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), the Population Council, UNICEF, UNFPA, the World Bank and the WHO. Both conferences arrived at a consensus about the centrality of including

---

98 Critchlow, Donald T. (1999) op. cit. p. 185.

99 Barzelatto, Jose (1988) “Continuity and Change”, in Diczfalusy, E., P.D. Griffin and J. Khanna (eds.) (1988) *Research in Human Reproduction. Biennial Report of 1986–1987*, WHO Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction. Geneva: WHO, pp. 11–16, p. 12.

a stronger focus on health aspects of reproduction within family planning programs, and of addressing, in particular, the special health-risks and status of women.<sup>100</sup>

Second, the re-orientation of research at the Population Council had resulted in the hiring of new researchers, many of whom were women, who began to insert new perspectives in the practice of family planning. Introducing the concept of “quality of care”, Judith Bruce explicitly seeks to combine and integrate a commitment to individual health and rights with a commitment to fertility reduction, asserting:

Improvements in the quality of services will result in a larger, more committed clientele of satisfied contraceptive users. Over the long term, this expanded base of well-served individuals will translate into higher contraceptive prevalence and, ultimately, reductions in fertility.<sup>101</sup>

This was important, Bruce argued, because “Despite technological advances, adoption of birth planning techniques is still a cultural process, and people’s behavior is the critical link in their effectiveness.”<sup>102</sup> This critique formed a central element in the formulation of what came to be called the “quality of care”, and which came to form an integral part of, and central argument for, a reproductive health and rights approach. Bruce emphasized that the analytical framework presented was geared towards “assessing quality from the client’s perspective”, and argued that this made sense not only from the perspective of the rights and concerns of the individual user, but also from the demographic perspective of reducing fertility rates.<sup>103</sup>

Together with the Population Council, the International Women’s Health Coalition (IWHC) organized in 1986 one of the first meetings that explicitly brought the concept of “quality of care” to bear on the priorities of contraceptive development and family planning programs. The meeting sought to encourage a dialogue between women’s health advocates and the “population establishment” for the purpose of introducing a women’s health issues in the field of population, using the Population Council – by now staffed with several

---

100 Fathalla, M. F. and T. Varagunam (1988) “Highlights of the Biennium”, in Diczfalusy, E., P.D. Griffin and J. Khanna (eds.) (1988) *Research in Human Reproduction. Biennial Report of 1986–1987*, WHO Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction. Geneva: WHO, ch. 2, p. 17.

101 Bruce, Judith (1990) “Fundamental Elements of the Quality of Care: A Simple Framework”, *Studies in Family Planning*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 61–91, p. 61.

102 Bruce, Judith (1980) “Implementing the User’s Perspective”, *Studies in Family Planning*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 29–34, p. 30.

103 Bruce, Judith (1990) *op. cit.* p. 61.

researchers sympathetic to such views – as a vehicle for a reorientation of the field.<sup>104</sup> The IWHC’s key motivation was to introduce a women’s health perspective into the research on contraceptive technology. As elaborated by the Vice-President of the IWHC Adrienne Germain in a later publication, “Women’s health advocates’ ideas about fertility regulation are based on their experiences *as* women and on their experiences *with* other women”. These experiences were crystallized into three key assumptions. First, that women have the right to control not only their fertility but also their sexuality; second, that women have the ability to exercise these rights requires broader changes in women’s circumstances rather than better technology; and third, that women will make rational decisions about their fertility and sexuality if appropriate information and services are available.<sup>105</sup>

At the same time as the *concept* of reproductive health was formulated at the WHO in the mid-1980s, then, it was formulated as a *policy approach* by a the IWHC and other women’s health advocates. As visiting scholar at the Population Council and Vice President of the International Women’s Health Coalition (IWHC), Adrienne Germain aimed to transform the population policy from the inside by calling for an integration of child survival programs, maternal health efforts and family planning programs. This integration, Germain held, could serve to broaden the focus of family planning programs from the “technological fix”, focused on contraceptive delivery, to include a range of services addressing women’s health issues.<sup>106</sup> In drawing upon the lived experience, the preferences, risks, and rights of women in the developing world within a larger political context according great significance to human rights, the IWHC made use of a symbolic resource that could effectively delegitimize the expert-driven character of the field and its mode of regulating women in the developing world to serve other ends (i.e. male experts from the North developing a “technological fix” bypassing women’s health and rights to facilitate economic growth)

Together, these developments gave to women’s health advocates a set of symbolic resources with which to challenge key tenets of key positions and rules within the field, notably the goals and organization of family planning programs. To reiterate, the symbolic power permeating the field of population gave some groups a privileged positions while

---

104 See IWHC and the Population Council (1986) *The Contraceptive Development Process and Quality of Care in Reproductive Health Services: Report of a Meeting Held in New York City October 8–9, 1986*. New York: IWHC and the Population Council. Interview, Adrienne Germain, IWHC August 1, 2000; Interview Joan Dunlop IWHC, May 10, 2000.

105 Germain, Adrienne (1993) “Are we Speaking the Same Language? Women’s Health Advocates and Scientists Talk about Contraceptive Technology”, in Dixon-Mueller, Ruth and Adrienne Germain (eds) (1993) *Four Essays on Birth Control Needs and Risks*. New York: International Women’s Health Coalition.

106 Germain, Adrienne (1987) “Reproductive Health and Dignity: Choices by Third World Women”, Background Document for the International Conference on Better Health for Women and Children Through Family Planning” Nairobi, Kenya, October 1987.

marginalizing others, and accentuated some goals and modes of governing, rather than others. However, to the extent that this was a relation of power, serving to naturalize certain views and ways of acting in the world, it was also characterized by “struggle” or contestation. While symbolic power is akin to structure with an affinity to Foucault’s dyad of “power/knowledge”, actors in a subordinate position have access, in Bourdieu’s framework, to symbolic resources with which to engage in a struggle inside the field. Above, I have tried to show how this logic of contestation and struggle was initially transformed into a technical and reform-oriented criticism of existing programs because of how the field was knowledge-centered. However, the sum-total of these developments had provided, bit by bit, symbolic resources that, *coupled* with those that accrued from the broader political-institutional setting which conditioned the authority of knowledge by reference to individual rights and concerns, formed the basis from which actors previously accorded a marginal position could effectively change international population policy in the early 1990s.

However, it is doubtful whether the “reproductive health and rights approach” would have been adopted as the new standard of international population policy at the UN-organized International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994 had it not been for the fact that the women’s health advocates could draw on the symbolic resources accruing from renowned demographers that already occupied central positions in the field. John Bongaarts was to provide a central demographic rationale for a reproductive health and rights approach in an article in *Science* magazine where he argued for an approach that addressed, inter alia, gender issues, girls’ education and generally working to change the socio-cultural norms for family size and timing of first births.<sup>107</sup> Later, Bongaarts briefed Vice President Al Gore as he prepared to head the US delegation for the ICPD.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, three other prominent demographers published an article that called for a “common ground” between population control advocates and reproductive health and rights advocates by emphasizing the latter as both an end in itself *and* as a means to increase the efficacy of efforts to reduce population growth.<sup>109</sup> In short, the ability to marshal symbolic resources both with reference to women’s rights and the centrality of the “user’s perspective”, *and* to demographic trends, was central to the success of this policy approach at the ICPD.

---

107 Bongaarts, John (1994) “Population Policy Options in the Developing World”, *Science* 263, 11, pp. 771–776.

108 Bongaarts briefed Gore in August 1994, and Secretary of State Warren Christopher in April 1994. Personal communication with John Bongaarts, New York, April 4, 2000.

109 Steve W. Sinding, John A. Ross and Allan G. Rosenfield (1994) “Seeking Common Ground: Unmet Need and Demographic Goals”, *International Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 23–27+32, p. 26.

## **Conclusion**

Students of global governance have documented that non-state actors have become key players in world politics, but they have yet to develop a framework that can account for and allow us to get a better empirical handle on the life “inside” these governance networks. I have tried here to suggest such a framework by drawing on field theory, and to illustrate its usefulness in the case of transnational population policy. The field of population did constitute a “sphere of authority” inasmuch as it were directly involved in identifying a specific phenomena to be addressed, proposing and even implementing governmental techniques in a range of developing countries. Here, the role of demographers was central as they formulated a theoretical framework that constituted the template from which to institutionalize and transnationalize a particular understanding of what the problem was and how to deal with it. Their role, however, cannot be understood without reference to their support from both broader advocacy groups and from philanthropists. Transition theory, it can be said, gave the field its distinct form and helped define the points of contention within the field. It did not “cause” states or others to act as such, as the effort to teach, persuade and socialize other actors advanced on a much broader scale. Importantly, in analyzing this population as a transnational field, it has been possible to provide an account of its transformation over time by reference to the anatomy of the field and how it – as a meso-level order – structured the operations of inside groups and filtered the effects of external events.