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The Demographic Winter and the Barren Left
By Steven W. Mosher

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The Nation, a hard left publication of secular bent, is no friend of faith, life, or family. Still, I was expecting to be more amused than outraged by the lead article in the March issue, profiling the work of the Population Research Institute (PRI) and several other groups collectively concerned about falling fertility rates worldwide. The piece opens with the eye-catching line: “Steve Mosher is telling me about wolves returning to the streets of European towns . . . [during] the Black Death.”

Nothing calumnious here. I did, over a lengthy lunch at a sunny Main Street café in Front Royal, Virginia, say this very thing—and much more—to the author, radical feminist Kathryn Joyce. In the context of falling birth rates in Europe, I told her a cautionary tale about Europe’s earlier demographic collapse—the one that was caused by the bubonic plague in the Middle Ages—that left the continent in a century-long depression. If the demographic winter that now holds Europe in its grip continues, I concluded, then not only its people but also its economies may be expected to wither and die as they did centuries earlier. Much of the rest of the world seems set to follow, I told her. I have been a demographic bore for some time now, and the conversation was chockablock with numbers, statistics, and fertility rates.

Ms. Joyce did a good impersonation of listening, but her article is almost devoid of demographics. Indeed, this lacuna is essential to her argument, which is that the “demographic winter” is a creation of a conspiracy of conservative pro-natalist Christian groups. Or, in her words, the “baby-bust,” “the birth dearth,” and “the graying of the continent” are nothing more than “modern euphemisms for old-fashioned race panic as low fertility rates among white ‘Western’ couples coincides with an increasingly visible immigrant population across Europe.”

Why would Christian conservatives in the United States promote such ideas? Because we are, she breathlessly tells her readers, “in a panic for more white babies.” Our goal, according to this handmaid’s tale, is to turn white “women’s bodies” into breeding machines and maternity wards into “battlegrounds.” To make sure we get it, she entitles her piece “Missing: The ‘Right’ Babies.”

I will examine this feminist fantasy, and the deeply held leftist prejudices that animate it, later on. But first let’s take a look at the numbers that Ms. Joyce found so inconvenient to her thesis. For the numbers tell a stark tale of mankind’s decline, not just in Europe, but in much of the rest of the world as well. However insouciant the left is about reproduction (as opposed to its intense interest in copulation), demography is still destiny—for them as well as everyone else.

Demographic Winter Strikes Europe

Discussions of the demographic winter start with Europe not because of race (is it really necessary to say?) but because the barren world of tomorrow is already evident in the Europe of today. As nearly everyone knows by now, all of Europe, from Ireland in the West to Russia in the East, is aging and dying.

Unlike the Black Death of the Middle Ages, which filled up the graveyards of the continent, the new epidemic of voluntary infertility empties out the maternity wards. And it is not the result of bacteria that infect our bodies but rather anti-natal thoughts that invade our minds. These are reinforced by an economic system that puts a premium on expanding the workforce at the expense of maternity, as well as a political system that weakens families, putting those with children at a financial disadvantage that is both unjust and shortsighted. The peoples of Europe, along with those of every other developed nation and many as yet underdeveloped, for some time now have been refusing to provide for the future in the most fundamental way—by providing the next generation. Following in the footsteps of the Europeans, many other peoples around the world seem to be committing a slow form of collective suicide.

Obscured by debates over epiphenomena like exploding immigration and bankrupt pension funds is the brute fact that Europe is already suffering from a devastating, crippling shortage of people. The populations of no fewer than thirteen European countries, including Russia, Poland, and Hungary, have already begun to crash. The total fertility rate for Europe, including the former Soviet republics, currently averages an anemic 1.4 children per woman, and no increase is in sight. As a result, the current population of 728 million will plunge to only 557 million by the

year 2050, a drop similar in magnitude to that occurring during the Black Death. At that point, Europe will be losing three to four million people a year. Three out of four Europeans will have disappeared by the end of the twenty-first century, when the population will number only 207 million. By then the population decline will be irreversible, with the surviving Europeans averaging more than sixty years of age.

The plunge has already begun in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Russia's population is already decreasing by three-quarters of a million people each year; Ukraine's, by a quarter million. Russia's population is slated to decrease from 143 million in 2005 to 112 million in 2050.

Birthrates are higher—although still running below replacement levels—in Western Europe. France's estimated Total Fertility Rate, for instance, is running at 1.86 children per woman. While this is high by European standards, much of this fertility is attributable to immigrants, who are, as it happens, Muslims. Subtracting out the three or four children of the average immigrant leaves the native population averaging only 1.3 children or so, about the European average. Demographers now estimate that France, for example, will be as much as 40 percent Muslim by 2050.

"In demographic terms, Europe is vanishing," remarked then Premier Jacques Chirac back in 1984. "[Soon] our countries will be empty." Empty of Gauls, Teutons, Britons, and Slavs perhaps. But other tribes, more fruitful than the modern-day European ones, will certainly come to occupy the pleasant lands north of the Mediterranean. And the surviving Europeans will retreat to their retirement homes, as the Neanderthals once retreated across the same terrain before the advance of Cro-Magnon Man. In France, as in most of Western Europe, the successor population is already in place.

What did Ms. Joyce, who sat picking through her salad as I rehearsed these grim statistics and scenarios, make of all this? The notion of a "demographic winter," she writes, is being "fervently hawked among a group of Christian-right 'pro-family' activists" to stir up xenophobia against Muslim immigrants and to frighten white Europeans into out-breeding them.

The key members of this conspiracy to foment a kind of race war are, of course, Catholics. (Anti-Catholic bigotry is always respectable—some would say virtually required—in leftist circles.) I am described as "the president of the Catholic anti-contraception lobbyist group, Population Research Institute." Another grand conspirator, Christine de Vollmer of the Latin American Alliance for the Family, is referred to as "Catholic activist de Vollmer." Austin Ruse is

identified as the “head of the ultraconservative Catholic UN lobbyist group C-FAM” [italics added]. And behind us—how did you guess?—looms the shadowy power of the papacy. “The last two popes have involved themselves in the debate, with John Paul II pronouncing a ‘crisis in births’ in 2002 in an anomalous papal address to Italy’s Parliament and Benedict XVI remarking on the ‘tragedy’ of childless European couples.”

The vast Christian-right wing conspiracy uncovered by Ms. Joyce goes well beyond Catholics, however. “Hundreds of Mormon pro-family activists . . . have made common cause with conservative Catholics and evangelical ideologues,” she tells us.

However sinister she tries to make it sound, my comments on the falling fertility of modern-day Europeans were not intended to foment “race panic,” nor does it betray neo-Nazi inclinations. I was simply reporting on today’s demographic realities.

Certainly, on the Muslim side, with the exception of some extremists, this is not a competition of the cradle. Vast numbers of Muslim couples are falling prey to the same modernist, anti-natal impulses that are driving Europe’s birthrate down, while others are victims of population-control programs imposed by their own governments.

Islam Contracepted

The millions of Muslims migrating to Europe are not being driven out of their homelands by population pressure so much as they are being drawn into a demographic vacuum as Europe empties itself of offspring. There are still pockets of high fertility in the Islamic world—impoverished Afghanistan has one of the highest birthrates in the world—but the trend is towards three- and even two-child families.

In recent years, a number of Muslim countries have seen fertility declines that are among the largest ever recorded. Kuwait, Algeria, Iran, and Tunisia all saw their fertility rate drop by two-thirds during the past three decades of the twentieth century. All were at or below replacement by 2000.

In Iran, for example, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 ushered in a government of ayatollahs committed to the Qur'anic injunction that children are blessings and opposed to all forms of birth control. Yet, by the early nineties, the depression induced by the flight of Western investors, along with the unrelenting efforts of Western population controllers, induced the Iranian government to change its policy. Departing from the traditional Islamic understanding of children as a blessing, the government began a foreign-inspired campaign against the large family. Many a village mullah began devoting part of his Friday sermon to encouraging his followers to visit the local birth-control center, where the government offered free contraception and sterilization. The brief flourishing of births that followed the Islamic Revolution quickly subsided. By 2006, family size stood at 1.79 children and falling.

Birthrates are also plummeting in relatively prosperous, Westernized Turkey, despite the exhortations of government leaders to have more children. As the fertility rate fell past 2.5 children per women in 2002, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, soon to become Turkey's prime minister, attacked contraception as "straight out treason to the state." "Have babies," he ordered Turks. "Allah wants it." Appeals to patriotism and faith apparently fell on deaf ears, as Turkey's fertility rate skidded past replacement in 2007 and is still falling.

The most geopolitically charged exception to the small family norm is found among the Palestinians. The late Yassir Arafat once bragged that "the womb of the Arab woman is my best weapon." Those wombs, it turns out, are still churning out nearly five children each, almost twice as many as the average Jewish woman. Moreover, immigration to Israel has slowed to a trickle.

One consequence of losing the contest of the cradle is that by 2005 Jews had become a minority in Greater Israel. It is perhaps no coincidence that Israel pulled out of Gaza that same year. Uprooting a few thousand Israeli settlers may have seemed a small price to pay for ridding itself of 1.3 million unassimilated Palestinians. Both sides understand that it is not just modern weapons systems that will determine the ultimate fate of Israel, but differential birth rates as well.

Ms. Joyce, however, stubbornly refuses to concede this obvious point. Instead, she contrives to shoot the messenger—that is to say, me. In a classic twist and sneer, she claims that I "revealed the limits of my professed concern for women's rights when [I told her] that Israel relinquished Gaza because, as Yassir Arafat said, the best weapon of the Palestinians is 'the womb of the Arab woman.'" Come again, Kathryn? I was merely reporting on Arafat's instrumental view of Arab women, not endorsing it.

It Isn't Just Europe, Ms. Joyce

The unprecedented fall in fertility rates that began in postwar Europe has, in the decades since, spread to every corner of the globe.

Take Latin America, for example. The image of the loving Mexican *mamacita* surrounded by a passel of barefoot children remains scratched on the minds of Americans, even when it has largely vanished in the dusty pueblos of Mexico itself. Government-enforced sterilization campaigns, along with simple modernity, have dramatically shrunk family size south of the border in recent years. When I speak to American audiences, they are invariably surprised to learn that the average young Mexican family now numbers no more children than its American counterpart.

But Central and South American countries, too, are seeing their birthrates fall. Most Latin American countries are now rapidly approaching replacement rate fertility, if they are not already there, according to the United Nations Population Division (UNPD). Women in Brazil, the largest South American country, currently average only 2.3 children. The inhabitants of Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile are even less fertile.

Across the Pacific, China has become a byword for forced-pace population control. Since the early eighties, Chinese women have been allowed an average of only 1.7 children, a birthrate so low that by 2020 China's median age will be older than that of the United States.

India's de facto two-child policy is neither as well known nor as brutal as China's. But this policy, in conjunction with simple modernity, has effectively brought the fertility rate down to about 2.8 or so. India is projected to reach replacement rate fertility in a decade or so.

The voluntary childlessness of the Japanese exceeds even the forced-pace population reduction of China's one-child policy. With a total fertility rate of only 1.25, Japan is on the brink of a major demographic meltdown. Its population of 127 million has stopped growing and—if the birthrate continues at this low level—will soon begin to shrink at an alarming pace. A population bust, like an explosion, proceeds in geometric progression.

The old-age tsunami that is about to hit Japan will not spare other Asian countries. The Four Tigers—Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Singapore—are already getting long in the tooth.

Wherever we turn in the world, we see the same general picture. The only seeming exception is Sub-Saharan Africa, where birthrates are still fairly robust. But Africa has another problem: It languishes in the grip of an HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is sending some nations, such as South Africa, into absolute population decline.

The latest forecasts by the UNPD show the number of people in the world shrinking by mid-century, that is, before today's young adults reach retirement age. I am speaking here of the UNDP's "low variant" projections—historically the most accurate—which show that the population of the world will continue to creep up until about the year 2040, peaking at around 7.6 billion people. This is only a fraction more—one-sixth or so—than the 6.5 billion that the planet supports at present. Then the global population implosion, slow at first, but accelerating over time, begins. We fall back to current levels by 2082 and then shrink to under five billion by the turn of the next century.

This population implosion, by reducing the amount of human capital available, will have a dramatic impact on every aspect of life. As Peter Drucker has noted, "The dominant factor for business in the next two decades—absent war, pestilence, or collision with a comet—is not going to be economics or technology. It will be demographics."

I made it clear to Ms. Joyce that the demographic collapse that occurred "naturally" in the developed world has been in large part imposed by force on the less fortunate and less powerful peoples of the world. Hapless villagers worldwide have been subjected to clever marketing schemes, bait-and-switch health ploys, anti-family TV soap operas, and even blunt coercion in an effort to deprive them of the free exercise of their fertility.

Ms. Joyce did not appear to find any of this morally objectionable, nor did it appear in print. Perhaps this is because, like most feminists, she is deeply persuaded that women of color want nothing more than to wear the same IUDs, swallow the same birth-control pills, and undergo the same abortions that have set white feminists free of "patriarchal bondage." Or perhaps it is because she, like the left in general, believes that the developing world really does have a population problem, the solution to which just might require heavy-handed measures.

What she does find objectionable is that I, during a recent speech in Poland, encouraged the Poles to be more open to life by saying, “I want to see more Poles!”

Now of course I would like to see more babies in dying Poland—the Poles are averaging only 1.23 children—or anywhere else for that matter. As Ms. Joyce well knows from our long conversation, I am partial to babies in general, regardless of how much or how little pigment they happen to have in their skin. Speaking recently to five thousand people in Manila, I declared, “I want to see more Filipinos.” And last year at a conference in Columbia, I called for more Columbians. Condemn me for being pro-people, if you will, but don’t condemn me for being racist.

And if race is to be the subject, then let me mention my own ancestry, which includes Native American blood, and that of my wife’s, who is Hispanic. My children range in appearance from little Geronimos to little Bridgets, if you must know. But apparently Ms. Joyce couldn’t see beyond the color of my blue eyes. Who’s the racist here?

It amazes me that groups like PRI and the Latin American Alliance for the Family, whose work has been largely focused on helping “women of color,” can be accused of only promoting white births. In China, we have documented the forced abortion of young Chinese women and thus helped to cut funding to the U.N. agency cheerleading that country’s program. In Peru, we were instrumental in halting then President Alberto Fujimori’s infamous sterilization campaign, which was primarily directed against the Quechua-speaking Indians of the High Andes. Perhaps Ms. Joyce thinks that China and the Andes are inhabited by Aryans.

But her most amazing misrepresentation concerns my call for pro-natal policies to help save social security and counter the coming demographic winter. Issuing from her pen, this somehow became a handmaid’s tale—a world in which women are reduced to the role of helpless breeders. And not just any women, mind you, but white women like her.

She actually goes so far as to suggest that I intend white Christians to out-reproduce Muslims (and perhaps everybody else, for that matter). As I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, we at PRI are said to be engaged in “a new cold war, a ‘clash of civilizations’ to be fought through women’s bodies, with the maternity ward as a battleground.”

Ms. Joyce, herself a creature of the feminist narrative she has created, imagines that PRI and other pro-natal groups are conspiring to keep her and her sisters barefoot and pregnant. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am quite content to let the writers, readers, and editors of *The Nation* make their own fertility decisions. Having largely rejected marriage for cohabitation, conception for contraception, and childbearing for abortion, I doubt if they average one child per every pair of “significant others” (or whatever they’re calling their transient liaisons these days).

I would only ask that the left show the same regard for others, both in America and around the world. Surveys show that young American women, for example, express a preference for 2.5 children or so, significantly more than the two that they are likely to actually bear. PRI’s goal, through its educational and public policy initiatives, is to make it possible for women to achieve their desired number of children.

The left, however, seems determined to treat young women (and men) as wayward children to be propagandized, contracepted, sterilized, and aborted out of their inherently pro-natal convictions. Having adopted a de facto one-child policy themselves, they are hell-bent on imposing it on the rest of us. So they continue to propagate the myth of overpopulation, zealously support Planned Parenthood and other government-subsidized contraception and sterilization services, and bitterly oppose any restrictions on abortion.

There is a panic over births after all, it turns out. But it is not, as Ms. Joyce would have it, the Catholics, evangelicals, and Mormons of the pro-life, pro-family movement who are alarmed. These have bound themselves to their spouses in mutually fulfilling marriages and are happily procreating. As a result they are seeing their numbers and influence expand.

Not so the largely white and sterile readers of *The Nation*. Like the barren Ms. Joyce, unmarried and childless as she enters her thirties, they propagate aging and outmoded ideologies instead of making babies. Perhaps it is understandable that they are, well, panicking.

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