

century working class activists made “birth control ... a kind of substitute for class organization” (Foster 1998, 10).

Extreme neo-Malthusians argue that the scale of impact from the ‘population explosion’ justifies enforced sterilisation and abortion. They attribute diverse problems to population pressure including threats to peace and security, poverty, famine and hunger, refugee and migration flows, economic crisis, natural resource depletion and pollution, threats to biodiversity, climate change and other environmental problems.³¹ More recently, liberal neo-Malthusians have begun to support women’s reproductive rights in their campaigns to reduce fertility. David Suzuki and Paul Ehrlich, for instance, argue that empowering women and improving their status will reduce birth rates.³² Bandarage is distrustful of these attitudes, accusing neo-Malthusians who adopt the language of “unmet need” and “ability to choose” as attempting to disguise a “fragmented, top-down, homogenous approach” to population control (Bandarage 1997, 103).

Malthusian and neo-Malthusian approaches have been a major influence on global discourses and public opinion on population. Although the ICPD made demographers and family planners uncomfortable about using Malthus as a rationale for their work (McNicoll 1998, 311), Malthusian and neo-Malthusian approaches play important indirect roles in economic and environmental policy making, as explored later in the thesis.

There is, in short, nothing more ideologically powerful for capitalist interests to have at hand than unconstrained technological optimism and doctrines of progress ineluctably coupled to a doom-saying Malthusianism that can be conveniently blamed when as they invariably do, things go wrong. (Harvey 1996, 149)

Furthermore, as Harvey shows, Malthusianism and neo-Malthusianism are useful tools in diverting attention from the underlying causes of economic, social and environmental problems and restrict the transformative efforts of those who campaign for changes at the deeper systemic level. If the ICPD had challenged these approaches, it would have helped to set the rhetorical terms for the changes needed to benefit those

³¹ See Berelson 1969.

³² See Chapter five for a detailed analysis of Ehrlich’s approach.

who are the victims of an economic order which furthers capitalist interests at their expense. To establish whether this occurred, the global politics of population prior to the ICPD are surveyed in the next section.

2.4 The global politics of population: 1974 to 1984

Changes in the “demographic agenda” are closely related to wider concerns (Furedi 1997, 28). Population has been discussed at the international level for several decades. A study of the UN Population conferences of 1974 and 1984 offers insights into the relationship between the conferences’ outcomes and the debates of their times (Finkle and McIntosh 1994; Furedi 1997; Singh 1998). Each conference provided a forum for the dominant contemporary debates and set a program for the ensuing decade.

They are ... international conclaves of policy expression, where undertakings of good faith are made by all, and statements are made and resolutions drafted which together give a comprehensive picture of how the world’s thinking has evolved on an issue. (Catley-Carson 2000, 11803)

As noted in chapter one, individual states have historically taken a pro-natalist approach to their own populations for purposes of ‘nation building’ and to increase military strength, which until recent times, depended largely on manpower (Grebenik 1989). Western leaders became concerned about the growth of poor states’ population in the 1960s and, in recent decades, some leaders of low income countries have adopted policies to reduce fertility as a solution to their broader economic and social problems. These policies are often tied to the desire to emulate western development models; for instance, Chinese national ‘experts’ modelled the ‘one-child policy’, commenced in the late 1970s, on western discourses of modernity which Chinese leaders believed would lead their country to prosperity and international power (Greenhalgh 2002). Other states were encouraged by international financial institutions and bilateral donors to introduce population programs to assist in meeting economic objectives.³³ Finkle confirms that

³³ States which have received extensive financial and expert support for population programs include India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, South and Central America and a number of African states. Prior to the end of the Cold War, resources for these programs were plentiful.

the use of Malthusian and neo-Malthusian terms like ‘overpopulation’ is not confined to Northerners.³⁴

A point that is often neglected is that ‘overpopulation’ was attractive to both industrial societies as well as to developing countries as an explanation for the poverty of much of the Third World. It was much easier to attribute ‘underdevelopment’ to excessive population than to confront social and economic inequality, culture, religion, female subordination, or other plausible contributing factors. In the same spirit that western industrial nations found population control an appealing remedy for Third World poverty - for population control did not demand radical changes in the social and economic structure - scholars, intellectuals, and political leaders in developing countries also embraced population control as it did not require them to question fundamental attitudes and beliefs of their society. (Finkle 2000, 11796)

Family planning programs are remarkably similar, regardless of cultural and political contexts. The similarity of the “machine model of implementation” indicates that, rather than evolving from existing health programs, methods of implementation were imposed by Northern states (Warwick 1982, 40).

The 1974 World Conference on Population (WCP) in Bucharest provided a forum for developing countries to protest against the West’s preoccupation with population, while they attributed their problems to underdevelopment. The Bucharest conference was held when many in the North were panicking about population growth following the publication of The Population Bomb (Ehrlich 1968), the The Limits to Growth (Meadows & Meadows 1972) and increasing recognition of the global nature of environmental problems, signalled at Stockholm two years earlier. The WCP’s outcomes were strongly influenced by the UN General Assembly’s (UNGA) earlier adoption of the Declaration and POA for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), the successful outcome of a concerted effort by a united G77. The NIEO called for trade preferences and technology transfer to low income countries, commodity price stabilisation, a restructured international monetary system, debt relief, increased development assistance and greater regulation of multinational corporations and foreign investment (Finkle & Crane 1975, 93). The call for population ‘stabilisation’ and targets for fertility reduction in the draft World Population Plan of Action (WPPA) pointed strongly to United States influence because ‘population’ was seen as an “American cause” (Finkle & Crane 1975, 108). Countries in support of the NIEO,

³⁴ See also Caldwell 1998, for a discussion of the influence of Malthus on population and development policy in India.

however, combined to oppose the influence of the United States delegation, enabling them to make development the keystone of the Plan of Action.³⁵

The Bucharest Conference on Population was, in its way and for its time, as much of a paradigm shift as the ICPD, since it insisted that 'population' be considered in the context of development, despite the United States delegation's attempts to separate the issues. This was reflected in the statement that "[a] population policy may have a certain success if it constitutes an integral part of socioeconomic development; its contribution to the solution of world development problems is hence only partial" (WPPA 1974, cited by Hartmann 1987, 109). Bucharest moved the understanding of global population issues beyond the neo-Malthusian preoccupations of the United States at that time and indicated the power wielded by developing countries working together. Finkle and Crane (1975, 109) note, however, that although low income countries were strident in their demands for economic justice in a "feudal" global system they were nonetheless concerned about their population growth rates, patterns of migration and urbanisation and the age structure of their societies.

Consequently, ten years later at the Mexico City Conference, a greater number of countries - including China, many sub-Saharan African countries, Algeria and Brazil - which at Bucharest had been focused on economic issues, were prepared to prioritise population. Although the 1984 conference was not intended to produce a new WPPA, it signalled a paradigm shift in the global politics of population. The Conference became a forum for two policy perspectives which the Reagan administration brought to the United States: advocacy of neoliberal economic policies at the global level and opposition to abortion-related activities (Finkle & Crane 1985, 9).

The official policy statement presented by the US delegation to the conference asserted that "The relationship between population growth and economic development is not necessarily a negative one" and that "governmental control of economies" or "economic statism" had caused population growth in developing countries to change from an "asset" to a "peril". While recognizing that "in some cases, immediate population pressures might require short-term efforts to ameliorate them", the statement went on to conclude: "...population control programs alone cannot substitute for the economic reforms that put a society on the road toward growth and, as an aftereffect, toward slower population increase as well." The statement clearly indicated that the economic

³⁵ 'The insistence of the Indian delegation that "development is the best contraceptive" has become the hallmark of this conference' (Demeny 1985, 100).

reforms advocated by the delegation were those consistent with a market economy. (Finkle & Crane 1985, 11)

This approach was an explicit rejection of President Carter's Global 2000 report (Barney 1981) which predicted a global population crisis exacerbating impending environmental disasters. It also contradicted the World Bank's World Development Report of 1984, which called for stronger policies to reduce population growth. The United States argued that population 'problems' were an effect rather than a cause of poverty. However, by endorsing a market-driven approach and insisting on a greater role for the private sector, the United States approach reiterated the analysis of advocates like Bauer (1981) and Simon (1981). Bauer used phrases like "the grail of equality" and "Western guilt" to berate the dependency theorists and development economists whose ideas provided the economic framework for the NIEO.³⁶ He described development economics as "intellectually corrupt", calling for the shrinking of government activities in developing countries and rejecting development aid from North to South. Bauer saw the solution to underdevelopment as the further integration of national economies into the world economy. His analysis informed the Reagan administration's revisionist script for Bucharest: "[r]apid population growth has not been an obstacle to sustained economic advance either in the Third World or in the West" (Bauer 1981, 43).³⁷ His insistence that aid from rich to poor countries should be reduced and his rejection of redistributive taxes within countries echoes Malthus' approach to the poor and indicates his contribution to the macroeconomic policies which underlie the contemporary global political economy.

The outcomes of the 1984 UN population conference resulted from political processes which had been underway since 1974. The religious right's influence in the United States was projected to the international level. In the run-up to the United States Presidential election, the Reagan government acceded to requests from the religious right for a 'pro-life' stance and representation at Mexico City. As a result, the United States delegation backed the Vatican in the introduction of language which insured that abortion "in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning" (Finkle &

³⁶These are among the chapter titles of his 1981 monograph, Equality, the Third World and Economic Delusion.

³⁷ See Chapter four for an explanation of revisionism.

Crane 1985, 13) and introduced the policy which became known as the Mexico City policy, or Global Gag Rule. This was a major blow to the population establishment which hoped for a renewed commitment to financial support for population activities.

Women played a greater role at Mexico City than at Bucharest following their participation in two earlier world conferences on women in 1975 and 1980. Nafis Sadik, then Assistant Executive Director of UNFPA, organised an *ad hoc* Women's Caucus consisting of women at the head of national family planning organisations in India and Zimbabwe and the minister in charge of family planning in Pakistan. Their efforts resulted in the addition of a separate chapter devoted to women's rights in the revised WPPA (Singh 1998, 20).

Apart from the new additions of references to population and environment connections and the chapter on women, most of the 1974 WPPA survived the Mexico City conference.³⁸ Like ICPD, the 1974 and 1984 conferences reveal the influential role of the United States government in the global politics of population. The White House incumbents are important not just to Americans but to all governments and social movements and institutions concerned with population and reproductive rights. Both conferences signalled a shift in the paradigm by which the international community officially viewed population issues. However, neither deviated from a macro-approach to population, or took a gendered view of reproductive rights and reproductive health. It was not until 1994 that the micro-politics of reproduction came to the fore, nudging aside debates about the macro-politics of development and economic growth which had characterised earlier UN conferences. This focus constituted what Sadik described as the paradigm shift of ICPD.

2.5 The global political context of ICPD

The preceding discussion argues that earlier population conferences reflect their global political context. Similarly, the ICPD was a product of its times. Although it was the first UN population conference to have 'Development' in its title, the focus of the 1994 conference was 'population' and 'reproduction', and minimal attention was given to 'development'. Its organisers made strong claims for the conference.

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) ... has earned a place in history as one of the most significant global conferences ever. It radically transformed the views and perceptions of thousands of policy makers and programme managers on how population policies and programmes should be formulated in future - moving away from top-down approaches and pre-planned demographic goals to those that would seek to respond to the needs of 'couples and individuals'. (Singh 1998, 1)

If the Cairo Conference presented a paradigm change, it was by moving its focus from the macropolitics of development and economic growth to the micropolitics of individual rights and reproductive health. Catley-Carson's generalisation about population conferences more accurately describes ICPD than earlier conferences.

Population conferences as international policy making occasions therefore provide highly visible venues for intense debate about sensitive reproductive health issues of safe abortion, genital cutting, violence against women, and services for adolescents. (Catley-Carson 2000, 11803)

Why did issues tied to women's bodies and lives, of little interest earlier, achieve such centrality in 1994? The demographer Nathan Keyfitz provides a partial answer.

Cairo was a genuine 'happening', not a mere bureaucratic routine. It was news on the media and news in the bazaars in a way that few such international meetings have been. Because it came at the same time as many other smaller incidents in the awakening of women, the time was ripe for it; it fitted into the historic moment. (Keyfitz 1995, 90)

A number of factors contributed to that "historic moment". First, ICPD was the first UN population conference to be held in the post-Cold War period. East-West tensions had underlain earlier conferences, but, as McIntosh and Finkle (1995) point out, government leaders went to Cairo with a new willingness to work together. The collapse of the Soviet Union altered the geopolitical landscape, and there was optimism for a more cooperative global future. The signing of the Palestinian and Israeli peace agreement averted conflict over another issue which had derailed earlier international meetings.

The demise of the Soviet Union had another important impact. For the first time, the reproductive lives of women in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union became visible. Their need for an expanded range of family planning services was evident since induced abortion had been the primary fertility control method available to them. This issue preoccupied Western European governments and NGOs at the

³⁸ See Demeny 1985 for a comparative view of the 1974 and 1984 conferences.

European and North American regional conference in March 1993 as much as the need for family planning services in developing countries.

A second factor was the increasingly diverse economic status of developing countries, which had united in the campaign for a NIEO in 1974. By 1994, they lacked the common economic objectives which had helped them to overcome religious and political differences at earlier conferences. Many countries had adopted fertility reduction strategies and were enforcing them with varying levels of commitment and coercion. While religious and other differences were expressed through discussion about demographic and reproductive issues they also provided a smokescreen for some countries' poor progress in equitable social and economic development.

Third, as with earlier conferences, the ideological approach of the United States government was a crucial factor. Democrat President, Bill Clinton, had been elected in 1992; his administration reversed the Mexico City policy and promised to reinstate funding to IPPF and UNFPA in the next funding cycle. The appointment of Timothy Wirth as Under Secretary for Global Affairs was welcomed by the population establishment, since he had earlier voiced personal concern about population and sustainable development. At the beginning of the ICPD process, Wirth's views were neo-Malthusian. After persistent lobbying by feminist organisations, he was prepared to support a reproductive rights and health approach. The United States State Department, which had drafted the country's position for earlier conferences, was concerned about the security aspects of population growth - the macro perspective. Wirth worked with USAID, which was involved at the micro-level in the delivery of family planning, to develop a different approach for the United States position for ICPD. The friendship which developed between Nafis Sadik and Timothy Wirth at the European and North American Regional Conference "was extremely helpful to the ICPD Secretariat" (Singh 1998, 37). Although Wirth consulted a wide range of stakeholders, he was particularly accessible to women's organisations, and there was little consultation with "the community of demographers and other academic social scientists who have provided

the theoretical and analytical underpinnings of US international population policy for nearly thirty years” (McIntosh and Finkle 1995, 242).³⁹

Fourth, the timing of ICPD, two years after UNCED and a year after the Vienna Conference on Human Rights and months before the World Summit on Social Development and the World Conference on Women, was especially opportune for a gender perspective to emerge. UNCED revealed the minefield of neo-Malthusian approaches to population; Vienna, for the first time, explicitly recognised that “the human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights” (UN 1993, cited in Otto 1995, 10). Representation of the global women’s movement expanded with each conference. Although different constituencies were involved, according to each conference’s theme, coordinating groups like the Women, Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO), the International Women’s Tribune Center (IWTC) and DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) provided networking and communication between NGOs. The Beijing conference brought together many constituencies and concerns and built on the earlier conference documents.⁴⁰

Fifth, NGOs were positioned to play an unprecedented role in the global politics of population and reproduction. The UN increasingly welcomed NGOs at world conferences and, after initial reluctance, UNFPA welcomed the support of the family planning and international women’s health movements (Chen 1995). There were more organisations working on issues related to population, development and the environment, either separately or together than at any earlier population conference and, through the Women’s Caucus, they were well-organised. Many NGOs received government funding from UN agencies, foundations and other multilateral agencies to participate in the ICPD and related meetings. More significantly, a number of country delegations included leaders of the international women’s health movement (Chen 1995). Sadik saw this as crucial to the achievement of the paradigm shift.

³⁹ Singh (1998, 104) suggests that population specialists were present in their usual numbers, but outnumbered by government officials, diplomats and policy makers and the high participation of NGOs.

⁴⁰ See Gujit 1997 for a cross comparison of UNCED and WCW documents. She concludes that “[n]either document represents a comprehensive conceptual understanding of the key issues, nor is there a consistent approach for institutionalising a gendered environmental awareness”.

And I got quite a lot of money from donors for the participation of NGOs, provided they were members of the government delegation. The governments said, “okay the money is coming so let’s put this person on.” But the governments didn’t realize that that person would be so influential in the decision making. You have to have the NGOs - you have to have a person at the negotiating table to be able to influence things that happen at the UN. (Sadik in CEDPA 2000)

UNFPA invited sympathetic NGOs to participate in the ICPD process at many stages, and to make comments on the Draft Final Document which was presented to PrepCom III. WEDO’s comments in particular were judged to be “extremely useful to the Conference Secretariat in preparing the final draft” (Singh 1998, 132).

Finally, locating ICPD in Cairo helped to dissipate Islamist opposition to reproductive rights, although the choice was made through elimination rather than as a first choice and the alliance of Islamists with the Holy See was not foreseen at the early planning stages.⁴¹ The Egyptian Government wanted a successful conference to maintain its prestige. As the Holy See gathered support for its conservative approach to women’s rights among Islamist leaders, Egypt secured endorsement of the conference from more moderate Muslim leaders. As a result, only four Islamist countries carried out their threats to boycott the conference. As host government, Egypt also provided a voice for the G77, whose former leader, Algeria, had been weakened by domestic conflict.

This section has briefly outlined the global political context of the ICPD, indicating that it provided an environment conducive to those organisations bent on steering the POA towards a rights-based approach. The next section outlines the activities, campaigns and strategies of key players in the population establishment and women’s health movements which produced the ‘quantum leap’ which Sadik believes characterised the POA.

2.6 First steps toward the ‘quantum leap’

The objectives of the population establishment and the international women’s health movement were often in conflict, because the first focused on fertility reduction and

⁴¹ In this thesis, I use the term ‘Islamist’ to refer to Islamic views which are variously referred to as fundamentalist, revivalist or traditionalist. This follows El-Hadi’s (1996) use of the term, which she says, “describe[s] positions and tendencies which may include a wide variety of interpretations differing between regions and countries but which are united by the fact that their constituents describe them as being Islamic”.

family planning and the second regarded voluntary family planning as just one component of comprehensive reproductive health programs. Yet some of their interests converged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Each movement was deeply affected by the United States' Mexico City policy, and it made sense to increase their political clout by organising together. The 'Common Ground' process is described in detail by Hodgson & Watkins (1997) who ask whether the feminist health movement was coopted by the population establishment in the run-up to ICPD. Conversely, a number of demographers suspect that the population establishment wrongly joined the focus on reproductive rights (see Caldwell 1996; Cassen 1994; Cleland 1996; Cliquet & Thienpont 1995; Eberstadt 1995; Van de Kaa 1995; Westoff 1995). The following discussion explores these questions in detail.

2.6.1 Population and Reproduction at Rio

UN conferences not only provide a platform for influencing governments, they also provide a forum for social movements and lobby groups to secure public support for their campaigns and activities. UNCED provided the population establishment with the opportunity to link population and environment issues. UNFPA's State of World Population reports of the late 1980s and early 1990s highlighted the neo-Malthusian theme of environmental catastrophe caused by unchecked population growth.⁴² In 1990, North American population and environment organisations - the Audubon Society, Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA), Population Action International (PAI) and the Sierra Club - set up the Campaign on Population and the Environment (COPE) to influence UNCED's approach to population. This alliance excluded the feminist health movement and COPE's campaign material gave scant attention to reproductive rights and health. COPE adopted the neo-Malthusian objective of increasing awareness of "the link between population growth, environmental degradation and the resulting human suffering, and to translate this into public policy" (Hartmann 1995, 146, citing Mazur from her 1992 Population and the Environment: A grantmaker's guide).⁴³ It produced a regular magazine-style publication titled People and the Planet which was sponsored by Planned Parenthood of America (PPFA), UNFPA, and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Union for the

⁴² See Chapter five for an in-depth exploration of these documents.

⁴³ For an example of the kind of material produced, see Engelman and Koontz 1992.

Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and supported by other population and environment groups. Sadik and population and environment professionals used this forum to link population, human development and environment.

COPE worked hard to have population included in Agenda 21. Since UNCED's organisers saw the ICPD as the appropriate forum to discuss it, population was not identified as a critical cause of environmental degradation at UNCED's 1990 agenda-setting meeting (Rowlands 1994). Agenda 21 recommended measures to make consumption more sustainable and noted a 'synergistic relationship' between demographic trends and sustainable development. It recognised the critical role of women in population and environment programs and in achieving sustainable development.

This was not enough for the population establishment. "Looked at coldly and objectively, the language of Agenda 21 on population was a big disappointment - at least to those who came to Rio hoping that here at last, after so many years of passionate, often anguished debate, an international consensus, both practical and political, would at last be achieved" (Johnson 1994, 216). Neo-Malthusian language did not feature strongly in the UNCED documents, due largely to feminists' opposition to COPE's linking of population with environmental degradation. To oppose the inclusion of any neo-Malthusian content in Agenda 21, reproductive rights activists were prepared to form a temporary alliance with the Holy See and other members of the moral right.

UNCED revealed that women do not approach population, development and environment issues with one voice. Nevertheless, many feminists believe that gender issues are integral to environmental issues and are therefore concerned at the lack of a gender perspective among most environmental bureaucrats, institutions and NGOs. Observing this in the lead-up to UNCED, two feminist organisations were formed to critique and influence the conference's outcomes. The first and most visible was WEDO, which took a coordinating role at UN conferences to maximise the ability of feminist NGOs to pressure governments to adopt policies to advance the cause of women (Chen 1995; Higer 1999). The second was the Committee on Women, Population and the Environment (CWPE), created in 1991 to respond to the "incipient alliances being forged between environmental organizations, population control

advocates and uncritical feminist organizations” (Silliman 1999, x). CWPE was “determined to keep a space open within the transnational women’s movement for an alternative dialogue that was not tied to strategic public-policy objectives or conference politics” (Silliman 1999, xi). CWPE’s members include academics and activists from the North and the South, including Betsy Hartmann, who has written critically about population control and Joni Seager who highlights connections between militarism, environmental destruction, patriarchy and gender.⁴⁴ CWPE produced a statement prior to UNCED which was endorsed by over 300 individuals and organisations around the world (Silliman 1999, xi).⁴⁵

CWPE, intent on tackling the neo-Malthusian legacy of the writings of Ehrlich, Hardin and others who focused on population and environment connections at the expense of women’s rights, chose to work outside formal conference structures. Other feminists decided to use the processes set up by conference organisers and work inside organisations to increase gender-awareness. Since women were noticeably absent from the top positions of the major Northern environment groups and environmental institutions, feminists in these organisations saw UNCED as an occasion to highlight their concerns. They were assisted in this by WEDO, which was in an advantageous position to influence the UNCED agenda, as its Director, Bella Abzug, was senior adviser to the General-Secretary of the Earth Summit, Maurice Strong. As an insider, she was able to advise and assist with feminist strategies. Two key focal points were provided by the global women’s conferences held in Miami in November 1991. The first, organised by the Women’s International Policy Action Committee (IPAC) and WEDO, was the Global Assembly of Women and the Environment (4 - 8 November); the second was the World Women’s Congress for a Healthy Planet, (8 - 12 November). The Global Assembly was organised by Joan Martin-Brown and Waafas Ofofu-Amaah and supported by UN agencies, European and the United States governments and by many NGOs, trade unions and women’s environment and development global networks. Designed to demonstrate women’s ability to engage in environmental management, it was the culmination of several regional assemblies attended by Latin American and Caribbean, European, North American, Asia-Pacific and African

⁴⁴ See Hartmann (1987; 1994; 1995; 1998a; 1998b; 1999; 2000) and Seager (1993; 1999).

⁴⁵ CWPE’s position is discussed in more detail in Chapter five of this thesis.

women. The Global Assembly focused on projects from over seventy nations which were “repeatable, affordable, sustainable and visible”, leading to the development of regional strategies and action plans (Martin-Brown and Ofosu-Amaah 1992). The stories were documented and became part of the conference proceedings, distributed to the 1500 women from eighty-three countries who attended.

The Congress adopted the format of a tribunal where keynote speakers presented testimonies which explored environmental degradation in the context of broader issues: poverty, development, militarism, resource allocation, climate change and energy use and human rights issues. It was an NGO initiative, organised by a committee of fifty-four women from thirty-one countries⁴⁶; WEDO provided organising and secretariat services and Bella Abzug shared the chair with Yolanda Kakabadse, UNCED’s NGO liaison officer (WEDO 1991a). Recurring themes at the tribunals and workshops revolved around “the structural economic exploitation of developing nations by the First World, militarism, and the participation - or lack of it - by women in decision making” (Evatt 1992, 4).⁴⁷ Over-consumption and population growth were identified as causes of environmental degradation but the latter was attributed to lack of access to reproductive rights.

The judges identified both wasteful overconsumption in the developed world and rapid population growth, as part of the problem. The Action Agenda and the judges (*sic*) declaration both stressed the importance of implementing the right of women to decide freely on the numbers and spacing of children. It is impossible to exclude the questions of numbers from issues related to levels of consumption. (Evatt 1992, 5)

Women from the South used the Tribunal to educate Northern women about “the connection between the free market and environmental abuse” (IPS/WEDO 1991, 2). In her testimony, DAWN coordinator Peggy Antrobus emphasised the “continued heavy dominance of Western industrialized nations and transnational corporations in the world economic system” (IPS/WEDO 1991, 1). Like many Southern women activists, she was concerned that Northern feminists often failed to link global economic issues and environmental problems.

⁴⁶ The Congress’ convenor was IPAC - Women’s International Policy Action Committee (WEDO 1991).

⁴⁷ Evatt, an Australian woman, was a member of the Tribunal of five women judges, which included three judges from the South.

The Preamble of the major document to emerge from the Congress, Women's Action Agenda 21, linked harm to women, development and environment with damaging economic policies.⁴⁸ Described as “one of the most comprehensive and radical documents on sustainable development” (Braidotti *et al* 1994, 162), it strongly opposed “the re-emergence of topdown demographically-driven population policies and programs that are deeply disrespectful of the basic human rights of women as guaranteed in [the Women's Convention]” (World Women's Congress 1991, 5). Like CWPE's statement, Women's Action Agenda 21 saw the impact of women's reproductive activities as minor by comparison with the devastating impacts of militarism and economic systems on the environment.⁴⁹

The Miami gatherings linked the oppression of women and nature. Women's responsibility to ‘heal the planet’ was the focus of much of the literature. The Women's Environmental Network document stated: “[t]hat women should take the lead in such a global movement is a natural expression of the intrinsic relationship between women and the environment” (WEN undated). WEDO solicited new members with the words in bold print “Its time for women to Mother Earth” beneath a photograph of the earth taken from Apollo XI (WEDO 1991b). Ecofeminist ideas were attractive to many Southern women, as an expression of the links that they experience at the material level. This was especially evident in the writings of spokespeople for indigenous and rural women who relied upon agriculture and foraging for subsistence.⁵⁰

At UNCED, women's reproductive (‘natural’) activities provided a useful mechanism to connect the different concerns of Northern and Southern women as “shar[ing] a common vision of a healthy planet” (Abzug 1991). Abzug's welcoming speech politicised the links between women and nature by advising women that they were “more than global housekeepers” and should be involved at every stage of planning processes and in national delegations. She stressed that “the political empowerment of

⁴⁸ ‘As caring women, we speak on behalf of ... the millions of women who experience daily the violence of environmental degradation, poverty and exploitation of their work and their bodies. As long as Nature and women are abused by a so-called “free market” ideology and wrong concepts of “economic growth”, there can be no environmental security’ (World Women's Congress 1991, 1).

⁴⁹ See Iyer 1998, Seager 1998 and Vertegaal 1989 for analyses of the environmental impacts of military activities.

⁵⁰ See Chapter five for an expanded discussion of women/nature approaches.

women may well provide the missing part of the equation that is needed to restore the health of our planet”.

The Miami conferences put women's issues on the agenda at UNCED. Feminists from environment, development and women's organisations attended Rio in unprecedented numbers where the women's tent, Planeta Femea, provided an opportunity to develop strategies for Cairo. The Statement on Population, Environment and Development: Call for a New Approach was negotiated at the Global Forum. Its first sentence announced that “[w]omen's empowerment to control their lives is the foundation for all action linking population, environment and development” (Johnson 1995, 137), auguring the centrality of women's empowerment as an organising principle for feminists' campaigns for the ICPD.

The success of the process inaugurated for UNCED, of holding regional assemblies of women, followed by global meetings to devise strategies and make consensus statements, legitimising the women's caucus at the conference with strong grass roots support, provided a model for feminist organising for ICPD. The population establishment could not fail to see the visibility that women had developed through these processes, and the election of the Clinton government in the United States would enhance their influence. Further, it was evident that UNFPA was already talking to WEDO and other feminist organisations and there was a real danger that the neo-Malthusian approach of most population lobbyists would be marginalised.

UNCED failed where Cairo must not ... The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 is our last real chance, before of (*sic*) the end of this century, to bring together in a consensus the voices of our planets (*sic*) leaders. This time there will be no choice but to discuss the population crisis and the hard decisions that must be made globally. (Population Institute 1993 cited by Richter & Keyzers 1994)

The outcomes of the Rio conference indicated that neo-Malthusianism might not gain the support to bring in the funds necessary for UNFPA's work; another approach was required. Following UNCED, Catherine Pierce, who then managed the women in development section of UNFPA, proposed that her organisation drop “controlling population growth” from its goals and make “improvement of women's reproductive health” its primary objective (Harkavy 1995, 194). In December 1993, Sadik told UNGA that the draft POA would focus on the rights of individuals, freedom of choice, the needs and empowerment of women and the sexual health and family planning needs

of youth and adolescents. This incorporated the agenda of the international women's health movement and the family planning establishment, which was keen to deliver services to the oncoming generation of prospective parents.

2.6.2 Seeking common ground

After UNCED, the COPE alliance disbanded and many populationists and environmentalists joined feminist organisations in the Common Ground campaign. This alliance was instigated by members of the international women's health movement who had established links with population organisations during their career paths (Harkavy 1997; Hodgson & Watkins 1997). The International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) emerged from the National Women's Health Coalition (United States) which formed with funding from the Population Crisis Committee in 1980. In the late 1980s, it adopted an international focus under the leadership of Joan Dunlop and Adrienne Germain, each of whom had worked with organisations focused on population issues.⁵¹ Their extensive contacts in the population establishment ensured IWHC's funding and facilitated communication between the two movements.

The common ground shared by feminist health organisations and the population establishment was facilitated by the concept of 'unmet need'. This term refers to the proportion of married women who indicate that they want to defer conception or cease childbearing, but who are currently not using modern methods of contraception (Westoff 1988). Unmet need is estimated from Knowledge/Attitudes/ Practice (KAP) surveys, World Fertility Surveys (WFS), Contraceptive Prevalence Surveys (CPS) and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), and extrapolated over a wider population to justify the 'diffusion' of contraceptives. Although these surveys have been criticised for aligning contraceptive use with fertility decline and ignoring traditional methods of avoiding pregnancies, (Sloan 1983) they provide useful data to assert that there is a high rate of unmet need. Sinding, Ross and Rosenfield (1992), Sinding (1993) and Merrick (1993) claim that satisfying unmet need would meet most countries' demographic targets.

⁵¹ Dunlop had been John D. Rockefeller's 'population aide' and is attributed by Harkavy with writing the speech that announced his conversion to the developmentalist approach at the Bucharest Population Conference. Germain had worked at both the Population Council and the Ford Foundation.

A very significant demographic impact would result from family planning and reproductive health programme efforts that attempted no more than to satisfy the stated reproductive wishes of the women of the developing world. The analysis strongly suggests that such an approach would equal or exceed what could be accomplished by achieving stated demographic targets of most countries. (Sinding 1993, 33)

Prior to its adoption by the international women's health movement, the concept of 'unmet need' was primarily used by demographers and family planners focused on diffusion of contraceptives, the 'supply' end of the population establishment. Some demographers focused on the demand side, suggesting that efforts to improve development would increase demand for family planning services.

In sum, reducing fertility is best seen as a broad problem of improving economic and social conditions, especially for women: raising their levels of education, their economic position, their (and their children's) health, and their role and status in society. That is a task more difficult, but with more promise, than manipulating contraceptive supply. (Pritchett 1994, 42)

Pritchett's suggestion that the 'unmet demand' is for the benefits of development provided a bridge between feminist aims and demographers' and populationists' objective of extending family planning programs. Members of the international women's health movement saw the narrow definition of 'unmet need' as an obstacle to introducing a reproductive rights and health approach to demographic programs; they wanted the definition broadened. In the run-up to the ICPD, international women's health advocates Dixon-Mueller and Adrienne Germain, who was vice-president of IWHC, suggested redesigning DHS surveys to discern the need for family planning services among unmarried as well as married women (Dixon-Mueller and Germain 1992).⁵²

In an attempt to broaden the ICPD's approach, Abzug further widened 'unmet need' to include all women's unmet needs.

So, what shall we emphasize in Cairo? First, we must collectively address the challenge of how to meet the real unmet demand of billions of people for simple human dignity and basic human rights. How do we meet the unmet demand and need by the female half of our population for power over their lives, for control over their bodies, for physical and emotional security, for education and economic independence that enables the realization of one's human potential? And how do we meet the unmet consumption demand and

⁵² Robey, Ross & Bushen (1996) have also argued that the unmet need of unmarried women must be considered.

need for food, for shelter, for education, for jobs, for health care? (Abzug 1994, at PrepCom III, cited in Hodgson & Watkins 1997, 499)

Expanding the concept of 'unmet need' to incorporate a broad transformative agenda, encompasses the enabling conditions which Petchesky (1995) believes that women need to exercise their reproductive rights. In any case, the international feminist health movement adopted the Dixon-Mueller/Germain definition for which they sought and obtained endorsement from the population establishment.

The broadened definition of unmet need was linked with another concept from the family planning and health movements, 'quality of care'. Judith Bruce (1990) listed the essential ingredients of a quality of care approach to family planning as choice among methods, information on technical competence, client-provider relations, continuity of use and a broad constellation of services. Like 'unmet need', the concept of 'quality of care' provided an entry point for the women's health movement to work with those in the population establishment who believed that family planning programs answer women's reproductive health needs as well as achieving population objectives. As the term was used in the family planning literature, 'quality of care' was too narrow for women's health advocates who wanted to see family planning services expanded to cover all sexual and reproductive health needs. They feared that the population establishment's interest was limited to the supply of contraception and legalised abortion (Germain *et al* 1994, 35). A study of survey and anthropological data by Bongaarts and Bruce (1995) shows that lack of access to family planning services is not the only reason that women do not use contraceptives. They found that lack of knowledge, fear of side effects and social and familial disapproval are also deciding factors. Bongaarts and Bruce recommended that services be made more responsive to the social situation of clients, target men as well as women and incorporate an understanding of the power, as well as the health, factors involved in using family planning services.

Thus, populationists, feminist health activists and the family planning movement in the Common Ground alliance connected the concept of unmet need with a quality of care approach to craft a comprehensive reproductive health focus for the ICPD. It was a winning combination since it pleased liberal neo-Malthusians and those governments which supported a rights-based approach to population programs.

Mr Biegman, Ambassador for Netherlands at UN, commented that the concept of 'unmet need' that was introduced into the discussions on reproductive

health, reproductive rights and the empowerment of women was probably the most significant factor in the successful completion of the negotiations on these themes. (Singh 1998,161-2)

The cross-over between personnel in the United States-led feminist health movement and population organisations, the focus on unmet needs and quality of care in service delivery and the HIV/AIDS epidemic provided the ingredients for the 'Common Ground' agenda between environmentalists, populationists and key segments of the feminist health movement. United States-based NGOs were crucial to the process; not only did they build a bridge between the population establishment, reproductive rights and health activists, they gained the support of key Southern women's groups (Correa 1994). While, as Hodgson and Watkins point out, this was an uneasy basis for an alliance, it was strengthened by the opposition of the Vatican and its supporters at ICPD. Events proved it to be the right approach for gaining broad support for putting reproductive rights on the agenda of a population conference.

2.7 ICPD's micro agenda

At ICPD, for the first time, a document endorsed by most of the world's governments agreed that population objectives could be achieved by increasing women's power to determine their reproductive lives through the exercise of their reproductive rights and access to quality reproductive health services. Liberal neo-Malthusians supported these concepts because they believed that women with reproductive autonomy would have fewer children. Having reached this basic agreement, the other new concept brought to a document at a population conference, women's empowerment, was seen as uncontroversial since, as presented in the POA, it would assist in the achievement of their main objective, reduced population growth.

Chapter IV 4.1 of the POA states that "[t]he empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important end in itself" but continues by relating women's empowerment, access to reproductive rights and health services to the achievement of sustainable development and reduced fertility. In Chapter five, I interrogate the assumed relationship between sustainable development and reduced fertility. Here I chart the evolution of the concept of reproductive rights in UN documents, consider the concept of reproductive health and interrogate the role that 'empowerment' plays in the POA to discern whether the

inclusion of these concepts did signal progress towards women's reproductive autonomy, a condition with the power to 'change the world'.

2.7.1 Reproductive rights in the POA

The formulation of reproductive rights was an incremental process which began in the 1960s and extended beyond the ICPD to Beijing, where women's greater stake in biological reproduction was for the first time explicitly acknowledged. The concept of 'reproductive rights' was first articulated within human rights discourses rather than in the context of health or population debates. The 1968 Conference on Human Rights in Tehran established the human right to govern reproductive processes.

Parents have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children, and a right to adequate education and information in this respect. (UN 1968)

This statement steered an uncontroversial path by using the vague concept of 'parents'. Since a parent is anyone who has children, the statement is tautological. The 1974 World Conference on Population added nothing to the definition (Johnson 1994). The 1984 Mexico City conference extended the right in its additions to the WPPA.

Governments should, as a matter of urgency, make universally available information, education and the means to assist couples and individuals to achieve their desired number of children.

Governments are urged to ensure that all couples and individuals have a basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and the means to do so. (Recommendations 25 and 30 of the Mexico City Plan of Action, Johnson 1994, 182)

Granting reproductive rights to 'couples and individuals' acknowledged that reproduction can occur outside marriage and thus was opposed by the Holy See. However, the Mexico City articulation was limited by its failure to address *whose* rights should prevail when there was conflict within couples and between individuals.

Feminist human rights activists were successful in gaining a statement from the 1993 UN Conference on Human Rights in Vienna that the entire suite of human rights is applicable to women. The final document states that "the human rights of women and the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal rights". In their campaigns prior to the Vienna conference, feminist human rights activists focused on violence against women since "issues of gender-based violence ... illustrate best how traditional human rights concepts and practice are gender-biased and exclude a

large spectrum of women's experience or abuse" (Bunch *et al* 1999, 95). The campaign for reproductive rights benefited from progress made in Vienna, but was focused on the ICPD.

The Cairo conference deserves recognition as the first attempt to define reproductive rights. Nonetheless, despite success in engendering human rights at Vienna, the ICPD POA puts aside the contentious question of *who* in a heterosexual couple has a greater claim to reproductive rights, which are inherently unequal, since women bear the greater physical burden of reproduction.

[R]eproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents. In the exercise of this right, they should take into account the needs of their living and future children and their responsibilities towards the community. The promotion of the responsible exercise of these rights for all people should be the fundamental basis for government- and community-supported policies and programmes in the area of reproductive health, including family planning. (UN 1994, 7.3 - excerpt)

The subsequent statement adds a gender dimension, but does not make reproductive rights specifically women's rights.

As part of their commitment, full attention should be given to the promotion of mutually respectful and equitable gender relations and particularly to meeting the educational and service needs of adolescents to enable them to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality. (UN 1994, 7.3 - excerpt)

Conference declarations are 'soft law,' meaning that they are "non-legally binding instruments that nevertheless create expectations about future action" (Charlesworth & Chinkin 2000, 66). There is no internationally constituted body to hold states to their agreement on the recommendations of the POA or the Beijing Platform for Action. More binding is the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (the Women's Convention), the major international treaty protecting the rights of women over their sexuality and fertility, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1981.⁵³ The Convention is framed in terms of enabling women to achieve equality with

⁵³ The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women is referred to in writings on women's human rights as both the Women's Convention and CEDAW. In this thesis I refer to it as the

men, indicating that it has the same limitations as the POA. In its original form, Article 16 (1) (e) of the Women's Convention recommends that women be allowed "[t]he same rights [as men] to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights" (UNHCHR 1981). At its 1994 meeting, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted a general recommendation on equality in marriage and family relations which clarified 16 (1) (e) and extended women's right to decide their reproductive lives.

The responsibilities that women have to bear and raise children affect their right of access to education, employment and other activities related to their personal development. They also impose inequitable burdens of work on women. The number and spacing of children have a similar impact on women's lives and also affect their physical and mental health, as well as that of their children. For these reasons, women are entitled to decide on the number and spacing of their children.

Some reports disclose coercive practices which have serious consequences for women, such as forced pregnancies, abortions or sterilization. Decisions to have children or not, while preferably made in consultation with spouse or partner, must not nevertheless be limited by spouse, parent, partner or Government. (cited by Cook 1994, 31)

This is an important advance on the language of equality used by the Women's Convention; to talk in terms of "the same rights" is inappropriate since the biological and social roles of men and women are inherently unequal.⁵⁴ Yet, while the 'hard law' of the Women's Convention is, in theory, enforceable, in practice, the mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing the Convention's implementation are inefficient and ineffective. States which have ratified the Women's Convention are required to report on their enforcement. Where they do not comply with the reporting requirement or their reports are found to be inadequate, the only option available to CEDAW is 'constructive dialogue'. Furthermore, independent and well-resourced women's NGOs are needed to inform CEDAW of inaccuracies and omissions in government reports, and such NGOs are scarce in countries where women's rights are denied. Although the Optional Protocol which gives women's organisations standing is now supported by sufficient countries to gain international standing, it has not been ratified by many

Women's Convention, and the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women as CEDAW.

⁵⁴ The preamble to CEDAW promotes a pronatalist view of women, emphasising the social significance of maternity and the role of women in procreation.

countries, including Australia. The United States has not yet ratified the original Convention.

Nonetheless, as Charlesworth (1996) concludes, human rights law, whether ‘soft’ or ‘hard’, allows women to articulate their demands in a language which has salience in global discourses. It was in this knowledge that women organised at the 1995 Beijing Women’s Conference to consolidate themes they had pursued in the conferences of the early 1990s. This led to an expansion of reproductive rights and the first inclusion of sexual rights in an international document endorsed by states. The Platform for Action explicitly addressed women’s biological and social role in reproduction and acknowledged its connection with sexuality.

The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters relating to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences. (UN 1995, Para 96)

Gone is reference to ‘the couple’ with its problematic assumption that men and women are equal within it. Women’s rights *as women* in reproductive decision-making are asserted. For the first time, the connection between reproduction and sexuality is spelled out (Miller 2000). Following this strong statement, however, with a sentence which subordinates women’s human rights within ‘equal relationships between women and men’ dilutes its potential for women’s empowerment and sexual and reproductive autonomy.⁵⁵ In asserting equality with men, women’s distinct role as biological and social reproducers is ignored.

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that the ICPD’s concept of reproductive rights was an incremental advance rather than a paradigm shift. In part, this was due to opposition to the draft definition from conservative forces at Cairo. However, the ICPD definition provided the basis on which the Beijing Conference could build, and the ICPD provided an occasion for CEDAW to clarify the Women’s Convention’s understanding of women’s entitlement in decision-making on reproductive matters. In Chapter three, I expand the argument that the concept of ‘reproductive rights’ is limited

⁵⁵ See Otto (1996, 16) for a critique of the Beijing Platform’s formulation of reproductive rights.

but suggest that the existence of an international human rights framework is nonetheless useful for advancing women's reproductive autonomy.

2.7.2 Reproductive health in the POA

'Reproductive health' would seem to be a less controversial term than 'reproductive rights', and thus unproblematical to populationists, family planners and women's health advocates. It is defined in the ICPD POA and correlated with widely accepted rights such as access to health services and information.

Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the right of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the law, and the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant.

In line with the above definition of reproductive health, reproductive health care is defined as the constellation of methods, techniques and services that contribute to reproductive health and well-being by preventing and solving reproductive health problems. It also includes sexual health, the purpose of which is the enhancement of life and personal relations, and not merely counselling and care related to reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases. (UN 1994, 7.2)

The organisers of the ICPD decided to frame abortion within a reproductive health framework rather than as a reproductive right, hoping to diffuse opposition. As a result, the seemingly benign term of reproductive health was highly contested at Cairo. The Vatican and conservative governments entered reservations to the ICPD's definition of reproductive health on the grounds that it "would seem to assert that abortion services belong within primary health care as a method of choice" (cited in Johnson 1995, 203). That these organisations and individuals were unhappy with the conference's outcomes was unsurprising; they had been dissatisfied with the outcomes of earlier UN Population conferences. The disquiet of demographers was less predictable.

While they do not deny women access to the full range of reproductive health services, a number of demographers and populationists have taken issue with ICPD's focus on reproductive health programs, which they see as competing for declining family planning funds. Demographer Jack Caldwell disapproved of the 'micro' approach, with

its emphasis on the individual, rejection of numerical targets and lack of concern about the impacts of population growth. He argued that the inclusion of health, educational and employment objectives makes population policies unworkable. He believed that conference participants had underrated the difficulties of maintaining financial and political support for population programs in Northern electorates, arguing for “an emphasis on government leadership in convincing the population that they will be better off with smaller families” (Caldwell 1996, 72). Harkavy expressed the concerns of the population establishment.

If population concerns were to become just one of several elements of women’s reproductive health, I fear that Third World ministries of finance, which typically give low priority to women’s health - the rhetoric of Cairo notwithstanding - are not likely to allocate the magnitude of funds needed to achieve a stable world population of 7.27 billion by 2015, or 8.5 billion by 2025. I fear too, that the reproductive health movement, if it succeeds in driving out demographic concerns in funding agencies, will further dampen the momentum of the population movement. (Harkavy 1997, 200)

Caldwell’s and Harkavy’s concerns that funding for reproductive health programs might be difficult to find were prescient, as discussed in Chapter four. However, family planning and straightforward population control programs are just as strapped for cash. At the time of ICPD the rights and health discourses seemed appropriate, and feminists were hopeful that the funding trends evident in the early 1990s would continue. Generous funding organisations like the Ford and Macarthur Foundations and the Population Institute had begun to turn away from population programs towards a focus on reproductive health prior to ICPD, and the ICPD focus reflects this (Harkavy 1997).

Dissent over whether reproductive health should be the primary goal of population programs highlights the fracture lines of the Common Ground alliance. Harkavy believes that the ICPD revealed the faultlines in the population movement, which he characterises as being torn between two intellectual and political forces. The first is the international women’s health movement goal of improving women’s reproductive health. While empowerment, human rights, education and women’s independence are likely to lead to lower fertility, “these objectives are pursued for the sake of women’s well-being, not as a means of reducing population growth” (Harkavy 1997, 198). The second force is the neo-Malthusian population movement which aims “to enhance economic development and to enhance family welfare through family planning. ... The long-standing concern for economic development merges with environmental considerations under the banner of ‘sustainable development,’ for which containment

of population growth is a *sine qua non*” (Harkavy 1997, 198). For this group, reproductive health is the means to the end of fertility reduction, while for the international women’s health movement, family planning is just one ingredient of comprehensive reproductive health services.

The tension between the two streams in the Common Ground alliance was evident in the run-up to Cairo. In 1993, Wirth revealed his membership of the demographic camp by announcing the Clinton Administration’s intention to “aggressively re-enter the population battle to try to level off the world’s population” (Harkavy 1997, 198). A year later, he was emphasising the need for high quality family planning and reproductive health services, access to safe abortion and the need to enhance the status of women. Harkavy, a self-declared populationist, experienced the successes proclaimed by Sadik at the ICPD as a defeat.

More significant than the abortion debate was the victory of the forces of women’s empowerment at Cairo. Stabilization of population growth was to be achieved through enhanced reproductive health care and by enabling women to have the right and means to decide the number of children they will have and when they will have them. (Harkavy 1997, 200)

Nonetheless, he feels partly compensated by the inclusion in the POA of the objective of stabilising population growth. While discussion and arguments revolved around reproductive rights and health, neo-Malthusianism was quietly endorsed in the POA, where it appeared as a component of sustainable development in the Preamble.

Intensified efforts are needed in the coming 5, 10 and 20 years, in a range of population and development activities, bearing in mind the crucial contribution that early stabilization of the world population would make towards the achievement of sustainable development. (UN 1994, 1.11)

The objective also appears twice in Chapter III on sustainable development, and twice in Chapter VI on reproductive rights, health and family planning. Singh claims that the ICPD went further than any previous conference in its focus on stabilisation of world population.

By putting forward the case for rapid demographic transition and eventual stabilization of the world population, Cairo goes much further than Bucharest and Mexico in dealing with issues related to population growth. (Singh 1998, 85)

Clearly, neo-Malthusianism objectives underlie the ICPD’s reproductive rights approach. Reproductive rights and reproductive health were endorsed by neo-Malthusians because they made their agenda more acceptable in a decade when the

main themes were human rights, women's empowerment and sustainable development. The neo-Malthusian approach has proved to be resilient, since it is embedded in the dominant international political economy as Chapter four of the thesis explores.

2.8 The ICPD's limited view of 'population'

While the POA's focus on the micro issues of reproductive rights and reproductive health was seen by many observers as a change in approach to population issues, its approach to the macro issues of global political economy and development had been set at UNCED. The POA endorsed a model of sustainable development based on 'sustained economic growth' which would stifle the changes it endorsed in its micro agenda. Furthermore, its focus on population growth and fertility obscured a number of demographic issues which were already coming to the fore in global population politics in the 1990s.⁵⁶ In this section I discuss the issues which were given little detailed attention by those who drafted the POA and by the Common Ground alliance and other NGOs.

2.8.1. Abortion as a key reproductive right

The focus of the conference on population growth and its emphasis on reproductive rights and health led to a preoccupation with family planning services and information. Within this framework, it is difficult to avoid the topic of induced abortion. Indeed, the legalisation of abortion and provision of safe services is a key objective of the international women's health movement. Nonetheless, due to opposition from the Holy See and a number of governments, the draft POA went to Cairo with every reference to the topic bracketed, and many days were spent discussing the issue. In this section, I consider the final text decided by the conference, to assess whether the final wording of the POA reflected, after all, an endorsement of this key reproductive right.

⁵⁶ Population growth does not depend on fertility (number of births) alone; it is also influenced by increased longevity of those already alive. However, as at the ICPD, conversations about population growth usually focus on fertility, which locates 'the problem' in countries with high fertility rates, even though life expectation may be low. The longer lives of most of the population in high income countries is rarely given equivalent attention, although fewer affluent people consuming goods and impacting on the environment have proportionately greater impact than a larger number of poor people who live shorter lives. This issue is explored in more detail in Chapter five of the thesis, but little is to be found in demographic or other literatures on this topic.

Despite the central role of abortion in western women's campaigns for reproductive rights, the final POA does not propose its legalisation. Its high rate of occurrence is acknowledged: "[a]t present, approximately ninety per cent of the countries of the world, representing ninety-six per cent of the world population, have policies that permit abortion under varying legal conditions to save the life of a woman. However, a significant proportion of the abortions carried out are self-induced or otherwise unsafe, leading to a large fraction of maternal deaths or to permanent injury to the women involved" (UN 1994, 8.19). ICPD's main message on abortion is that governments should do everything they can to reduce the need for it.

In no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning. All Governments and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are urged to strengthen their commitment to women's health, to deal with the health impact of unsafe abortion as a major public health concern and to reduce the recourse to abortion through expanded and improved family-planning services. Prevention of unwanted pregnancies must always be given the highest priority and every attempt should be made to eliminate the need for abortion. (UN 1994 8.25)

Elsewhere in the POA, recommendations about abortion include the following: ensuring that where it is legal, it is safe; providing quality services to deal with post-abortion complications; and counselling to prevent repeat abortions. The widespread practice of aborting female fetuses in societies where sons are preferred is discouraged by urging "investments in the girl child's health, nutrition and education, from infancy through adolescence"(UN 1994, 4.15). Since, in the former Soviet Union, women had few options besides abortion, Eastern European governments are asked to "give higher priority to reproductive health services, including a comprehensive range of contraceptive means, and ... [to] address their current reliance on abortion for fertility regulation by meeting the need of women in those countries for better information and more choices on an urgent basis" (UN 1994, 7.12). Adolescents' sexual and reproductive health issues are listed as "unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS" (UN 1994, 7.44 -a).

This language is far weaker than feminists wanted. It was obvious by the time of the Third PrepCom, held in New York in April 1994, that the combined forces of the moral right posed a formidable challenge to the international women's health movement's plans to use the ICPD in its campaign to improve women's access to safe abortion. Abortion is an iconic issue for the moral right, which invokes 'foetal rights' against women's right to terminate a pregnancy. Placing abortion in a reproductive health

context rather than a rights framework, made reproductive health a more controversial issue than reproductive rights.

Norwegian Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, tackled the issue head-on.

Sometimes religion is a major obstacle. This happens when family planning is made a moral issue. But morality cannot only be a question of controlling sexuality and protecting unborn life. Morality is also a question of giving individuals the opportunity of choice, of suppressing coercion of all kinds and abolishing the criminalization of individual tragedy. Morality becomes hypocrisy if it means accepting mothers' suffering or dying in connection with unwanted pregnancies and illegal abortions, and unwanted children living in misery. ... A conference of this status and importance should not accept attempts to distort facts or neglect the agony to millions of women who are risking their lives and health. I simply refuse to believe that the stalemate reached over this crucial question will be allowed to block a serious and forward-looking outcome of the Cairo conference - hopefully based on full consensus and adopted in good faith. (Brundtland, opening statement, cited in Johnson 1995, 90)

The influence of the moral right on the United States Government came to an end with the election of Clinton. No longer able to rely upon the United States government to push its agenda globally, the Holy See (sometimes referred to as the Vatican in this thesis), a Non-member State Permanent Observer at the UN, actively sought and gained the support of Islamist leaders. The combined electoral strength held by Islamist and 'pro-life' Catholics and supporters in the United States was an effective weapon in moderating the United States delegation's approach to abortion at Cairo. The statement produced by the American Muslim Council and the Archbishop of Baltimore four days before the ICPD provides a succinct summary of the moral right's agenda. It states that the alliance was based on abhorrence of abortion and 'false individualism', the desire to restrict the concept of 'family' to husband and wife and offspring, and opposition to providing information and reproductive health services to adolescents. Underlying these 'values' is the desire to retain the *status quo* of their religions' approaches to women. "The particular gifts of women as teachers of the faith, bestowers of values, imparters of wisdom, leaders of projects and officeholders have sustained our two traditions from their origins" (Cheema & Keeler 1995, 195). The reproductive labour of women is claimed as the property of religious institutions; its requisition for other agendas, including women's own, is seen as a material as well as a symbolic threat.

The religious alliance stalled discussion at Cairo for nearly a week, provided the media with a conflict to report and caused the United States delegation to backtrack on its

approach to abortion.⁵⁷ Vice President Al Gore announced that he would amend his country's position statement document to remove reference to women's right to abortion. Timothy Wirth discarded the term "abortion rights" in favour of "access to the full range of reproductive health care services" (Stanley 1995, 83).

Allowing an observer delegation to take centre-stage at a conference for states may have been politically strategic for the United States and other Northern states.⁵⁸ With the focus on conflict over reproductive rights, the failure of northern states and international financial institutions to assist in the alleviation of poverty in the South was sidelined, as Stafford (1994) points out.

Rather than letting the Pope offer himself up as a sacrificial lamb at Cairo, there is a substantial body of opinion which says that he is being used as a stool pigeon by western governments whose tiny - and shrinking - aid budgets fail to tackle the real cause of population growth in Africa, namely poverty. And he has become the punchbag for western consumers reluctant to accept that their desire for mahogany toilet seats has a much more profound impact on the Brazilian rain forests than the Catholic family in the slums of Rio with six children. (Stafford 1994)

Despite compromise by the proponents of legal safe abortion, the language which emerged was too strong for governments with morally conservative views and the Holy See, who entered reservations on every reference to reproductive health in the POA. Despite the intense frustration of pro-choice delegates and NGOs during the week-long assault of the moral right, there was no rolling back of the legality of abortion except for the insistence that it be made safe. This was a better outcome than might be gained from a shallow reading of newspaper headlines and indicates the relative strength of the international women's health movement and the population establishment.⁵⁹

2.8.2 The reproductive rights of adolescents

The moral right also waged a strong attack at the ICPD against the extension of information and services to assist young people to determine their sexual and reproductive lives. The Common Ground alliance campaigned strongly on these issues. It was a particular concern of the population establishment since as Secretary General

⁵⁷ See Neidell 1998 for an analysis of coverage of ICPD in the New York Times.

⁵⁸ See Copelon and Petchesky 1994, 348 for a similar view.

⁵⁹ See, for instance, Canberra Times 8.9.1994: For many women, it looks like a hijack (AP 1994).

of IPPF, Halfdan Mahler, pointed out, the reproductive activities of the 500 million young people between the ages of fifteen and nineteen worldwide will provide the population momentum to keep global population growing for another fifty years. This cohort experiences a high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancies, abortions and high maternal mortality rate, including HIV/AIDS. Although many governments wanted the POA to propose specific government actions targeted at young people, the Holy See and a small number of governments opposed this on the grounds that it threatened the authority of parents.

Nonetheless, after 'women', 'adolescents', 'youth', the 'girl child' and 'children' are the groups most often mentioned in the POA. In particular, it acknowledges adolescents' vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases and girls' lack of power in sexual relationships. The broad needs of youth are recognised in a number of sections.

Countries should take effective steps to address the neglect, as well as all types of exploitation and abuse, of children, adolescents and youth, such as abduction, rape and incest, pornography, trafficking, abandonment and prostitution. In particular, countries should take appropriate action to eliminate sexual abuse of children both within and outside their borders. (UN 1994, 6.9)

Gender is taken into account in most of the sections on adolescents. Girls and boys are understood to have distinct needs. The improvement of educational opportunities, particularly for girls, is strongly recommended.

Young people are not considered in international conventions: adolescents are excluded from the full range of human rights law, except as subjects of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adolescents' voices do not inform the POA as women's voices do. There was no expert roundtable on adolescents prior to ICPD, as there was on women. Nonetheless, the draft language of the POA asserted young people's right to a degree of bodily autonomy. This concept was dogmatically opposed by the Holy See delegates, who opposed the intervention by the State in this aspect of the parent-child relationship. This situation reflects the lack of voice given to young people at international fora, and their reliance upon others to promote their needs and rights.⁶⁰ The moral right considers parental control of adolescents' sexual and reproductive lives as a marker of family values, as it considers denying women access to abortion to be a marker in its

⁶⁰ This was recognised in the year of ICPD + 5 and a young people's conference was held prior to The Hague Forum in 1999.

opposition to women's rights. It has intensified its fight against sexual and reproductive rights for adolescents at every forum since 1994, indicating its lack of understanding of the lives of young people in many countries of the world.

2.8.3 Migration

Migration is a demographic issue of increasing relevance since the movement of people parallels the movement of investment and trade in goods and services across the globalised world.⁶¹ The topic was addressed in two chapters in the ICPD POA: Chapter IX, Population Distribution, Urbanization and Internal Migration and Chapter X, International Migration. Chapter IX focuses on rural to urban migration "although rural-rural and urban-urban migration are in fact the dominant forms of spatial mobility in many countries". The Programme presents all the reasons for increasing urbanisation - loss of resources for subsistence, local conflict, as well as positive aspects of seeking education and employment - in a positive light as an inevitable aspect of the development process: "[t]he process of urbanization is an intrinsic dimension of economic and social development and, in consequence, both developed and developing countries are going through the process of shifting from predominantly rural to predominantly urban societies" (UN 1994, 9.1). Development-related migration is described as a "rational and dynamic effort to seek new opportunities in life". Negative factors are recognised: "migration is also prompted by push factors, such as inequitable allocation of development resources, adoption of inappropriate technologies and lack of access to available land" (UN 1994, 9.1) but they are lost in the assumption that development inevitably increases urbanisation.

A section of Chapter IX is devoted to internal displacement. "Because there is no single definition of internally displaced persons, estimates of their number vary, as do the causes of their migration" (UN 1994, 9.19). Governments are urged to provide "adequate protection and assistance to persons displaced within their country, particularly women, children and the elderly, who are the most vulnerable, and to find solutions to the root causes of their displacement in view of preventing it and, when appropriate, to facilitate return or resettlement". They are also requested "to put an end to all forms of forced migration, including 'ethnic cleansing'" (9.20). These are

⁶¹ See Castles 1999.

sensitive topics for governments of countries with high numbers of displaced people; they gave internal migration little attention, despite recognition that internal displacement is the precursor to “outflows of refugees and externally displaced persons” (UN 1994, 9.19).

Chapter X addresses international migration, which was a contentious issue between North and South. Discussion focused on bracketed text relating to the rights of minorities and indigenous people, the right of family reunification and the human rights of documented and undocumented migrants. Compromise text was found for all issues except family reunification, where disagreement focused on the definition of ‘family’ and the rights of migrants to bring family members into their country of work. The International Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, adopted by the UN’s General Assembly in 1990, had not gained sufficient numbers for implementation. Oil-producing Middle Eastern countries which host millions of expatriate workers joined western governments in opposing language endorsing the right to family reunification, which they feared might extend to cousins and in-laws. The Conference accepted compromise text which called on governments to recognize “the vital importance of family reunification and promote its unification into their national legislation ... [for] families of documented migrants” (UN 1994, 10.12). The recommendation that a global conference on international migration and development be held at a later date has not yet been implemented.

The POA stresses the growing urgency of refugee-related issues, noting that in the eight years up to 1993 the number of people seeking asylum outside their home countries had doubled to 19 million. Paragraph 10.15 recognises “the right of every nation State to decide who can enter and stay in its territory and under what conditions” but predicts that the number of undocumented migrants will rise. Governments of origin are urged to reduce the causes of displacement and receiving countries are requested to ensure the safety of asylum seekers and provide “adequate accommodation, education, health services, including family planning, and other necessary social services” (10.25) and “access to a fair hearing and ... the expeditious processing of asylum requests, ensuring that guidelines and procedures for the determination of refugee status are sensitive to the particular situation of women” (10.27). The vulnerability and needs of girls and women refugees and asylum seekers are recognised: “[a]ll necessary measures should be taken to ensure the physical

protection of refugees - in particular, that of refugee women and refugee children - especially against exploitation, abuse and all forms of violence” (10.24).

The Common Ground alliance did not address migration-related issues, although the topic preoccupies the population establishment and environmental movements in the United States (Hartman 2000). In developed countries, immigration is now the major means of compensating for low fertility rates, but it is a demographic issue too politically sensitive to address at conferences on population to date. The displacement of people due to inequitable development, intra-state and interstate conflict and ecological devastation is likely to be a source of tension within and between countries for the foreseeable future, but, unlike low fertility and ageing (UNPD 2000), it has not been given an international forum. Migration has complex roots and is unlikely to be reduced by stabilising population growth in countries with high numbers of emigrants or by increasing women’s empowerment and access to reproductive rights. The POA’s proposals ignore global political and economic factors which render such measures ineffectual, as Chapter four of the thesis explores.

2.8.4 Ageing populations/low fertility rates in the North

At the end of the twentieth century, the governments of developed countries are becoming increasingly concerned about their declining fertility rates. These trends were evident in 1994, yet the ICPD POA focuses on high, rather than low, fertility rates. Nonetheless, the POA acknowledges that “fundamental changes in the age structure of the population of most societies” are occurring. The ageing of populations is considered “both an opportunity and a challenge to all societies” (6.16). The Programme emphasises increasing the self-reliance of elderly people, and strengthening “formal and informal support systems and safety nets” for them (6.20). The elderly are represented as a vulnerable group, requiring the support of family members and governments.

There is no recommendation to empower elderly people; women’s empowerment, it is implied, is to end at menopause. While it is recognised that women will constitute the greater proportion of the aged population in any country, there is no acknowledgement of their role as care-givers and their own needs for care. Consequently, there are no proposals for reducing their workload or increasing support for them. Indeed, their

skills and experience are to be available to society: their reproductive work, in the broad sense, is to continue.

Although old age removes women (but not men) from the reproductive age group, their needs for reproductive health services are not diminished; indeed, poor women who live beyond the reproductive years are likely to need special attention, regardless of how many children they have borne. Further, while elderly women's reproductive lives may be over, their sexual lives may continue. The neglect of their sexual rights indicates a blindness among the conference organisers and NGOs to issues related to the real lives of the elderly. Clearly, this was a group which, like the young, was not adequately consulted.

The focus of feminists on reproductive rights and reproductive health limited the attention that they, like the POA, paid to women outside childbearing age. Much of the population establishment, as noted earlier, prefers to focus on population momentum and persistent high fertility in some countries rather than acknowledge that fertility is declining in much of the world. A decade later, the aged constitute a new 'problem' for the governments of developed, and an increasing number of developing, countries.⁶² Sections of the demographic community have taken up this issue as a topic of study, but as Lutz (2003) notes they occupy different research communities to the high fertility experts.⁶³

2.8.5 Morbidity and mortality

In contrast to its focus on fertility, the ICPD gave little attention to mortality. It was not a contentious issue, although Chapter VIII, Health, Morbidity and Mortality, notes that the targets to reduce mortality set by the World Population Plan of Action have not been met. "There remain entire national populations and sizeable population groups

⁶² In some countries, discrimination against aged women is blatant. Here is an example from Japan: "Ishihara Shintaro, the Governor of Tokyo, made the following comment in November 2001 in a weekly women's magazine with a circulation of more than 300,000: 'He [translator's note: a Tokyo University professor whom Ishihara is misquoting] says it's both wasteful and sinful for women to live beyond menopause, because while men can father children into their 80s or 90s, women lose their reproductive powers after menopause, yet even so they go on living until the age of Kin-san and Gin-san [translator's note: famous Japanese women over 100 years old]. He says such useless human beings are extremely harmful to the whole planet. I really think he's on to something here, although I can't say such things myself in my capacity as a politician (laughter)'" (Motoyama 2003).

⁶³ See McDonald 2000, 2002.

within many countries that are still subject to very high rates of morbidity and mortality. Differences linked to socio-economic status or ethnicity are often substantial” (UN 1994, 8.1).

While the Conference recognised that structural adjustment programs contribute to high mortality and morbidity rates, it was accepted that they are essential for “sustained economic growth”.

Moreover, large segments of many populations continue to lack access to clean water and sanitation facilities, are forced to live in congested conditions and lack adequate nutrition. Large numbers of people remain at continued risk of infectious, parasitic and water-borne diseases, such as tuberculosis, malaria and schistosomiasis. ... The impact of reductions in expenditures for health and other social services which have taken place in many countries as a result of public-sector retrenchment, misallocation of available health resources, structural adjustment and the transition to market economies has pre-empted significant changes in lifestyles, livelihoods and consumption patterns and is also a factor in increasing morbidity and mortality. Although economic reforms are essential to sustained economic growth, it is equally essential that the design and implementation of structural adjustment programmes incorporate the social dimension. (UN 1994, 8.1)

While the POA acknowledges that there are macroeconomic constraints on health policy, all its recommendations are aimed at governments. It is paradoxical, in the context of structural adjustment programs, to ask governments to “reform ... the health sector and health policy, including the rational allocation of resources ... in order to achieve the stated objectives” or to proclaim that “[a]ll Governments should examine ways to maximize the cost-effectiveness of health programmes in order to achieve increased life expectancy, reduce morbidity and mortality and ensure access to basic health-care services for all people” (8.11).

The POA points out that girls are disproportionately represented amongst deaths in infancy and early childhood but does not challenge the entrenched attitudes which value girls and women less than boys and men in this chapter. The POA sets a number of targets for governments (UN 1994, 8.16) but fails to acknowledge that, with declining expenditures on public health, these are unlikely to be achieved. The development context of maternal and infant mortality is not explored; for instance, there are no recommendations to address the lack of basic sanitation and clean reliable water supplies, improvements which dramatically improved the health of western populations.

HIV/AIDS is addressed in the chapter on health. By 1994 the disease's impact on the developing world was evident, and the POA's prediction of 30 million people infected by 2000 proved to be accurate. The POA emphasises socio-economic factors and proposes that information about prevention and condoms be made widely available. The international community is asked to provide the resources to enable the UN to deliver integrated programs.

While the POA acknowledges that women are highly vulnerable to the disease, there is little attempt to address the power imbalances many women confront in their sexual relationships with men. There is a fleeting reference in the first objective: "to increase awareness of the disastrous consequences of HIV infection and AIDS and associated fatal diseases, at the individual, community and national levels, and of the ways of preventing it; to address the social, economic, gender and racial inequities that increase vulnerability to the disease" (UN 1994, 8.29 - a). HIV/AIDS, like unintended pregnancy, links sexuality and reproduction, a topic previous conferences on population avoided. If ever there was a case for women's empowerment, HIV/AIDS provides it.

If you want to save Africa, you must save the African woman first. It is they who care for the young, the old, the sick and dying. It is they who nurture social networks that help societies share burdens. (Annan at Summit of Franco-African leaders, cited in Agence France 2003)

It also provides a powerful basis for the feminist health movement to insist that governments introduce strategies to alter the power relationships between men and women. HIV/AIDS was not, however, a major focus of the Common Ground campaign or the lobbying of the international women's health movement.

2.9 Conclusion

The seven issues listed above are major omissions from a document about population. Already evident as global concerns in 1994, it could be expected that a conference concerned with demographic trends would have dealt with the range of issues likely to become major concerns in the twenty years the POA was expected to cover. These exclusions point to one of the major difficulties of the POA and a reason why it was not able to 'change the world'. At the ICPD, 'population' as 'demography' was actually about fertility. 'Population' as 'people' was about women's reproducing bodies. This theme is explored further in Chapter five.

Indeed, the ICPD POA is really two documents; the first, more transformative document presents a micro agenda while the second presents a macro agenda modelled on the neoliberal global political economy. The micro agenda focuses on the problem of fertility, to be solved through women's empowerment, reproductive rights and reproductive health, but ignores a wide range of issues which impact on women in their reproductive years as well as every other section of the population. The macro agenda, as I argue in Chapters four and five, fails to propose changes in the economic and political conditions to allow even this narrow objective to be achieved.

Feminists paid for the reproductive rights and health focus of the POA with the neo-Malthusian sub-text which underlies it and the population establishment paid for the population stabilisation objective by accepting a broadening of reproductive health services beyond family planning. Clarity with regard to the key concepts of reproductive rights, reproductive health and women's empowerment as they might operate in the wider global context was never reached. In Chapter three of the thesis, I explore these debates to assess whether these terms are durable enough to overcome the increasing opposition that they face from the moral right in the contemporary global political environment.

Chapter three The micro agenda II: Contesting the reproductive body

When I encountered the phrase “reproductive rights/freedom” in English for the first time, my attempt at its Japanese translation was “my body is my own.” I believe that it is the very first step to living a decent life, to know that no one else can control or rule my body. (Yumiko Ohashi 2001)

“Don’t you think,” the Pontiff interjected, “that the irresponsible behaviour of men is caused by women?” (Pope John Paul II to Nafis Sadik 1994 reported by Moorhead 1996)

3.1 Overview

Chapter three critically examines the three concepts - empowerment, reproductive rights and reproductive health - that are central to the POA and its transformative potential. I do this by exploring debates about the concepts through the writings and statements prepared by feminists in the run-up to the ICPD to develop a critique. While feminists have differences about the concepts, particularly reproductive rights, the moral right is firmly opposed to both reproductive rights and reproductive health. Consequently, at the ICPD, the World Conference on Women and their five year reviews, the nuanced discussions of feminists were abandoned in the need to defend the ICPD and Beijing language against an increasingly well-organised and influential morally conservative lobby of states and NGOs led by the Vatican.

The influence of moral conservatives In the United States and the UN has been steadily growing and offers the most visible impediment to the ICPD POA’s ability to ‘change the world’. As Chapter three shows by a detailed description of the activities of the moral right at ICPD + 5 and Beijing + 5, their main aim is to make sure that this does not happen. Although they have so far not succeeded in forcing a retreat from the Cairo and Beijing language, they have certainly prevented it going forward. Consequently, Chapter three concludes by reassessing the status of women’s reproductive bodies in global politics at the turn of the century and the usefulness of a rights framework to achieve the quantum leap needed to improve it.

3.2 Empowerment and power

As noted in Chapter one, ‘population’ in the International Relations discipline is directly related to balance of power debates. Power is seen to lie with governments and

other global actors, which in recent decades has been broadened to include multilateral institutions and organisations, financial institutions and corporations. The demographic reality that eighty per cent of global population is situated in the South suggests the potential for a major shift in power from the North, where mainstream Western foreign policy advisers believe it is appropriately placed. Participants in debates about population have shared this understanding of power and directed their campaigns accordingly.

Foregrounding reproductive politics in debates about population, however, makes visible an unfamiliar location of power: the reproductive decision-making of women. In the South, women's reproductive acts are blamed for the problem of 'too many' people; in the North, their failure to reproduce is seen as the cause of the 'birth dearth'. Women, South and North, act within social, political and economic constraints and might make different reproductive decisions if these were transformed. Conversely, if women had the power to determine their reproductive lives, the impacts would be felt at economic, social and political levels. For these reasons, 'women's empowerment' has particular resonance in population and reproductive politics, and its centrality to the ICPD POA could have signalled significant progress for Southern feminists' campaigns. In section 3.2, I explore this potential and the obstacles to its achievement, both of which are signalled within the Cairo document.

3.2.1 Empowerment in development and population debates

The concept of 'empowerment' emerged in alternative development discourses in the 1980s, and was first specifically applied to women in the international domain at the Nairobi Women's Conference in 1985. Southern women have made women's empowerment an objective and method of development (Sen and Grown 1985). The term is used frequently in discourses about development but, as in the POA, it is usually associated with other objectives.

By contrast, instrumentalist forms of advocacy which combine the argument for gender equality/women's empowerment with demonstrations of a broad set of desirable multiplier effects offer policy makers the possibility of achieving familiar and approved goals, albeit by unfamiliar means. (Kabeer 1999, 436)

The partitioning of the potentially transformative process of empowerment in the policy documents of institutions like the World Bank takes it far from the objectives of DAWN and other feminist organisations.

While the rhetoric of 'empowerment' now abounds nearly everywhere among development specialists and was incorporated into the language of the ICPD POA (thanks to feminist initiatives), its meanings in mainstream contexts have usually been diluted to become indistinguishable from 'raising women's status' through piecemeal reforms. (Petchesky 2000c, 22)

Stripped of its transformative potential, the word 'empowerment' loses value for feminist and development campaigners. The concept, however, cannot be discarded, since it is the only one of the three Cairo micro concepts which explicitly refers to 'power'. A reorganisation of the power relationships in which women are enmeshed is essential for the achievement of the other important concepts: reproductive rights and reproductive health.

The use of 'empowerment' as a transformative concept can be traced to Freire's 'conscientization' approach to education. The root of 'empowerment' is revolutionary struggle.

The central problem is this: How can the oppressed ... participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? Only as they discover themselves to be 'hosts' of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy. ... Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one. ... [T]he solution of the contradiction is born in the labour which brings this new man into the world: no longer oppressor or oppressed, but man in the process of achieving freedom. (Freire 1972, 25)

This extract is interesting for three reasons. First, it indicates that 'empowerment' is a process of political change involving the overturning of existing power structures. This indicates how far the term 'empowerment' has moved from its original meaning of 'liberation'. Second, the objective of "the pedagogy of the oppressed" is freedom, a broad term which Freire does not define, but which, twenty-seven years later, Amartya Sen states to be the aim of development (A. Sen 1999).⁶⁴ The processes Freire is describing are 'political': "the oppressed, in order to become free ... need a theory of action" (Freire 1972, 150). Finally, while this passage is rich in reproductive imagery, Freire's book is written about 'man', indicating a lack of gender consciousness in early 'conscientization' activities. Feminist educators brought gender into the process and worked with women to build collective alternative visions where women named and challenged oppressive behaviours, developing strategies to confront and change them in households, communities and states.

⁶⁴ See Chapter four for an exploration of this theme.

As 'concientization' operates through dialogue, feminists argue that women's empowerment is best achieved through participation in groups, especially in organisations run by, with and for women (Sen and Grown 1985, 13). Many of these organisations are small and operate at the local level, where they are invisible to most students of international politics. Some larger organisations, like India's Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, are cited as examples of development approaches which empower women. Naila Kabeer (1994) notes that these organisations do not express the transformative potential of early feminist conceptions of empowerment because they did not emerge from the efforts of poor women, but were established by others on their behalf. Reliance on funds from other agencies constrains their ability to act politically and to challenge class and gender hierarchies. Further, the need for financial accountability limits their ability to take empowerment to the ultimate goal of enabling the disempowered to act "collectively in their own practical and strategic interests" (Kabeer 1994, 250).

Like liberation, 'empowerment' is "an objective and a result, a process and an impact" (Griffin 1999, 3). Batliwala (1994) provides a definition which DAWN and other feminist organisations endorse.

Empowerment is thus both a process and the result of that process. Empowerment is manifested as a redistribution of power, whether between nations, classes, castes, races, genders, or individuals. The goals of women's empowerment are to challenge patriarchal ideology (male domination and women's subordination); to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality (the family, caste, class, religion, educational processes and institutions, the media, health practices and systems, laws and civil codes, political processes, development models and government institutions); and to enable poor women to gain access to, and control of, both material and informational resources. (Batliwala 1994, 130)

These are broad aims. Grass roots women usually have more specific objectives; the Senegalese group TOSTAN links literacy to life skills; after completing their training, members were successful in having female genital mutilation banned in their village (Senegalese researchers 1998). The North Sumatra Peasant Women set up their Union to force designers of agricultural programs to notice them (Core group of North Sumatra Peasant Union 1999). Women established the neighbourhood kitchens in Lima to feed people affected by the poverty which followed structural adjustment programs in the 1980s; these kitchens now form the hub of the women's movement (Lind 1997). Panda's work in Orissa in India shows that local self-help groups, working together,

can broaden their vision from that of “frog in the well” to analysing government policies which affect them negatively and advocating for pro-poor and pro-people policies and actions (Panda 2000).

These examples suggest that women’s empowerment programs work best when devised by women in response to the needs they identify. They should provide women with independent incomes and reduce their workload or, at least, not increase it.⁶⁵ The dispersed forms of power employed by the marginalised are often not visible to Northern NGOS and development institutions, which may identify other needs and strategies to respond to them which exacerbate the problems they failed to identify. Such projects are likely to be greeted with resistance through non-compliance, subversion, deliberate miscomprehension and a multitude of other forms available to the oppressed and disbanded when the implementing agency departs (Townsend *et al* 1999, 34).⁶⁶

As noted earlier, ‘empowerment’ has become a jargon word in development discourses, where it loses much of its transformative potential. It remains closest to Batliwala’s definition in Gender and Development (GAD) approaches. GAD evolved from Women in Development (WID) approaches as feminists within and outside development institutions observed that the small projects typical of WID approaches failed to challenge embedded structures which perpetuate women’s oppression. As Kabeer (1994, 65) observes, “a focus solely on women tended to imply that the problem - and hence the solution - could be confined to women”.

When we all talk about the change happening or what needs to happen, one has to consider several factors. Empowering women is just not enough, it is rather incomplete, because the men haven’t been taught, how to deal with the “empowered woman”. They won’t know what it was, if one bit them on the leg. (shamila shaligram 2000, punctuation etc in original)

Although many mainstream institutions have adopted the rhetoric of GAD, most use a combination of ‘welfare’ and ‘efficiency’ approaches to women in development. The welfare approach regards women primarily as child-bearers and domestic workers in

⁶⁵ There is a growing literature documenting examples of women’s activism to increase empowerment at the local level; for a sample, see articles in Basu 1995 and Dean 1998.

⁶⁶ See Foucault for an extended discussion of this form of power (1980).

their households, and favours projects which increase their skills in these reproductive functions. Interventions are directed to women in their social role as mothers, through maternity and infant welfare programs.⁶⁷ The 'efficiency' approach sees women as economic agents and supports programs to increase their earning power but tends to ignore their domestic and community responsibilities.

The World Bank has adopted the language of empowerment, although its economic orientation favours an efficiency approach to women. As the Bank uses the term, 'empowerment' is a catch-all term for the characteristics of the 'modernised' woman: educated, employed in the market economy, involved in credit schemes, setting up small enterprises and delaying marriage and childbirth while ensuring that existing children are well-nourished and educated. Women's empowerment, when used in this sense, is harnessed to the achievement of broader social, political and economic objectives, with impacts on women's lives a secondary consideration.

In GAD approaches, 'empowerment' begins with women's identification of their needs and participation in designing programs to answer them. The process is an educative one. DAWN believes that it is important to build "into any project for women's empowerment at community level an awareness of how their country's macroeconomic policy framework impacts on their daily lives and how this in turn is influenced by global trends. The methodologies for doing this must draw on those of feminist consciousness-raising, Freirian conscientization, and other methods of popular education and popular theatre" (Antrobus 1998, 75).

As articulated by Southern feminists, 'empowerment' describes an emancipatory process which challenges entrenched global structures. It is unlikely that a document which advocated this approach would be endorsed by many governments. As noted above, the POA's Chapter IV takes a cautious approach to empowerment, suggesting that it is good for women and for development; the addition of the adjective 'sustainable' suggests that the environment will benefit as well. But what sort of empowerment is this? The applied economic 'empowerment' approach - which usually

⁶⁷ Kabeer (1994, 85) used the term 'welfarism' to distinguish between 'welfare', which is a desirable aim of human activity and "the stigmatizing relations associated with the public provision of welfare goods, especially to the poor".

means the commodification of women's labour - has uneven impacts on women.⁶⁸ Carr, Chen and Jhabvala, examining women's economic empowerment in South Asia, observe that it is impossible to generalise about "what is good for women" since their lives vary from place to place. They conclude that "empowerment has to be understood in terms of concrete everyday experiences" (1996, 213). Economic growth, as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), counts only women's formal work, ignoring the many hours spent in reproductive labour which underpins much so-called productive work (Waring 1988). Projects which increase already heavy work loads do not empower women in the medium to long term.

Embedding women's empowerment in 'sustainable development' without problematising development limits the concept and strips it of transformative potential. It indicates that the POA's understanding of 'empowerment' has been developed without the full participation of Southern women. Goetz (1994) points out that the perspectives of developing world women are frequently overlooked in policy development, although western feminists may be consulted.⁶⁹ This is one explanation of the persistence of welfare and efficiency approaches, since they reflect many western women's understanding of Southern women's needs. The other is the dominance of liberal feminist approaches to women's empowerment, which focus on increasing women's equality with men. In the equality approach, access to fertility control and childcare is seen as important to reduce imbalances between men's and women's social roles and to free women to participate in the economic and political spheres. The notion of 'choice' – whether or not to have children and with whom, and between types of contraception and providers – is central to liberal feminist attitudes to reproduction. The liberal feminist approach is favoured by western governments and international financial institutions because it does not challenge dominant economic models or upset class hierarchies as socialist feminism does.⁷⁰ Nor does it aim to overturn patriarchy, as radical feminism does.⁷¹

⁶⁸ See Chapter four of this thesis for a development of this argument.

⁶⁹ See Mueller 1986 for a similar argument.

⁷⁰ See Eisenstein 1979 for an explanation of socialist feminism.

⁷¹ See Rowland and Klein 1996 for an explanation and history of radical feminism.

Although the 'empowerment' of the POA does not destabilise conceptions of economy and development, its centrality profoundly alters the terms of population and reproduction discourses. ICPD's POA tells countries that they "should act to empower women and should take steps to eliminate inequalities between men and women as soon as possible" (UN 1994, 4.4). A number of measures are listed which, if implemented, would enable women not only to take control of their reproductive lives, but also to participate fully in every sphere of life.

These interventions require broad social transformation as well as deep changes in gender relationships at the micro-level of the household, to avoid making women's juggling act with maternal, matrimonial, domestic, and community roles more burdensome.⁷² They also require change at the formal political level: democratic electoral systems which invite women's participation and the support of educated, politically-aware feminists and progressive men in parliaments. Accountable, active governments which work for women require well-resourced, active and independent women's organisations to tell them what women need and to make sure that they provide it. These organisations need skills and resources to work globally to strengthen and utilise the framework of human rights and international law, and to monitor compliance with international conventions.

Reproductive rights and health provide a topic with rich potential for a 'conscientization' approach for women's empowerment. Shapiro, one of the authors of the famous Our Bodies, Ourselves (OBOS) manual for Northern American women (Boston Women's Health Collective 1985), worked with Latin American women to produce a version of the text that answered their needs.⁷³

In applying a social developmental approach to the cultural adaptation of OBOS, the work of Paolo Freire and colleagues in participatory education was especially useful. Based on critical theory and cultural studies, participatory pedagogy emphasizes that learning begins with the student's knowledge of her world derived from direct personal experience. Effective teaching transmits knowledge through collaborative processes of mutually respectful dialogue, highlighting ethical dimensions of relationships and communities, consciousness of social injustice, and shared action toward personal and social change. Such a conceptual framework, which was consistent with the narrative

⁷² See Folbre 1983, 1988.

⁷³ Similar projects have been conducted in many countries; see for instance Farah 1991.

and political strategies embodied in OBOS, helped shape key decisions in the adaptation of [the Latin American version]. (Shapiro 2000)

This example indicates the potential of reproductive health programs to be a means of empowering women, not just by liberating them from unwanted pregnancies and poor health, but by involving them in the design and delivery of material and programs which answer their needs. This discussion indicates that ‘empowered’ women’s NGOs play an essential role at the grass roots level, where government interventions often fail to reach, and in pressuring governments and other institutions to create the conditions which will further enhance women’s empowerment.

Empowerment in the ‘liberatory’ sense in which DAWN, Batliwala and Townsend use the term challenges power structures at every level, from the neighbourhood to the global. This was not what the governments who supported the ICPD POA had in mind. They were more interested in the assumption that women’s empowerment results in the “long-term success of population programmes” (UN 1994, 4.1) which, in the theme of the POA, means reduced fertility. Does this imply that a government with pronatal demographic objectives should introduce policies which disempower women? McDonald’s work (2000, 2002) on low fertility societies suggests that women’s empowerment and gender equality are essential to solving this ‘problem’ as well. Nonetheless, empowerment is a nebulous concept in debates about population and reproduction without the enhancement of the other micro-concepts highlighted by the POA, reproductive rights and health.

3.2.2 ‘Empowerment’ in the POA

The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important end in itself. In addition, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. (UN 1994, 4.1)

The first sentence of the fourth chapter of the ICPD POA encapsulates the overall aim of the broad international feminist movement. The ICPD provided the opportunity for significant progress towards that aim, by expanding international understanding of women’s reproductive rights and reproductive health through the vehicle of a flagship international conference on population and development. Had the first sentence been allowed to stand alone as the overarching principle of the chapter, it would have signalled a paradigm shift towards women’s right to determine the conditions and content of their own lives. The international community of states was not asked,

however, to endorse women's empowerment for its own sake; the concept was diluted by its connection to objectives connected to the economic and political agendas incorporated in the term 'sustainable development' (see Chapter five of this thesis). Consequently, this two-sentence excerpt captures the potential and disappointments of the ICPD POA for feminist global campaigns.

The lack of debate about 'empowerment' as a key concept in the POA indicates broad in-principle support for the term. The lack of contest is not surprising since its plasticity suits a variety of aims. At the micro level, defined as "personal power" (Antrobus 1989, 189, 203), it can be directly linked to reproductive decision making and personal reproductive health. Or, as Renate Klein asserts, in the parlance of populationists, personal empowerment may mean little more than choice between harmful contraceptives (see below). Attempts to calibrate women's empowerment throughout the decade, suggest that, in any terms, government's commitment to achieving it is primarily rhetorical (UNIFEM 2000).⁷⁴ Empowering women would lead to a fundamental transformation in the relations of power. This was not an outcome sought by the governments and institutions which agreed upon the ICPD's POA.

3.3 Reproductive rights

'Reproductive rights' is, on first appearance, a straight-forward concept with direct relevance to ICPD's program. The concept emerged from United States feminists' campaigns to make abortion legal in the 1970s and was adopted by the fourth International Women and Health Meeting in Amsterdam, 1984, as "adequate to the movement's political goals in relation to the betterment of women's reproductive lives across the world" (Correa 1997, 108). Even so, 'reproductive rights' is contested among feminists and strongly opposed by the moral right. In this sub-section, I outline the evolution of reproductive rights from a campaign slogan to a comprehensive statement integrating Southern feminists' concerns about the context of rights.

3.3.1 Redefining reproductive rights

The concept of reproductive rights, which has been a central plank of women's health and rights campaigns for several decades, has evolved from a focus on abortion rights

⁷⁴ Measurement of women's empowerment is, at best, an approximate venture (see Kabeer 1999)

to a broad definition which captures the entire agenda of the international women's health movement. The ICPD played an important catalysing role in the evolution of the concept. Two key texts in the process of redefining reproductive rights are examined here: the first (Correa and Petchesky 1994) was produced prior to ICPD in a collection which developed an intellectual framework for the international women's health movement agenda (Sen, Germain and Chen 1994). The second (Copelon and Petchesky 1995) appeared after ICPD in a collection of articles linking women's human rights with women's needs (Schuler 1995).⁷⁵ Below, I consider 'reproductive rights' through a reading of these and other feminists' writings, to present a picture of a concept which has evolved to answer criticisms and gain wide support, but which, nevertheless, has not been implemented by many governments which endorsed it at the ICPD. Despite the hard work of Petchesky and other authors to pin the concept down, critics from the right and the left cling to their own interpretation of reproductive rights and favour a definition which they can reject, as suits their own aims.

Petchesky has been working with the concept of reproductive rights since its earliest formulation. In early writings (1980, 1984) she considered the term to be inadequate and used the term 'reproductive freedom' to incorporate what she later refined as 'enabling conditions' (Petchesky 1995). She listed a number of problems with the 'rights' framework for achieving the transformative ends of the feminist movement. First, 'rights' is an individualistic concept, "inherently static and abstracted from social relations" (Petchesky 1980, 670). Reproduction, by contrast, is simultaneously social and individual, "operating at the core of social life, as well as within and upon women's bodies" (Petchesky 1984, 2). Further, the language of rights does not challenge the conditions which create the need for their articulation. "Rights are by definition claims staked within a given order of things. They are demands for access for oneself, or for 'no admittance' to others; but they do not challenge the social structure, the social relations of production and reproduction" (Petchesky 1984, 7). Second, Petchesky was concerned that making reproductive rights women-specific would reinforce the widely held view that reproductive activity is the special province of women. "[I]t is not inevitable that women, and not men, should bear the main consequences of unintended

⁷⁵ These articles built on earlier work of these authors and many other writers on the topic. See Dixon-Mueller 1993, Freeman and Isaacs 1993, and a large body of work by Petchesky, Correa and Sen.