AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO FERTILITY CHANGE

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In the main it is doubtless true that men are guided in their activities by reasons of utility, but their conceptions of utility differ widely. A.M. Hocart

This remark, a cautionary reminder to those who favour narrow economic explanations of fertility change, was made by the social anthropologist A.M. Hocart in 1909. More recently, Leesthaeghe and Surkyn (1988:2) made a similar observation, noting that

...the transmission or reordering of meaning-giving (ideational) goals...through agents of socialization and through the individual's search for meaning-giving beacons in life contributes to the specification of the content of what is understood under the blanket term 'utility'.

Both comments underscore the importance of considering cultural conceptions ('meaning-giving beacons') in explanations of demographic behaviour. Anthropologists who examine the constitution of meaning and its transformations, would seem to have a contribution to make in explaining this process.

Yet there are difficulties in integrating anthropological and demographic perspectives. One recent approach to the study of fertility change, which attempts to combine demographic research on fertility change with the specifics of anthropological explanation, has been termed micro-demographic analysis by demographers (Caldwell, Hill and Hull, 1988) and demographic anthropology by anthropologists (Macfarlane, 1978; Howell, 1986). However, while demographers and anthropologists may be interested in interdisciplinary approaches to events of mutual concern such as birth, marriage, and death, they have distinctive disciplinary perspectives—both theoretical and

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1 Utility in the economic sense refers to economists' wealth maximization hypothesis: that wealth maximization is the highest-order utility function (see Pollak and Watkins, 1993:480).

2 I use the term 'demographic anthropology' here as it would be used by anthropologists: the noun (the primary concern) 'anthropology' modified by the adjective 'demographic'. The term 'anthropological demography' is used by demographers for similar reasons, although in both cases these terms have particular implications for those within their disciplines: anthropological demography suggests qualitative, cultural approaches to demography; demographic anthropology suggests quantitative, often biological, approaches to anthropology. While I acknowledge these different disciplinary interpretations, I use the terms interchangeably in the following discussion.
methodological—on these topics which discourage collaborative work. For example, demographers often derive their conclusions from large-scale survey data and statistical analysis, focusing on isolating specific variables which can be statistically correlated, whereas anthropologists tend to support their own studies with detailed material acquired through personal, long-term field research, analysing particular phenomena within their broader cultural, social, political, and economic context. How to reconcile these differences in scale and in the evaluation of evidence is perhaps the most difficult question facing those interested in interdisciplinary approaches to these two fields today.

What follows is an attempt to formulate an anthropological approach which complements demographic issues research on fertility change that reflects my own perspective as a cultural anthropologist. Specifically, I suggest an ethnographic focus on culture as beliefs, practices, and things\(^3\) that not only structure individuals' and groups' sense of their world but also provide the means for individual strategies of reinterpretation. I also interpret culture as part of a continual process in which the reproduction of structure, represented by prevailing social institutions and moral values, coexists along with practice—reflected in the re-evaluation and reconstruction of these structures. This conception of culture, sometimes referred to as symbolic or interpretive anthropology, derives from the writings of sociologists such as Schütz (1970), Bourdieu (1977) and Elias (1978), and of anthropologists such as Beidelman (1986), Moore (1986), and Jackson (1989). For them, the pertinent questions are: 'What are the meanings and moral values associated with particular events, things, and practices?' and 'By what processes do these interpretations change in specific historical, political, and economic contexts?' These questions are important not only for clarifying what such general terms as 'Westernization' and 'development', often cited in explanations of fertility change, mean to people experiencing them,\(^4\) but also for addressing the concerns of those who argue that diffusionist explanations of fertility change do not adequately explain the process whereby local acceptance and incorporation of new ideas and practices occur in the first place (Kreager 1993).

However, before examining exactly how one might go about unravelling the basis of the meanings associated with particular practices and things and the processes by which they may change, I will discuss other recent anthropological approaches to demography, in order to emphasize the fact that demographic anthropology, as well as the concept, culture, has been differently interpreted within the field of anthropology itself (Handwerker 1986:10).

**Demographic Anthropology**

Anthropology is divided into several subdisciplines, the exact delineation depending on the particular histories of national schools of anthropology (American, British, etc.) from which they derive.\(^5\) In American anthropology, for example, departments are organized according to the 'four-field approach', which consists of socio-cultural, physical, linguistic, and archaeological anthropology. Moreover, within these subdisciplines, there is further specialization: for example socio-cultural anthropology includes those who focus on social structure, political organization, cultural ecology, and symbolic systems. To use the term anthropology is misleadingly general.

Embedded within these various anthropological subdisciplines are distinctive interpretations of culture which have important implications for demographic applications. Carter (1988:164) classifies these definitions into two groups: conceptions of culture as a set of overarching ideals and beliefs at the societal level, external to human action, and conceptions of culture as a set of ideals and beliefs which are actively engaged by individuals and internal to individual human action. Carter argues that culture is most usefully conceived as ideals and practices which inform human behaviour but are also shaped by human actions.

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3 The word 'culture' is from a Latin word, colere, which means to inhabit, cultivate and a range of human activities including ploughing, adorning the body, caring for and attending to friends and family, mirroring the gods, and upholding custom through the cultivation of correct moral and intellectual disciplines (Jackson, 1989:120). There are other anthropological interpretations of the word culture; for summaries of others in a somewhat chronological order, see Hammed, 1990:458-466.

4 For example, Peel (1978) examines the Yoruba term, oloju, most closely associated with Western notions of 'development' in order to understand local interpretations of this phenomenon.

5 See Stocking (1974) for a discussion of the historical development of the discipline and the distinctions between British, German, French, and American schools of anthropology. P trie (1986:9) mentions another aspect of these distinctions, namely the underlying tension within the discipline among those who perceive it as either a humancentric or a scientific endeavour.
Thus, the difficulties of integrating an anthropological approach to demographic studies is not just a problem for demographers and anthropologists sparring over theory and method (Caldwell, Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987) but are also related to differences of perspective among anthropologists themselves. Interdisciplinary disagreements within anthropology, such as whether it is a humanistic or scientific endeavor, as well as changing theoretical fashions (advocated by practitioners of functionalist, structuralist, interpretive, or deconstructive approaches, for example) have made it difficult for even well-intentioned demographers to grasp exactly what a demographic anthropology would entail. In order to convey a sense of the distinctive anthropological subdisciplinary approaches, the following section both summarizes recent writings by anthropologists on demographic topics and examines the particular conceptualizations of culture associated with them. Ironically, while the methodologies and analytical concerns of demography and anthropology differ considerably, some of the intradisciplinary squabbles—between those who argue over economic or biological or ideational explanations, for example—are strikingly familiar. Further, the familiar lamentations over lack of theory voiced by demographers (McNicol, 1980; Schofield and Coleman, 1986) may also be heard among anthropologists, ranging from Boas (Stocking, 1974) to Needham (1963:xii). In their complaints and divisions, anthropologists and demographers share some common ground.

### Biology and fertility

Not surprisingly, anthropologists most interested in demographic issues have been those who are somewhat quantitatively inclined, often with biological or economic anthropological backgrounds. Biological anthropologists have often been interested in the long-term population dynamics of both human and non-human populations. Making use of quantitative techniques such as analysis of information on kinship relationships and computer simulation, they examine long-term demographic trends based on survey data for small, localized populations. Nancy Howell (1986), in an overview paper, describes several studies (Carroll, 1975; Netting, 1981), as well as her own work with the !Kung hunter-gatherer population (Howell, 1979). Her research combines detailed descriptions of population demographics with an analysis of environmental resources, diet, and body weight as factors influencing fertility.

In a related paper, Hammel and Howell (1987) propose a more general study of the demography of human populations, focusing on birth, marriage, migration, and death, as a way of providing a common ground not only between demographers and anthropologists, but among the various subdisciplines within the field of anthropology itself. They suggest that such an approach may contribute to the formulation of a theory that integrates biological aspects of human evolution with cultural constructs: kinship organization, language, food preferences and preparation, etc. Their use of the term evolution is not meant to imply a deterministic, directional process. Rather, they define evolution as 'a set of interacting mechanisms resulting in the production of variation and its selection' and seek to 'place the development of human demography and coevolved culture squarely within the framework of biological evolutionary theory' (Hammel and Howell, 1987:142).

Methodologically, they suggest focusing on a particular population although regional interactions with other populations would also be considered. Their discussion of the process of fusion and migration is important since it is through this process, they argue, that adaptive selection and change takes place, drawing upon a new combination of biological, ecological, and cultural resources (Hammel and Howell, 1987:147). The interpretation of culture in these cases is viewed more as a social resource external to action than as a construct of everyday practice or belief. While cultural resources such as language may be strategically used, they are regarded in the sense of Carter's category of overall social controls.

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6 Hammel (1990:477n18), noting these interdisciplinary discontinuities within the two fields, remarks that while they may appear to be similar—i.e., in demography the divide is between economic or ideational explanations, in anthropology, between quantifiable or interpretive explanations—they are not analogous. The differences among demographers are a matter of degree since 'the enterprise seems thoroughly positivistic' for both sides whereas among anthropologists, differences are more of kind—of types of analytic framework. This is a generally valid point, but some of the ideationally-disposed demographers are not so positivistic (e.g., Cleland and Wilson, 1987), nor are the interpretive anthropologists as non-empirical (e.g., Fortes, 1963), as Hammel supposes.

7 The two main problems that cultural anthropologists would have with this approach (apart from its use of phrases such as 'breeding choices' and 'cultural equipment' that belie its biological bent) are the use of the term 'evolution' and the sense that 'culture' is something that functions for the benefit of evolution. For example, they write that The development of cultural symbols, language in particular, facilitates either recognition and reincorporation or diplomacy and fusion. Symbols are thus hedges against extinction (and specialization) (Hammel and Howell, 1987:146). Furthermore, their emphasis on evolution, even if defined in the non-vulgar sense of random change, has a historical background in anthropology associated with the eugenics movement which would make some cultural anthropologists wary of using it (see Stocking, 1974).

8 Nardi (1981), on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of examining cultural practices and biological factors as interrelated aspects of fertility.
Economics and human reproduction

A somewhat different tack regarding biology and population is taken by the anthropologist A.F. Robertson (1991) who focuses on the interrelationship between human reproduction and the economics of production. He insists that anthropologists take seriously the effects of the biological processes of birth, migration, ageing, and death on the social and economic lives of households and individuals, which distinguishes him both from biological anthropologists who tend to think in terms of population aggregates, and from cultural anthropologists who conceptualize reproduction in social or cultural terms (e.g., the reproduction of the patrilineage, of marriage ritual, or of gender identities) and for various reasons eschew biological explanations altogether.9

He argues that reproduction shapes economic processes and economic situations influence reproductive arrangements and that both converge at the intimate level of the household (Robertson, 1991:51). While this point might seem too obvious for comfort to demographers who have long studied the effects of proximate determinants such as infecundity and age at marriage on the structure of societies, for socio-cultural anthropologists this emphasis on physical reproduction of people and households is unusual.10

Robertson’s discussion about reproduction relates to the demographic literature on fertility change in several ways. He argues that while the mundane personal choices and strategies [of individual households] cumulatively...shape whole societies (Robertson, 1991:51), they nonetheless exist within particular economic and political contexts, and through this interplay reproductive regimes are shaped:

The compact pattern of domestic development is generally feasible only because there is some well-established wider network of social relations to support it...Schools, banks, clinics and all the other apparatus of industrial society have assumed much of the burden of organizing reproduction...(Robertson, 1991:16).

The obverse, situations where state social support systems are weak, would suggest high-fertility regimes.

Robertson’s definition of culture is difficult to categorize as it encompasses ‘procedural norms’ (1991:22), for example religious beliefs and practices, which order individuals’ lives; but it also stresses that when these behavioural ideals become materially untenable, individuals may contest and reinterpret them (Robertson, 1991:24).

Cultural ecology and fertility

Cultural ecologists, who study the interaction between human behaviour and particular environments, represent another subdisciplinary group of anthropologists interested in population.

Research often focuses on the conjunction of long-term adaptations reflected in institutional structures (e.g., forms of marriage or land tenure) with the short-term adaptive behaviour of individuals responding to particular events in their natural and socio-cultural environment.

In his case-study of a mountain Tamang village in central Nepal, Fricke (1986) emphasizes the process whereby ecological constraints such as limited arable land, a short growing season, geographical isolation and distance from main roads, have supported a certain pattern of household economy and high fertility that also leads to fertility change and migration, because of the inevitable limitations of the environment. The conception of culture in place here would seem to be similar to that subscribed to by Robertson; that is largely external to human action but subject to some individual agency.

What is particularly interesting about Fricke’s work is that through continued research in the Tamang village, to which he returned in 1987, after the initial 1981-1982 study, he has been able to document various changes in village population structure and the local economy. Further, Fricke’s theoretical perspective itself has changed somewhat, emphasizing the social historical process whereby political economic factors as well as

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9 Some anthropologists steer away from such explanations because of early disciplinary associations with the eugenics movement (see Stocking, 1974, on Boyd); some are also uneasy with certain deterministic aspects of social biological explanations, e.g., that genes determine behaviour.

10 The social anthropologist Jack Goody, an exception to this statement, has had an important impact on demographers interested in anthropology. His book, Production and Reproduction (1976) focuses on the particular conjunction of political economy, ecological constraints, and social organization as a way of explaining why people in societies behave the way they do. Thus, constraints of land and particular form of inheritance gave rise to a particular form of social organization incorporating the nuclear family, primogeneriture, etc., in Europe, whereas in Africa, relatively abundant land and corporate property inheritance gave rise to other forms of social organization: the extended family, polygyny, etc. The implications for fertility and demand for children among those living in these different types of organization have been examined by Caldwell and Caldwell (1990:122).
environmental ones have influenced villagers' options (Fricke, 1994). For example, while the local resources limited the number of people the environment could support through self-sustaining agriculture, other sources of income relating to participation in the cash economy have been tapped. These economic changes, along with changing marriage strategies, appear to be affecting village fertility patterns. This attention to ecological constraints, a particular population regime, social history, and the wider national political economy—supported by longitudinal survey data and qualitative field research—provides a useful model for future demographic anthropological studies of fertility change.

The political economy and fertility

The attention given by Fricke (1994) to institutions and large-scale forces that impinge on individual and community behavior has been supported by several other anthropologists interested in fertility change (Greenhalgh, 1988, 1990; Kertzner, 1993). Taking what is referred to as a political economic approach to demographic change, these writers are interested in how regional, national, and global forces affect local fertility behavior, both of kin groups and individuals, in order to explain the connections between these local and larger-scale processes. This approach is important for its insistence that fertility behavior does not derive solely from individual decision-making or from isolated local practices. Rather, fertility change is related to wider institutional political economic factors, which in turn affect the social and cultural practices of individuals and groups at the local level. A focus on the political economy clarifies aspects of fertility behavior, such as contraceptive use, associated with national family planning programs and health care policies which might otherwise be attributed to individual preference (e.g. Coleman, 1983; Greenhalgh, 1994). Anthropological political-economic studies of fertility may also concentrate on single communities, showing how factors of economic class and political power have resulted in several fertility transitions among different groups and over a period of time in a single community (Kertzner and Hogan, 1989; Schneider and Schneider, 1992); or they may examine how the micropolitics of child fostering affects levels of fertility (Bledsoe, 1990).

An anthropological political-economic approach has also been useful in studies of land-tenure practices, family landholdings, and fertility (Cohn, 1985), and of the effect of colonial cash-crop development on labour availability and fertility (Weil, 1986). These studies tend to define culture as beliefs and practices associated with particular institutions, e.g., religious, educational, family planning agencies, although individual and group reinterpretations of these overarching ideals could be considered.

Cultural and demographic analysis

In his essay, 'A theory of culture for demography', Hammel (1990) proposes another approach to the integration of demographic and anthropological analysis. He suggests a particular interpretation of culture, one represented in a negotiated set of understandings by social actors whose 'evaluative behaviour' is grounded in a set of more general social values and structures.

Further:

Emerging from the concept of culture as a transitory and negotiated set of understandings is the view that behavior is controlled by its own symbolizations. It is the evaluative behavior of actors, playing unceasing variations on themes provided by their current cultural stock (e.g., historical ideas concerning social organization, religious practice, marriage), that creates and recreates culture as a constantly modified and elaborated system of moral symbols (Hammel, 1990:467).

This definition of culture appears to bridge the external-internal dichotomy discussed by Carter (1988), through the incorporation of both general cultural ideals ('cultural stock') and individual 'evaluative behaviour' (and presumably practices) into his analysis.

By defining and contextualizing 'the network of social actors directly involved in processes that have demographic import' (1990:468), Hammel seeks to bridge the gap between explanations which attribute demographic change to institutional factors and explanations which attribute demographic change to individual motivation. Hammel (1990:474) argues that these social networks may also be used to link individual with wider regional and national level institutions which would allow for the integration of micro- and macro-level analysis within his model. This approach would optimally involve fieldwork, with emphasis on a few fine-grained case studies of the social networks of

11 Just how these two levels of analysis would be conjoined is not made clear. His alternative to fieldwork in a study gleaned from survey data and ethnographic literature; used for the sort of micrometaphysics he proposes, this seems an unlikely substitute and is probably unworkable. Fricke (1986), for example, noted that certain household configurations become clear to him only after he had worked in a village for several months; it is unlikely that these very culturally-specific social units would be evident from survey data.
selected individuals, for example, women who use contraceptives and their network of family, friends, and acquaintances. Once these networks were established, individuals could then be questioned about their evaluation of particular events or disputes related to demographic questions.

Demographic change as a process

My own approach to demographic anthropology is similar to that taken by Hammerslough (1990), which focuses on 'culture as negotiated symbolic understanding', although I would stress that these 'negotiated symbolic understandings' are evident in people's everyday practices and use of things as well as in what they say, their 'intensely evaluative cloud of commentary' (Hammerslough, 1990:407). The process whereby these mundane practices, things, and events—grounded in underlying social structure—are reinterpreted and associated with particular moral meanings over time is at the heart of my conception of anthropological demography in general and an approach to fertility change in particular.

Exactly how to go about unravelling this process is somewhat more difficult. Hammerslough (1990:468) suggests a type of network analysis mentioned above. Taking the example of contraceptive use, he writes:

We might find important to a study of birth control a set of women, their husbands or lovers, their mothers, sisters, and closest friends, their medical and spiritual advisors and attendants, social workers, and important figures in and representatives of organizations to which these central female actors belonged or to the policies of which they were subject (Hammerslough, 1990:468).

He then proposes the analysis of relevant disputes (e.g., a woman's use of family planning pills without her husband's knowledge and his subsequent enlightenment) in order to illuminate the evaluations of the event by those in the network. An identification of which, and whose, comments had an impact on behaviour would help to clarify the process of when, how, and why or why not contraceptives may be used.

I have used a related but somewhat different tack, referred to as 'processual analysis' (Vincent, 1986; Moore, 1987), in my own work. Analysis began with a village-wide census and with open-ended interviews of a selected group of village women and men of particular ages, focusing on questions relating to fertility, reproductive health, and child-rearing practices. Based on this material, I then identified and selected unusual local events, ones that seemed to highlight change, suggesting that

Some pattern of local replication is being broken. This kind of event is a telling historical sign visible in fieldwork. Quickly one must try to find out how often it is happening and what people are saying about it (Moore, 1987:730).

Based on these events, qualitative ('what people are saying about it') information was then obtained from individuals, both directly and indirectly involved, who were questioned for their explanations and reasons for what was going on. Quantitative ('how often it is happening') data were obtained from specific local surveys and national surveys when available. Organizing research data around an event, rather than institutions or individuals, has the advantage of conveying a sense of dynamic process.

This approach would not preclude the study of social networks. However, it would emphasize the ways that the structural positions of network individuals support their 'ongoing contests and conflicts and competitions and the efforts to prevent, suppress, or repress these' (Moore, 1987:730). I am particularly interested in the ways that different social actors, young and old, women and men, to farmers and government officials, who may have different stakes in what is represented as 'orderly' social relations, evaluate these events and explain their actions. Their different representations, which in turn help to define the moral high ground, may be used to justify their particular positions.

The examination of 'diagnostic events' provides insights as to how local-level cultural 'rules' are replicated and how they are contested and changed over time. However, it also allows for a consideration of the ways that political and economic forces at the state, national, and global levels may affect local behaviour. For example, people may be asked to evaluate federal programs pertaining to fertility as well as local village events. One research assistant asked men about the effects of the Structural Adjustment Program (instituted by the Nigerian Government at the insistence of the IMF) on family size, using a mock television interview format, that was both amusing and productive. Yet I do not mean to slight the difficulties of bridging different scales of analysis here. It is still unclear

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12 The definition of culture proposed by Kroeber (1966:136) is similar: 'the sense people make of their material environment, with the word 'material' not restricted to the physical environment.

13 Hammerslough (1990:468) refers to Gluckman's case-study analysis using legal disputes as a model for this approach. Gluckman, however, has been criticized for the isolated scope of his analysis which failed to take colonial political and economic policies into account (Chasek, 1985).
exactly how one would equitably integrate large-scale events such as policy shifts in
government population programs, with the perceptions of fertility and responses to family
planning initiatives by individuals at the local level, the classical small-scale focus of
anthropological research (Moore, 1986:329). However, the methodological and analytical
difficulties facing anthropologists in synthesizing different levels of explanation present
problems for demographers as well, as Holcroft has observed (1987:837):

Our main research goals still lie with the much less tractable problems of
discovering the real determinants of fertility [not only the proximate ones]. Here
there is little common ground, with almost every demographer having a pet
theory; even when we understand each other’s broad concepts we can rarely
identify agreed measurement procedures. Explanation at this level is usually
qualitative. A major research challenge over some time to come is the
elucidation of common ground and development of a consensus on the real
determinants of fertility and their quantification. It is, however, only realistic to
accept that we may not achieve such a desirable synthesis in the foreseeable
future.

An example of a very preliminary attempt at such a synthesis using a processual
approach is discussed in the following section.

A diagnostic event and analysis

In this section, I consider a very abbreviated discussion14 of a particular ‘diagnostic
event’ in order to illustrate the ways that a processual analysis can both clarify fertility
change ‘on the ground’ and relate this change to larger social and economic factors. It also
suggests some of the ways that demographic and anthropological perspectives can be used
complementarily in addressing questions of fertility change. In particular, I examine child-
fostering—the raising of children by someone other than the biological parent—in one
Ekiti Yoruba village in southwestern Nigeria.

In the past and the present, young children have often been sent to live with kin. This
relationship is considered to be mutually beneficial as children work for their foster parents
and in turn, receive education and discipline, and are able to extend their network of
potential supporters. Children are also fostered because of parental need for childcare or
because older villagers ask to raise foster children for their help and companionship. From

14 See Renne 1993a for a more detailed discussion of this material.

a village-wide household survey, I found that child-fostering was quite common, with 19.2
per cent of children in the village (in late 1991) raised by foster parents.15

However, attitudes toward child fostering appear to be changing, with some younger
villagers saying they will not have their own children fostered. Using open-ended
interviews, I questioned 70 women and 66 men in the village about child-fostering, their
experiences with this practice, and their assessment of it. From their comments I selected
particular events for further analysis.

The ‘diagnostic event’ was chosen as it illustrates important aspects of the child-
fostering issue: for example, struggles over scarce agricultural labour, fierce competition
for positions in higher educational institutions, and the ambiguities of kin obligations. The
speaker, Bayo, is a thirty-year-old Ekiti Yoruba man, has a secondary school certificate,
and works as a farmer and part-time dry cleaner. He has two children now and would like
to have three more. He responded to questions about child-fostering as follows:

In my own opinion, I have vowed in life not to give my children to anyone.
This is one reason why I want that specific number [5]. I don't demand any help
from anybody before I can bring my children up.

I can still recall the time when my grandfather died, one of my senior brothers
came home. I was happy to see him and then I immediately decided to follow
him and stay with him in his station. I was happy because it would be my first
outing to a distant place. On getting to our destination (near Osogbo) I was
asked to go back from Primary 5 to Primary 1, while my classmates at home
who were no better than myself have gone far in secondary school. I started to
look at them as being outstanding [the lucky ones]. I was made to harvest
pepper every day, not school. I attended school twice a week and even in the
examination period I was compelled to harvest pepper. What surprised me most
was when one of my brother's children broke a plate without my knowing it. His
father was saying his child couldn't do that, that I must have broken it. He beat
the hell out of me and asked me to do 'jump frog' [leap like a frog] for about
three hours. When it got to the extent of having no energy in me again, I was
rushed to the hospital. The next day, when I told them I would die, they decided
to take me home. I have suffered much because I was fostered out.

15 Thirty-seven per cent of households (n=111) in the village had at least one foster-child (ages 0-19)
present. The 1990 NDHS figure for foster-children (ages 0-15) for southwestern Nigeria was 8.6% (Nigeria, 1990:12),
defined as households with neither the biological mother nor father present. Since
the definition of fostering used in the Ekiti village did not preclude the presence of a biological parent,
this may explain, in part, my higher figure.
In this wise, I have made up my mind not to foster my children out to anybody. I can help foster any child but myself, I will not give out my children to anybody. In sum, fostering is bad.

Two elements stand out in this man's story of his fostering experience. First, he was made to harvest pepper every day, rather than go to school regularly. Secondly, he was falsely accused and severely punished by his brother. As a result of his experience, he vowed that he will not have any of his children fostered. At this level, his story is a straightforward one of cause and effect.

However, at another level, there are elements in this recital which suggest that competing claims are at stake here, claims which are part of a continuing process of struggle for control over people, things, and meanings. Bayo chose to follow his senior brother after the death of his grandfather, having certain expectations of rights and responsibilities of close blood kin, namely that such people should help, not exploit, their relations. He was hoping to continue his schooling under the sponsorship of his brother. Yet the introduction of universal primary education and increasing cash-crop production have led to labour shortages in some rural areas so that the immediate family is often the best source of farm labour. Whereas Bayo saw living with his senior brother outside of his village as an opportunity to improve his future chances through schooling, his brother saw him primarily as a source of labour.

Further, the dilemma faced by many parents in the early colonial period in Nigeria over whether it was more advantageous to send a child to the farm or to school has been resolved in favour of education. The resulting large numbers of students wanting access to secondary and post-secondary institutions has led to fierce competition for these positions. Beyond the question of labour, the senior brother's uninterest in promoting his junior brother's education may have been in the interest of favouring his own children's chances. Boundaries delineating closeness of kin and consequently lineage obligations are being redefined.

Beyond the economic and social issues of agricultural labour, kinship obligations, and educational expectations, the meaning of fostering is being recast here in an interesting way. Rather than as in the past, when fostering was considered to be good—helping others who in turn help you—it is now perceived as bad. Bayo argues that his decision not to have his children fostered is the morally correct one. Finally, Bayo's initial statement provides a clue for answering the demographic question: would a decline in child fostering lead to lower fertility rates? He suggests that his unhappy experience with child-fostering led him to decide against having his children fostered, and to limit their numbers to ensure that he does not need to do so.

This story has other cultural dimensions, suggesting that a shift in the moral assessment of child-fostering may be related to changing notions about parenthood and blood relations as well.

For example, some people felt that foster-child mistreatment can be overcome by biological closeness, expressed in terms of blood:

If my child is with my mother, I will have no cause to fear, she will know that her own blood has the child and she will care for the child as she will care for me. But if a child is given out to another person outside one's immediate home or family, it may be dangerous [Man: 40 yrs, farmer/musician, technical school, 1 child now, wants 5].

Several people who saw positive advantages in child fostering said that they would only have their children fostered by close blood relations. The conflation of emotional closeness with blood and the idea that it is best to entrust one's children to blood relations was supported by data from a small survey of 115 foster-parents in the village. The range of relationships of foster-parents to fostered children reflected this preference for close kin relationships in the village (Table 1). Foster parents were most often grandparents, raising children from their own sons and daughters (65 per cent of female, 72 per cent of male children). Only one child (1 per cent) was fostered by a person who was not kin-related. Interviews with the 106 foster-mothers from this survey suggest that this pattern was common in the past, at least in the rural Ekiti Yoruba area (Table 2).
TABLE 1: Relationship of 'in-foster' children (n=127) to foster-parents\(^a\)

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<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daughter's child</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(9)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(23)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td>(11)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jr./sr. sister's child</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>(13)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jn. sister/brother</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other kin</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friend's child</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>(15)</td>
<td>(78)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) 'In-fostering' refers to children taken in by an adult surrogate parent.

TABLE 2. Foster-mothers' own experience being fostered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age groups:</th>
<th>20-39</th>
<th>40-59</th>
<th>60-79</th>
<th>80+</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (n=106) fostered by:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>(6)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's sr/brther/sister</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's sr/brther/sister</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior sister or brother</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's co-wife</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>(2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don't know relation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total fostered</td>
<td>74(^a)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>(14)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not fostered</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(23)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>(39)</td>
<td>(35)</td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(106)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) These relatively high figures may reflect the introduction of free primary education in the Western Region in 1955. In communities where there were no schools, children were often sent to live with relatives in towns with primary schools, possibly resulting in increased child fostering during this period (1950-1970). They may also reflect the low numbers of respondents.
What appears to be changing is that some people are taking these blood restrictions even further, stressing the importance of biological parents to the exclusion of all other blood relations. Several people maintained the idea that no one could care for a child like the child's own parents. Exactly how people have developed these attitudes about child-rearing remains to be more specifically investigated. School reading material, the media, and church teachings have surely contributed to these changing attitudes (Caldwell, 1977:101-103). Indeed, some village men and women seemed to make this association in a general way, illustrated by one 65-year-old grandmother's comment that 'Educated people's children are not fostered nowadays'.

One of the ways that schooling has affected ideas about foster-care is in matters of 'hygiene'. Grandmothers, for example, were criticized for not being the best parents not only because of their lack of education, but also because they might not know about modern methods of personal hygiene:

Ah, well you know these old people the care they give to children—we young people we don't like that...For example, as a parent when you wake up early in the morning, you must make sure you cater for your children, starting from taking care of their teeth and other things, but these old people they just give them food, their food is the only essential something for the children (Woman, 30 yrs, teacher, NCE, 3 children, wants 5).

Thus present ideas about being a 'good parent' not only include providing sufficient food, clothing, schooling, and emotional support, but also stress the importance of knowing about modern conventions of health and diet (see Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992). Biological parents are able to strike the best balance in terms of discipline and affection in child-rearing. As one secondary school girl remarked, 'A real parent will care better for the child'. In other words, the real parent is the best parent.

The reification of boundaries and beliefs about the shrinking circle of blood relations who can properly raise children is also reflected by shifts in the perception of financial and moral responsibilities. Changing attitudes about what constitutes being a 'good parent' and the need for securing the best possible education for one's children suggest how ideas about child fostering are related to the present economic situation in Nigeria.

For example, the devaluation of the naira in 1987 has led to increases in the price of imported goods, and of food, and in educational costs. The combination of economic constraints and not wanting to have one's own children fostered does seem to be affecting family size. Yet many of the people who say they will not have their own child fostered because fostering is 'bad' say they would foster another person's child. Most people acknowledge that fostering provides some sort of insurance for children left in precarious situations as a result of death or other family crises. Further, fostering a family member's child and sponsoring it in school may reap the immediate benefits of a child's labour and the future benefits such as old-age security. Child-fostering serves as a strategy for coping with the economic difficulties of living in contemporary Nigeria, for as one man remarked, 'One never knows what the future will bring'.

It is this uncertainty, in part, which supports continued child fostering. On the state and national level, this uncertainty is manifested in political crises, university closures, strikes by unpaid primary school teachers, and food and petrol shortages. Just how these factors will impinge on future child-fostering patterns is unclear. Before the Ekiti village data can be used to support people's claims that they are limiting family size so as to preclude child fostering, a follow-up study, perhaps in five years' time, would be necessary. It seems unlikely that young people like Bajo in the diagnostic event who have incorporated a particular view of the 'good parent'—as immediate blood kin who can both discipline and love a child—will want to have their children fostered in the future, but the contingencies of living may force people to do something other than what they say.

Processual analysis is a particularly apt approach for considering these contradictions and uncertainties for it emphasizes the ways that contesting voices simultaneously proffer 'contradictory interpretations of the world' (Moore, 1987:730). Thinking of child-fostering as a transitional 'process', influenced at the local level by interpretations and reconstructions of the meaning of blood and 'good parents', and at the regional and national level, affected by federal policies and international events, relates it to recent trends to integrate macro and micro levels of analysis in population studies (McNicoll, 1988). The particular contribution of processual analysis is largely methodological, through the isolation of diagnostic events which illuminate underlying struggles to control

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16 Parkin (1978:139-140) associates high fertility among the Luo people of Kenya with uncertainty both at the domestic and national political level.
17 In Sierra Leone, Bledsoe and Fagboh-Dahine (1989:471) argue that a deteriorating national economy is likely to lead to increased fostering of young children by rural grandmothers, partly because it provides insurance of sustained rural ties. However, Ekiti villagers said that fostering puts strains on family ties and that in some cases, it may be better, when possible, simply to substitute cash.
persons and things over time. Its emphasis is on cultural factors, particularly the contested construction of moral authority. Though it implicitly challenges theories of social change based on economic and political factors alone, it does not deny the relevance of these factors but attempts to integrate them all within the context of historical process.

DISCUSSION

Before concluding this paper, I want to expand on the definition of 'culture as a constantly modified and elaborated system of moral symbols' (Hammel, 1990:467) and its implications for demographic research, through a consideration of Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of habitus and practice. As Hammel (1990:469) makes clear in comment about shared evaluative discourse, symbolic meanings are negotiable but they are not created in a vacuum. Bourdieu discusses how such collective representations of meanings associated with actions and things are simultaneously socially reproduced over time yet are subject to individuals' practical reinterpretations.

Ideals and practice

In his Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977), perhaps one of the most influential revaluations of anthropological thinking in the last fifteen years, Bourdieu makes the statement:

To consider regularity, that is, what recurs with a certain statistically measurable frequency, as the product of a consciously laid-down and consciously respected ruling (which implies explaining its genesis and efficacy), or as the product of an unconscious regulating by a mysterious cerebral and/or social mechanism, is to slip from the model of reality to the reality of the model (Bourdieu, 1977:29).

While it might appear that Bourdieu here is criticizing demographers with his points about regularity and the reality of the model, he is actually reproaching certain structural anthropologists who treat culture as a set of idealized social rules without due consideration of the political and material contexts and individual strategies through which these 'rules' are reproduced and sometimes reformulated.\(^\text{18}\) What Bourdieu has proposed is an approach which considers social life as a reflection of both 'official structures' and 'unofficial practices.' The structured official ideologies which are the generative basis of social organization in a given society are referred to as habitus:

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (Bourdieu, 1977:72).

His rather ironic point here is that what may appear as immutable structural societies which organize social life, observed so unconsciously as to seem only 'natural', are in fact 'the products of historical practices and are constantly reproduced' (1977:83), particularly by those who stand to gain in material and symbolic ways from these structures.\(^\text{19}\) Yet these structures contain within themselves the possibility for change through the unofficial practices and strategies of individuals who attempt to enhance their own particular situations. While Bourdieu's model has been criticized for its tendency toward universal assumptions about generic individuals and their behaviour, this model's emphasis on the analysis of culture as the conjunction of an underlying social structure and individual practice is taken up by many, including Carter (1988:168).

Demographic regimes and vital events

An application of the notion of habitus to demographic concerns may be seen in Kreager's (1986) essay, 'Demographic regimes as cultural systems'. Kreager argues for a shift in demographic research and population theory from an emphasis on individual decision-making, demographic transition, and development to a focus on social structure,

\(^{18}\) Specifically, he is referring on the one hand to structural-functionalists such as Radcliffe-Brown who viewed society as organized by individual structures (kinship, law, religion) each with its own 'rules' that spelled out behaviour and together contributed to the proper functioning of society; and on the other hand, to structuralists such as Levi-Strauss who viewed society as a reflection of the organization of the human mind ('a mysterious cerebral mechanism').

\(^{19}\) Bourdieu here is also criticizing social theorists such as Parsons: The theory of action as mere execution of the model (in a twofold sense of norm and scientific construct) is just one example among others of the imaginary anthropology which objectivists engage when, with the aid of words that obscure the distinction between 'the things of logic and the logic of things', it presents the objective meaning of practices or works as the subjective purpose of the action of the producers of those practices or works, with its impossible homo economicus subjecting his decision-making to rational calculation, its action performing roles or acting in conformity with models, or its speakers 'selecting' from among phonemes (Bourdieu, 1977:29-30).
the cultural context of decision-making, and on the demographic regimes: the distinctive population structures of particular societies. He is also interested in the ways in which vital processes are used in the constitution of local identities and in the practice of cultural and economic strategies (Kreager, 1986:131-137).

He suggests that demographic regimes are simultaneously based upon social structure and cultural ‘rules’ (reproduced through processes of institutional recruitment to kin groups, religious groups, etc.), and upon the strategies of individuals and groups (delineated by class, age, sex, etc.) who use vital processes not simply to enhance both their economic positions but also to constitute a sense of self-respect and moral legitimacy. That the reproduction and reinterpretation of ideas about right and wrong should be associated with ritual practices and symbolism associated with birth, marriage and death should not be surprising as they are fundamental to all social life:

...[They] are the true playground of moral systems: while crucial to the continuity of groups and recognized as such by them, both the relevant facts of life and the values regarded appropriate to them may be juggled by actors and audience alike (Kreager, 1986:136-137).

In its emphasis on both the reproduction of underlying social structure and moral systems and their negotiability through an endless process of reassessment, Kreager’s approach is similar to Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. By taking this tack, Kreager (1986:138) suggests that researchers examine ‘how societies maintain distinctive population structures suited to certain ends’ and how individual behaviour may change, as ‘new alternatives may be attempted at the margins of acceptability’ (Kreager, 1986:140). Thus he emphasizes the ways that underlying institutions and values associated with vital events exhibit considerable historical continuity, although there is selective adjustment of these underlying social structures brought about through the strategies of individuals and groups. Or to state this view of structure and process somewhat more graphically:

A collective resolution to change a custom, to prohibit incest or whatever it may be, to be permanent must be the outcome of long and steady preparation; show us this preparation, show us previous custom inevitably and logically leading to the resolution, and we can dispense with the resolution itself, which is to the new order of things but as the guard’s whistle to the departure of the train (Hocart, 1987:37).

In other words, a lower total fertility rate may be regarded ‘as the guard’s whistle’: it is the underlying ideas and practices associated with fertility, reinterpreted over time that actually effect the train’s departure.

CONCLUSION

In this discussion of anthropological approaches to fertility change, I have attempted to bridge several conceptual disjunctions as well as interdisciplinary divides. Following Hocart’s remark that begins this paper, I suggest that fertility change is indeed influenced by notions of utility, but utility has many possible interpretations, beyond mere wealth-maximization, and an anthropological approach may be particularly suitable for illuminating other interpretations of utility. High fertility, for example, might be perceived as a symbol of an individual’s or group’s divine blessing, or as a confirmation of moral behaviour, and hence moral authority, or as a means of ensuring future security, or increasing social and political networks (see Olusanya, 1989:91).

I also argue for the integration of two often-opposing conceptualizations of culture. Taking the concept of habitus as a starting point, I suggest that culture be viewed as both a set of fundamental beliefs, ideas and ‘rules’ that inform behaviour, and a set of practices and strategies that reinterpret and reconstruct these underlying systems of beliefs. These fundamental beliefs and ideas themselves must be reproduced by practice, through religious or political rituals, for example, or through the everyday use of the most mundane objects.

I suggest an anthropological approach to fertility change which integrates larger-scale institutional forces (economic, political, social) with ethnographic-grounded research on the local experiences of actual, non-generic individuals. Processual analysis seems particularly suited to this attempt to integrate these differences in scale. It also encompasses the negotiability of social life, the fashionable and fleeting as well as the sense of timeless stability represented by the reproduction and subtle reinterpretation of tradition. It presents a less static conception of time than is implied in some evolutionary models of fertility change, such as high-fertility to low-fertility regimes, or traditional-to-modern forms of social organization.

This approach to anthropological demography is more in line with contemporary anthropological thinking in other ways as it acknowledges the difficulties of objective
research (Clifford, 1988): that the language of surveys and ethnographic accounts alike inevitably includes a particular bias of perspective. Further, the search for universal theories might be replaced in favour of an intermediate-level approach which draws general conclusions from particular constellations of situations, actions, and ideas.  

Finally, this essay also argues for a demographic anthropology that incorporates an analysis of the construction and reinterpretation of meanings associated with particular practices, things, and sayings into its approach. Hammel (1990:475) has suggested a symbolic approach in his consideration of individual agency, exhibited in part through the use of 'behavior as symbol'. Kertzer (1988) also notes the importance of symbols in rituals that shape social and political life. While a processual approach would certainly include people's 'evaluative discourse' (Hammel, 1990:469) in any analysis, my personal preference would be to consider as well the mundane things and practices associated with fertility. For example, the meaning of that potent symbol, blood, used to express closeness or distance of social relations in the case of child-fostering, could be examined in other contexts, such as in ideas about reproductive health, where certain contraceptives are associated with excessive bleeding and where infertility is associated with particular types of blood and excessive menstrual flow. This approach has the possible advantage of considering culture as somewhat more grounded in the specifics of what people do with and say about these things. Further, it is not altogether unfamiliar to demographers who use things such as TV sets and earth floors as symbols of wealth or its lack in survey questionnaires. These things are not unimportant for as Elias has observed:  

Although human phenomena may be looked at on their own, independently of their connections with the social life of men, they are by nature nothing but substantializations of human relations and of human behavior, embodiments of social and mental life...it is true both of phenomena which rank high on our scale of values and of others which seem trivial or worthless. Often it is precisely these trivial phenomena that give us clear and simple insights... (Elias, 1978:117).

Bourdieu dismisses the sorts of studies that focus on individuals' everyday behaviour as inappropriate for eliciting the sort of critical interpretations of ideology crucial for his theory of social practice. But it is through such ordinary everyday behaviour as the use of

Lux soap or the gossip about using condoms (Watkins and Danzi, 1992) or the lessons on genetics in secondary school classes (Delaney, 1987) that individuals' practical strategies which undermine prescribed 'official' traditions can take place.  

If there is to be theory of fertility transition (or transitions) which accounts for shifts in what is considered 'within the calculus of conscious choice' (Cosse, 1973:65), it must be based on a 'careful description of the underlying assumptions' (Schutz, 1970:56) about fertility. These assumptions could be examined as they are reflected in the local meanings associated with everyday things and practices as well as in religious rituals and beliefs (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987). It would then be possible to see in what ways meanings attributed to these things appear to be changing.  

If in this paper I have put too much emphasis on how fertility change can be illuminated by detailed ethnographic studies of the construction and reinterpretation of meanings considered in a historical context, I do not mean to imply that economic, political, and biological information related to this change should not be taken into account. Rather, the difficulty of encompassing these different perspectives within a single study suggests that collaborative research is necessary if such a multi-level approach is to be successful. This paper has merely attempted to place the analysis of 'the transmission or reordering of meaning-giving goals' through the ethnographic study of everyday practices within the realm of possible anthropological approaches to fertility change; and to outline the benefits of this perspective for demographic inquiry more generally.

For example, during the 1930s and 40s, the assumption that virginity before marriage led to pregnancy immediately after marriage, based on ideas about 'spilling' fertility through improper social behaviour, began to change in the northeastern El-Kati area. This shift reflected the impact of larger economic and social forces such as increased economic opportunities, Western education, and the introduction of court divorce which undermined established patterns of social relations and authority, including elders' control of arranged marriage. By the early 1990s, this shift had reached the diametric opposite, with many younger people assuming that virginity before marriage was likely to lead to infertility after marriage (see Renne, 1995b, for an extended discussion of this process).
REFERENCES


