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A Slippery Slope to Ecofascism Contribution to GTI Forum [The Population Debate Revisited](#)

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By centering population, well-meaning environmentalists are playing into the hands of eco-fascists. In an unequal world marked by white supremacy, xenophobia, and coloniality; and where current systems of production and consumption depend on the ruthless, systematic, and incessant exploitation of “racialized others,” any environmentalism that is about overpopulation (in the abstract) can easily become the population control of “those people.” Black, Indigenous, and majority world women have long been subject to population control by imperial and settler-colonial interests—be it by overt genocide, rape and forced birth, enslavement, incarceration, environmental pollution, or other techniques. The fight for bodily freedom and sovereignty is ongoing, continuous, and constantly challenged. Thus, calling for efforts to control population as a legitimate environmental strategy could open room for backsliding into eco-fascism, especially dangerous at a time when fascism is on the rise globally.

While I appreciate Ian Lowe’s measured [tone](#) and how he has distanced himself from more problematic discourses of overpopulation, I contend that population rhetoric can still be harmful because nuance is easily lost and “overpopulation” and “population control” feed into other, more dominant frameworks of thought and action. For instance, the Buffalo shooting suspect calls [himself an eco-fascist acting against](#) overpopulating “invaders” to save the environment. Similar discourses were invoked in the Christchurch mass shooting in New Zealand. In these circles, population is not at the margins but at the very center of (racial) anxieties. Nightly sermons about [“the great replacement theory”](#) are case in point. In another vein, anti-immigrant discourse is now a staple in certain elite environmentalist circles.¹

Focusing on consumer capitalism, accumulation, and exploitation might be more fruitful, especially alongside a discussion of sustainable well-being, solidarity, and flourishing. If the growing existential threat of climate change is awakening the environmental consciousness of more people, and they are looking for answers as to why and what to do about it, it behooves us to be clear-eyed in our explanations. If indeed there is something about this capitalist economic system that needs cheap labor and thus encourages more procreation to sustain profit-accumulation, then the focus should be confronting and dismantling the forces that cheapen life (racial capitalism, for one). If patriarchal systems force women to have more children than they would choose to in the absence of coercion or status pressures, then let us fight patriarchy (and there are many urgent avenues for this fight). “Overpopulation” is a symptom and not a driver. Ultimately, I do not see what a discourse on population offers to any of these fights or conversations. It distracts from them and divides progressive movements. Riffing on Jade Sasser’s essential work on this topic, unless the environmental community recognizes the pervasive repackaging of failed narratives, true change and progress will not be possible.²

Further, following the insights of intersectional feminists and disability justice activists “nothing about us without us”: a new narrative or concrete policies around family planning and reproductive health in relation to the environment or development should be led by those most affected by these policies, both historically and in the moment. Thus, I would encourage GTI to think about creating the conditions for those voices to be heard in forums such as these and to create more inclusive dialogue on these topics.

Endnotes

1. Lisa Sun-Hee Park and David Pellow, *The Slums of Aspen: Immigrants Vs. the Environment in America’s Eden* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

2. Jade Sasser, *On Infertile Ground: Population Control and Women’s Rights in the Era of Climate Change* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

About the Author



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