

Lineages of a conspiracy: the 'great replacement' and demography

MUSAB YOUNIS

Abstract: This article argues that the panic over the 'great replacement' of White populations in Europe, North America and Oceania needs to be understood in the context of demography as a science rooted in English and French settler-colonial projects. From William Petty to Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Robert Malthus, major formulations of populationism have been animated by the settler frontier and its double-sided promise of replenishment (for some) and annihilation (for others). 'Excess' populations have always been defined by their structural distance from Whiteness. Replacement theorists operate in this tradition. In a classic instance of anticipatory counter-revolution, they reassert a world-spanning hierarchy by imagining its dissolution. The supposed threat that racialised groups present to the imperial core therefore justifies their ongoing domination and virtually unlimited violence against them. Such weaponised pessimism reminds us that settler-colonial triumphalism has long been accompanied by deep anxiety about the prospect of defeat, incompleteness and retribution. Only a careful assessment of demography as a science of global racial stratification can explain the enduring power of the idea of populations competing to the death in a zero-sum war for planetary space.

Keywords: civilisational decline, demographic catastrophism, 'great replacement', Malthus, population control movement, transnational demographic loss

Musab Younis is Associate Professor of Political Theory at the University of Oxford and a Fellow and Tutor in Politics at St Edmund Hall. He is the author of *On the Scale of the World: The Formation of Black Anticolonial Thought* (University of California Press, 2022.)

Race & Class

Copyright © 2026 Institute of Race Relations, 1-23



10.1177/03063968261422608 journals.sagepub.com/home/rac

On 14 May 2022, an 18-year-old White supremacist killed ten people and injured another three with an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle at a supermarket in a predominantly Black neighbourhood in Buffalo, New York. He wanted to ‘kill as many blacks as possible’, he explained in an online manifesto. The reason was simple: demography. ‘White birth rates must change. Everyday the White population becomes fewer in number’. Such unacceptable depletion was the result of a ‘sub-replacement fertility rate’ alongside ‘mass immigration’. ‘This is ethnic replacement. This is cultural replacement. This is racial replacement. This is WHITE GENOCIDE.’¹ His words gestured across the Atlantic. In France, Renaud Camus had argued in his book *Le Grand Remplacement* (*The Great Replacement*, 2010) that immigrants – particularly Muslims from Asia and Africa – were replacing ‘indigenous’ Europeans through a process of ‘counter-colonisation’ that was enabled by governments of both the Left and Right.² Camus’ argument had found receptive audiences. By the time of the Buffalo massacre in 2022, replacement-style conspiracies had been cited by the perpetrators of attacks that had killed dozens of people in the United States and New Zealand. The deadliest of these massacres – of fifty-one people in New Zealand – was justified by a manifesto titled ‘The Great Replacement’.³

At the same time as it inspired acts of far-right violence, *remplacisme* bolstered its mainstream credentials. During the French presidential election campaign of 2022, the idea that immigrants were replacing ‘native’ French people was invoked by multiple candidates and received persistent and sympathetic airing on mainstream television channels.⁴ Giorgia Meloni, a far-right politician who had warned of the ‘ethnic substitution’ of Europeans, became the prime minister of Italy in October 2022.⁵ Replacement theory was mentioned in 1.5 million tweets on Twitter (now X) between 2012 and 2019.⁶ It was referenced by Tucker Carlson on over 400 episodes of his Fox News television show.⁷ And it was spread across the world by a ‘transnational network of extreme right ideological entrepreneurs’, which included politicians from Slovakia, Germany, Hungary, France, Denmark and Britain.⁸ An opinion poll in 2023 found that two in three Republicans in the United States agreed with its premises.⁹ It also found audiences in countries beyond the West, like India and Tunisia, at moments when nativist sentiments gripped political discourse.¹⁰ No single concept better captured the far-right worldview during the 2010s and early 2020s, or the ways in which neo-fascist ideas slid towards mainstream acceptance.

Why is reactionary politics in the 2020s framed through a specifically *demographic* catastrophism? What explains the deeply felt conviction among people with relative power that they are genuinely facing elimination – the overwriting of their bodies with the bodies of others? And what does this simplistic yet powerful reduction of politics to demography – the ‘demographization’¹¹ of myriad struggles – tell us about the complicity between population science and what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls a ‘revanchist victimology haunted by demotion and loss’?¹² In this article, I contextualise the panic over racial replacement against the backdrop of demography, which promises a scientific understanding of human

populations through statistical methods. The contemporary discipline was founded in the mid-nineteenth century, but its roots lie in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century population science that emerged alongside European settler-colonial projects, especially those of England and France. Replacement theory must be understood in light of this history.

The vision of populations competing to the death in a zero-sum war for planetary space has a long lineage. So too does the idea of colonialism in 'reverse' – part of a history of 'reverse colonization narratives', which, as David M. Higgins explains in a recent study, invite 'the beneficiaries of empire to imagine what it feels like to be on the receiving end of imperial conquest'.¹³ By combining these two existing themes, *remplacistes* make world-ordering claims. In particular, they restate the classic claim of Whiteness to expansive possession: 'the ownership of the earth forever and ever'.¹⁴ They do so through a classic form of counter-revolutionary rhetoric, in which hierarchy is reasserted by imagining its dissolution. Today's demographic catastrophism thus becomes a key element of what Alberto Toscano has called 'a global ascendancy of extremely reactionary forces' and a leading brand of what Lynne Stahl calls 'extinction phobia'.¹⁵ It functions so effectively, I suggest, because the lineaments of a global racial order lie already embedded within the demographic imagination.

Replacement theory cannot be understood apart from the widespread fears that have accompanied settler colonialism in its main forms since the early sixteenth century: first, the fear of Native retribution (part of the broader 'fear, anxiety, and panic' that characterises 'settler consciousness');¹⁶ and second, what Nasser Abourahme has called the deeply unsettled and 'stuck' nature of the settler project – its fundamental 'temporal irresolution' in the face of Indigenous refusal.¹⁷ As a form of 'right-wing annihilationism' and thus bearing similarities to other such discourses like TERFism,¹⁸ replacement theory imaginatively inverts actually-existing power relations precisely in order to legitimise those relations. The supposed annihilatory threat that racialised groups present to the imperial core therefore justifies their ongoing domination and virtually unlimited violence against them. Such proleptic and organised fear is reminiscent of what Arno Mayer termed 'anticipatory counterrevolution'.¹⁹ It reminds us that the triumphalism of imperial (and especially settler-colonial) expansion has long been accompanied by deep anxiety over the prospect of defeat, incompleteness and failure.²⁰

Demography and empire

I suggest that it is the scalar premise of demography – its racial hierarchisation of the populations of the whole world – that remains a vital source of its ideological power. Since race is a classificatory grid placed over a humanity spread across a knowable terraqueous globe, the hierarchy of bodies provided by the science of population has been crucial to its operation. And yet demography has no clearly articulated postcolonial subfield – a stark contrast to adjacent fields like sociology

and anthropology. Demography's academically marginal and technocratic nature historically segregated it from university departments and pushed it into proximity with government bureaucracies, leaving it, as one scholar complained in 1996, 'relatively untouched by conceptual developments' that had gripped the other social sciences.²¹ Critical histories of demography, which began in the early 1980s, did not draw substantively on the emerging postcolonial tradition of that decade and typically had little to say about demography's origins as a colonial science.²² More recent histories of the field have broadly followed in these footsteps.²³ Notwithstanding the vital but exceptional work of a scholar like Tukufu Zuberi, who has critically interrogated the construction of race in statistics,²⁴ accounts of demography's links to race or empire have largely come from outside the discipline. A valuable set of studies has explored the use of demography within colonised territories as part of the apparatus of what came to be known as colonial governmentality.²⁵ In this article, I am interested in the demographic imagination over the *longue durée*. So rather than focus on specific colonised territories, I draw primarily on historical and theoretical work that has explored the history of the idea and science of population, focusing on its colonial and racial associations.²⁶

The most cursory study of replacement discourse reveals its fundamentally gendered nature, bringing together the topoi of racial-gestational threat – typically hyper-fertile women and hyper-virile men – into contact with the pure, endangered and fragile White womb whose only defence is the assertive masculine power of the White phallus. Looking at the recent history of this idea, Sarah Bracke and Luis Manuel Hernández Aguilar compare two visual representations: the first, a billboard poster by Alternative for Germany (AfD) in 2017, depicting a pregnant White woman's stomach and the slogan 'New Germans? We'll make them ourselves'; the second, a cartoon by the blogger D. T. Devareaux in 2006 that depicts a grey female-coded skeleton whose face is covered with a supposedly Islamic garment and whose pregnant stomach is a bomb with the fuse lit.²⁷ In each case, the womb of a faceless but clearly racialised woman contains within it all the hopes and terrors of the future. Such images gesture towards the deep complicity of *remplacisme* with a political project of anti-queerness, anti-feminism and transphobia, as well as with what Sophie Lewis has called a type of 'enemy feminism'.²⁸ Registers of racial-sexual desire, contempt, longing and fear have long inhabited the science of population, though often submerged beneath its claims to neutrality and objectivity. What Anne McClintock identifies as the deep anxiety of male imperial discourse – suspended in ambivalence between 'a fantasy of unstoppable rapine' and a dread of 'dismemberment and emasculation' – has been endlessly restaged in the demographic imagination and its subsidiary projects.²⁹

My approach to far-right ideas is to historicise them and see them as world-ordering doctrines. This is in keeping with recent developments in far-right studies, which have explored the *longue durée* of the far Right and emphasised its irreducibly international dimensions.³⁰ But I take a different direction to the bulk

of existing research on replacement theory specifically. Scholars have tended to explore *remplacisme* as a contemporary discourse – looking at its connection to Islamophobia,³¹ its spread across the word via message boards like 4chan and 8chan,³² its embeddedness in the misogynistic online zone of the ‘manosphere’,³³ its strategic use of the politics of victimhood³⁴ and fear.³⁵ By focusing on the theory’s longer lineages, I aim to take a step back from the present-day functioning of *remplacisme* and consider its complicity with a much longer history of hierarchically organising the world’s population.

The settler-colonial origin of population theory

The science of population emerged in the wake of an apocalypse. Over the course of the sixteenth century, the ‘Great Dying’ saw approximately fifty-six million Indigenous people die across the Americas as a result of the colonisation of their territories by newly arrived Europeans from across the Atlantic.³⁶ The establishment of England’s first permanent settlement in the Americas, Jamestown, in 1607 – in Tsenacommacah, land belonging to the Powhatan confederacy – was followed by the expansion of English settlement colonies along the Atlantic coast. The Southern Department was created in 1660 to manage English government of its colonies alongside the Privy Council’s Board of Trade and Plantations. Over the subsequent four decades, there was a major shift from a relatively ‘dispersed and underdeveloped’ set of English colonial interests – plantations in Ireland and the Caribbean, trading posts in Africa and Asia, settlements in North America – to a project that aimed to ‘convert these dominions into a more coordinated base of territorial power’.³⁷ It was in this context that ancient practices of census-taking were first transformed into a modern science. The study of vital statistics was pioneered by John Graunt, a haberdasher who used London’s Bills of Mortality to draw up the first life tables and extrapolate population size in 1662. His friend William Petty developed these initial forays (of which, some have convincingly argued, he was the true author)³⁸ into a science that he called political arithmetic. This became the essential foundation of demography.

Petty, a professor of anatomy and music in Oxford and London respectively, took leave from his academic duties in 1652 to travel to Ireland with Oliver Cromwell’s invading army. There he led the cadastral Down Survey in 1655–6 whose purpose was to reallocate land confiscated from Irish rebels.³⁹ Petty himself became ‘a powerful owner of around 100,000 acres of confiscated Irish land’.⁴⁰ He conceived of political arithmetic with a specific ambition in mind: to ‘transmute the Irish into English’.⁴¹ To this aim, he conducted a census of the colonised territory and acquired possession of three baronies in County Kerry, at the centre of which he planted a ‘very prosperous’ Protestant colony. His key findings were published in his *Political Anatomy of Ireland* (1691).⁴² Thinking further afield, Petty was also interested in the success of England’s North American settler colonies. He offered a proposal for the demographic subsumption of Indigenous peoples through the

kidnapping of Indigenous girls and their forcible marriage to English colonists.⁴³ Political arithmetic was used by Petty's immediate successors not only to survey colonial land but also 'to calculate and project total world populations'.⁴⁴

Rather than being developed in the metropole before being extended to the colonies, then, the political subject of the population first emerged as a method of exerting imperial control over subject peoples in settler territories – counting and surveying with the aim of controlling and even annihilating them. As Charlotte Sussman accurately observes, 'population theory, and its attendant projects such as census taking, developed in the context of England's consolidation of control over its first empire rather than originating as neutral metropolitan practices that were later exported as instruments of colonial domination'.⁴⁵ Robert V. Wells, the leading demographic historian of the United States, has noted that 'the first English attempts to collect precise data on a colonial population occurred in Virginia between 1623 and 1625', despite the fact that 'England did not begin to count her citizens at home on a regular basis until 1801'.⁴⁶ Early conceptions of global population aimed explicitly to expand settler power. In 1751, Benjamin Franklin proposed to increase the global White population through both settler expansion and immigration control in the United States: 'The Number of purely white People in the World is proportionably very small', wrote Franklin, 'but it might be made to increase via these methods'. The historian Matthew Connelly has suggested that this may have been the first ever proposal to control world population.⁴⁷

Malthus and the world

Five decades later, the science of political arithmetic was transformed by Thomas Robert Malthus, who published his first *Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798.⁴⁸ Malthus was employed as professor of history and political economy at the East India Company College in Hertfordshire from 1805 until his death in 1834. In the first *Essay*, he argued that population growth was a major constraint to the visions of progress outlined by Godwin and Condorcet. Since the rate of population growth would, if unchecked, outstrip that of food production, attempts to improve the conditions of the poor could paradoxically worsen their lot by stimulating higher birth rates and increasing competition for food. Thus 'misery' had a positive function: it 'is the check that represses the superior power of population'.⁴⁹

An injunction in the first *Essay* forms the latent basis of all Malthus' subsequent thinking: 'Let us take the whole earth, instead of one spot'.⁵⁰ Data from specific countries had as its implicit backdrop 'the progress of mankind to the full peopling of the earth', as he put it in his 1830 summary of his ideas.⁵¹ Alison Bashford and Joyce Chaplin have thus rightly stated that the scope of Malthus' *Essay* was planetary: 'His major ambition was to establish a universal, mathematically expressed, and therefore scientific principle about all of humanity, and to do so

he knew he needed to canvass the inhabited world and find a way to theorize his worldwide exempla.⁵² But this planetary space was not in any sense neutral. It was a racially hierarchised global space cleaved between what Malthus frankly called in 1830 'the white population' in 'improved' zones and the non-White population in 'the less civilised parts of the world'. These 'more uncultivated parts of the world', as he also referred to them, would become an anxious fixation of the science of population that he pioneered.⁵³ Populations competed in a world shaped by a hierarchy of civilisation. Europe was naturally at the apex. Non-Europeans were destined to either strict tutelage or extinction. Thus, as he wrote in the second *Essay* in 1803, 'Indians [in North America] will be driven further and further back into the country, till the whole race is ultimately exterminated'. The 'inhabitants of the greatest part of Asia and Africa' would survive, but the immense imperial labour required 'to civilize and direct the industry of the various tribes of Tartars, and Negroes, would certainly be a work of considerable time, and of variable and uncertain success'.⁵⁴

About the 'wretched' Indigenous inhabitants of 'barren' territories like Terra del Fuego, Malthus was quite clear in the second *Essay*: they were 'at the bottom of the scale of human beings' – 'a race of savages, whose very appearance indicates them to be half starved, and who, shivering with cold, and covered with filth and vermin, live in one of the most inhospitable climates in the world'. They were comparable only to Indigenous peoples of 'Van Diemen's land' (modern-day Tasmania/Lutruwita), which was 'inhabited by a race of savages still lower in wretchedness even than these'.⁵⁵ While Bashford and Chaplin have pointed to strands of Malthus' argument as providing a basis for a moral objection to settlement,⁵⁶ these passages give us some of the starkest examples of what Patrick Brantlinger has called 'extinction discourse', which situates Indigenous peoples as inevitably disappearing in order 'to rationalize or occlude the genocidal aspects of European conquest and colonization'.⁵⁷ Malthus was, Brantlinger points out, a key influence on the later representation of 'savagery' in political economy as 'irrational' and 'self-extinguishing'.⁵⁸

As with his predecessor John Locke, Malthus drew key conclusions from the settler frontier.⁵⁹ He 'considered the United States to be the exception proving his rule that the availability of subsistence was holding human numbers in check', explains Dennis Hodgson. After reading Malthus, Thomas Jefferson rejoiced in the potential for the United States to evade demographic constraints, at least for a time. In Europe, 'the quantity of food is fixed, or increasing in a slow and only arithmetical ratio', wrote Jefferson. But 'here the immense extent of uncultivated and fertile lands enables everyone who will labor, to marry young, and to raise a family of any size'.⁶⁰ Defenders of slavery in the US South and in the British Empire also drew on Malthus to argue that enslavement had a positive effect by limiting Black fertility. While Malthus rejected the use of his theory to defend enslavement, the way he did so is instructive. As Hodgson explains, he 'argued that . . . Africa's population *was already being held in check* by the availability of

subsistence', while 'the slave population in the West Indies was', far from growing excessively, 'constantly in need of new additions to keep from shrinking in size'.⁶¹ Thus Malthus did not reject the idea that Black and African population size was a problem to be contained and carefully monitored by European imperial powers.

In the population science that arose from the writing of Petty, Malthus and others,⁶² assertions about populations were dependably, if often implicitly, made against a world-scale backdrop. At the heart of Malthus' permanent 'struggle for room and food' was a sense of insuperable competition between human groups. The 'Malthusian crossover with lebensraum' was, as Bashford points out, 'neither incidental nor coincidental'.⁶³ It endured in the thought of those inspired by Malthus: 'all strands [of neo-Malthusianism] operate in a way that justifies and affirms the established order of inequality', explains Soumaya Majdoub.⁶⁴ In the United States, a biologicistic view of politics, which saw the global pre-eminence of a racially advanced population as threatened by miscegenation with lesser breeds, was prominent in the language used to justify early systems of immigration control.⁶⁵ The leader of the Immigration Restriction League explained that immigration control measures offered 'a species of segregation on a large scale, by which inferior stocks can be prevented from both diluting and supplanting good stocks'. This process was similar to how 'we isolate bacterial invasions, and starve out the bacteria by limiting the area and amount of their food supply'.⁶⁶ Such bacteriological language prefigured the Third Reich's notion of 'a life-and-death struggle between the Aryan race and the Jewish bacillus'.⁶⁷

'The imminent disappearance of our country': depopulation anxieties

So far, I have discussed population science as it emerged in the British Empire. Yet the deep pessimism and fear that have come to characterise demographic thought cannot be located in British intellectual history alone. To understand contemporary anxieties about depopulation and replacement, it is necessary to turn to Britain's imperial rival, France – the second major player in the history of demography. Here too the science of population was erected on a settler-colonial foundation. The first census ever conducted in North America was a counting of settlers by Jean Talon in New France in 1666 that conspicuously excluded the territory's Indigenous inhabitants.⁶⁸ France progressively lost territory in North America from 1713. But its colonial enterprise in the Americas endured with the plantation economy it had established in the Caribbean – based on the labour of enslaved and forcibly transported African people – and an attempt to develop French Guyana into a settlement territory.⁶⁹ During the eighteenth century, approximately a million enslaved Africans and 300,000 French migrants were transported to France's Caribbean colonies.⁷⁰ A recent study confirms that 'it was in Canada and the Antilles that French authorities first regularly conducted nominative censuses, invented tabular analyses of the causes of population change,

and considered how sex ratios, agricultural production, religion, "race," and territorial defense intersected to grow or limit the overall population'. Such colonial population censuses 'frequently took the form of military reviews of "soldier-settlers" [soldats-habitants]'.⁷¹

It was in the context of French colonial expansion and rivalry with other European empires, especially Britain, that the notion of the French population emerged in the eighteenth century. The French population was not simply a nationally-bounded entity but a tool of expansive world-shaping power. Jean-Baptiste Moheau, the bureaucrat who is considered one of the founders of French demography (Foucault called him 'the first great theorist' of biopolitics) published his treatise *Recherches et considerations sur la population de la France* in 1778, the same year that a major Anglo-French war erupted over control of the English Channel, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean.⁷² In the book, Moheau explained that if 'man is the principle of all wealth', the power of this human wealth was properly realised at 'moments of crisis when Nations dispute over Empire, and when one mass of men conspires the destruction of the other'. Such warlike moments revealed how it is the 'action and the preponderance of the population' that 'decides these great quarrels of nations'.⁷³ In September 1792, the French Legislative Assembly passed a law that granted state municipalities sole authority to recognise births, marriages and deaths. The statesman Pierre-Victurnien Vergniaud argued that such regulation was necessary because 'marriage . . . exerts an influence upon the power and splendor of empires; upon their power by increasing population'. Collecting population data became a central function of the state.⁷⁴ Alexandre Moreau de Jonnès, the first director of the *Statistique Générale*, compared the emerging science of statistics to the 'hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt, where the lessons of history . . . and the secrets of the future were concealed in mysterious characters'.⁷⁵

Achille Guillard, who invented the term 'demography', explained in 1854: 'We mean by human statistics the mathematical knowledge of populations, of their general movements, of their physical, intellectual, moral, civil and social state. Its domain is very vast; it embraces the succession of generations, the duration of life, the relations of man with nature, in one word, all the type of facts and studies which are directly related to the species, its needs, its suffering, and its well being.' Libby Schweber, who cites the above passage in her comparative study of French and English population science, comments that 'demography followed in the tradition of Condorcet and Comte. It called for a comprehensive social science based on the scientific, and in this case statistical, study of society'.⁷⁶ Guillard was a resolute anti-Malthusian who rejected fertility as a cause of poverty.⁷⁷ But the totalising promise of his demography - his claim that demography's domain 'is very vast' - cannot be understood apart from the work of Petty and Malthus before him. At the same time as demography sought to tabulate and comprehend populations inside states like France, it also located those populations in a global space that was being ordered by European colonialism.

Population decline and imperial ambition

Populationist optimism did not survive the nineteenth century in France. From being Europe's most populous country in 1801, France found itself with fewer inhabitants than Russia, Germany or Britain by 1900.⁷⁸ One estimate puts the number of French military deaths caused by the Napoleonic Wars at 916,000.⁷⁹ The Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1, which ended French dominance in Europe, claimed another 150,000. By the close of the nineteenth century, nationalist voices warned of nothing less than 'the imminent disappearance of our country'.⁸⁰ The National Alliance for the Growth of the French Population was founded in 1896.⁸¹ Pronatalist sentiments were expressed in political tracts like Jacques Bertillon's *Le Problème de la dépopulation* (1897), which saw France as slipping down the league table of great powers. And they appeared in novels like Emile Zola's *Fécondité* (1898–1902), an ode to the procreating rural French family against the corrupting influence of modern birth control.⁸²

It is vital to understand these laments to *national* decline in the context of a wider sense of *transnational* demographic loss. The precipitous decline of the French population had tracked the diminution of its imperial ambitions. The obverse to French distress was British triumphalism at the entrenching hegemony of 'English-speaking peoples'. Charles Wentworth Dilke, the politician and author of the influential 1869 travelogue and Anglo-imperial tract *Greater Britain*, thus wrote that 'no possible series of events can prevent the English race itself in 1970 numbering 300 millions of beings . . . Italy, Spain, France, Russia, [will] become pygmies by the side of such a people'.⁸³ In 1884, William Gladstone exclaimed: 'What a prospect is that of very many hundreds of millions of people, certainly among the most manful and energetic in the world, occupying one great continent . . . United almost absolutely in blood & language, & very largely in religion, laws & institutions.' The 'prospect,' he added, 'is at once majestic, inspiring & consolatory'.⁸⁴ By contrast, though French governments had colonised Algeria since 1830 and encouraged successive waves of settlement, France's settler project in Algeria was 'underpowered' relative to comparable Anglo projects, as the historian James Belich explains, in part due to the reluctance of French capital to invest in the frontier.⁸⁵ *Anglo-Saxon superiority: to what is it due?* asked a book by Edmond Demolins in 1889.⁸⁶ Many agreed with him that Anglo-Saxon power was demonstrated in 'the constant installation of new settlers on all the points of the globe' leading to 'the incessant extension of the Anglo-Saxon world'.⁸⁷

The catastrophic 1.3 million military fatalities suffered by France during the First World War only strengthened these existing narratives.⁸⁸ There was an eruption of pronatalism during the late 1930s and especially during the Vichy years (1940–44). Contraception and abortion were banned. So was 'anti-conception propaganda' in any form: 'book, writing, print, poster, drawing, image or advertisement'.⁸⁹ It became compulsory to teach demography in schools. Even the French Communist Party abandoned its prior opposition to antiabortion laws

and adopted a pronatalist programme in 1938. Demographic institutions created between 1939 and 1945, including the Ministry for the Family and le Haut comité consultatif de la population et de la famille, established population policy as a matter of statecraft to be guarded from the influence of party politics.⁹⁰ After the war, the Fondation Carrel of the Vichy state became France's leading demographic research institute, l'Institut national d'études démographiques (INED). The major institutions of the French welfare state were developed in significant part with birthrate promotion in mind, as Susan Pedersen and Paul-André Rosental have shown.⁹¹

Recurrent panics over demography have since been a marked feature of French national life. During the interwar years, France pioneered a modern regime of immigration control as the country faced what the sociologist René Maunier called 'penetration' by 'thousands, hundreds of thousands of natives'.⁹² Hierarchies of bodies conflicted with the abstract individualism of republican doctrine in theory but not in practice. The whole history of French natalism was a dedication to the fertility of 'native' French people – 'put simply, *French* women were not having enough *French* babies'.⁹³ To reconcile this with the abstractions of republican doctrine, a 'hybrid Republican form' was created 'which facilitated the proliferation of racialized embodiments'.⁹⁴

The French nation was, as the French statesman and colonial administrator Albert Sarraut put it in *Grandeur et servitude coloniales* (1931), not an abstract entity but a racial spirit. It represented an evolved form of humanity that spread across the planet in the service of those less fortunate. It carried a unique 'national soul', which had been 'gradually formed, modeled, kneaded, bathed' by its defining influences, which, 'by a sort of capillarity', had 'gradually spread throughout the race'. These influences made the French 'represent a heredity still on the path of freedom, a heredity of light which, in the colonies, comes to the aid of a heredity of stagnation and darkness'.⁹⁵ It is *this* form of demography – competitively imperial, constitutively racial – that has made France into the intellectual home of the contemporary far right and the source of its preponderant concepts: great replacement, ethnic substitution, Eurabia, and White genocide.⁹⁶

The world population problem

Anticolonial movements began articulating demands for global justice in newly confident and radical ways after the First World War. During the same period, Margaret Sanger, the founder of the American Birth Control League, found herself horrified at the global abundance of excess human life. In 1922, after an eight-month world tour, she was 'led to agree with H. G. Wells when he says that the whole world at present is swarming with cramped, dreary, meaningless lives, lives which amount to nothing and which use up the resources and surplus energies of the world'.⁹⁷ Colonial public health officials put the same sentiment more simply: 'They are born too much and they don't die enough.'⁹⁸ After the Second

World War, the ineluctable movement of African and Asian states towards formal independence was accompanied by the idea of a population 'explosion'. Widely distributed tracts warned of the 'millions who can turn to revolution . . . or who may explode out of national boundaries to find food'. In *Our Plundered Planet* (1948) and *The Limits of the Earth* (1953), the eugenicist Henry Fairfield Osborn warned of environmental apocalypse due to human fecundity. The *New York Times* envisaged 'billions of half-alive, starving peasants' and 'forcible invasions of national borders by hordes of human beings'. 'They' could be 'here' too, populating what Moynihan called 'the urban frontier'.⁹⁹ There were unprecedented state- and international-level projects to intervene in the management of populations and especially to manage and control fertility.¹⁰⁰

Historians have pointed to the multiple lineages and constituencies implicated in the idea of a world population problem. Alison Bashford describes how it combined strands of post-Darwinian biological science with vitalist geopolitical ideas that saw nations as living organisms struggling for space in a world of limited land and resources. The divergent paths that radiated from this idea were all 'part of the long, modern trajectory of an aspirational one world'.¹⁰¹ Matthew Connelly highlights the 'diverse kinds of political projects' and 'unlikely alliances' that emerged from the population control movement.¹⁰² And yet world population was not a neutral problem space: its preponderant formulations were always those that reinforced rather than challenged what Patrick Wolfe calls the 'chromatic taxonomy' of race, in which non-White populations are stratified below a dominating Whiteness that remains the foundational claim to global privilege.¹⁰³ The basic premise of global population management articulated by Benjamin Franklin in 1751 – encouraging the relative growth of populations designated as White – remains inescapably latent in all its subsequent articulations. If anticolonialists like Tarak Nath Das have been able to speak ironically about a 'white peril' (or Public Enemy a 'Black Planet', for example), these resistant formulations have taken their power precisely from the fact that they subvert a hegemonic discourse in which it is *always* a surplus of Black, Brown, Yellow and Red bodies threatening a besieged White population.¹⁰⁴

'While the political control of colonies has greatly decreased, large parts of the world and its people remain under imperialism by economic power', said W. E. B. Du Bois in one of his final speeches in 1960. 'We might then regard the world outside Europe and the United States as still colonial.'¹⁰⁵ Rectifying this still-colonial world economy was the central aim of the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in 1974. As part of what Christopher Dietrich has described as an 'oil revolution' that sought to remake the international economy in the interests of formerly colonised countries, the NIEO represented a 'vision of justice through a restructuring of the international economy'.¹⁰⁶ It coincided with the apex of the population control movement – during the Indian 'emergency' in 1976, 6.2 million men were sterilised – and represented an alternative explanation for global inequality, as a recent study has

suggested.¹⁰⁷ Thus demographic anxiety continued to embody a central affective and ideological response to threats to global hierarchy and proposals for distributive equalisation. In the 1980s, when these threats receded, so did populationist gloom. Race itself continued to operate, however, in the globalised production chains of the 'new circuits of imperialism', which kept the world-scale bifurcation of the colonial era essentially intact.¹⁰⁸ It returned during the 'War on Terror' with a novel emphasis on Muslim peoples as the great overpopulation threat. The early 2000s witnessed an eruption of catastrophism that prefigured the great replacement theory of the 2010s. A paleoconservative commentator warned in 2002 that 'European peoples' were 'a vanishing race'.¹⁰⁹ The historian Niall Ferguson wrote in the *New York Times* in 2004 that 'a youthful Muslim society' was 'poised to colonize – the term is not too strong – a senescent Europe'.¹¹⁰ The 'Eurabia' conspiracy and 'counter-jihad' movement, which both date to 2005, imagined the multiplying and invading Muslim as the central agent of their extinction phobia.¹¹¹

The panic over replacement, seen in its proper context, is therefore not an aberration but part of a longstanding defensive strategy: what W. E. B. Du Bois recognised as the 'marvelous contrivances' that 'white and European civilization' has found for 'enslaving the many, and enriching the few, and murdering both'.¹¹² Du Bois' claim reminds us of the longstanding Black radical critique of fascism as a structural feature of the imperial order, indissociable from the selective liberties granted by the same order to its privileged classes. That tradition calls into question the apparently provincial defensiveness of the *remplacistes*, who claim to be preserving localised populations from overwhelming migratory pressures. It suggests that their claims are better recast as a project of 'anticipatory counter-revolution' on a world scale. The central concern of this counter-revolution is the maintenance of global North-South bifurcation and its concomitant hierarchies of power – what Du Bois called 'the concentration particularly of economic power' that 'puts the majority of mankind into a slavery to the rest'.¹¹³ In this sense, replacement theory operates within the premises of demography: both naturalise the racialised stratification of the world. As a colonial science of population management, demography is always premised on the Apollonian scale enabled by European expansion, even when it operates at apparently smaller scales.¹¹⁴ It has not simply worked to justify the bifurcation of that world but also to anticipate and resist any attempts towards decolonisation, understood as a form of global equalisation. It has thus ably produced doctrines of 'anticipatory counter-revolution', of which *remplacisme* provides the latest illustration.

Replacement theory and the idea of population

Let me conclude with some final words on the population as a political subject. In this article, I have insisted on locating replacement theory within the mainstream

of the science of population that arose alongside the colonial bifurcation of the world. Populations – what Michelle Murphy has called ‘figures of massified life’¹¹⁵ – are thus entwined with the spatial expansion of political horizons that accompanied the metastasization of European empires across the world and the creation of a stratified global system. They were never imagined in isolation but always in comparison across world-spanning space. Populationism should, then, properly be understood as a form of global thought. The populations conceived of by demography were never in any simple sense national. They were situated in a global racial order, hierarchised and stratified, in competition with one another, and yoked to settler-colonial projects. The imperial globe was the terrain on which individuals coagulated and competed. The colonial roots of demographic science indicate why, if the ‘population’ was, as Foucault argued, a new political subject, it was a constitutively colonial subject that was situated in an irreducibly global space. It is precisely this scalar vision at the heart of demography that gives it such ideological effectiveness during periods of planetary flux. Like Whiteness, with which it was indivisibly tied, the idea of the population naturalised hierarchy on a world scale.

In some ways, replacement theory is the recrudescence of a much older theme in western thought: civilisational decline occasioned by invading barbaric hordes.¹¹⁶ And yet – as with critical analyses of race that refer to ancient distinctions between barbaric and civilised peoples – such an approach can miss what is new about contemporary anxieties. Replacement theory is contingent on the idea of population as the central body of ‘massified life’ into which individual hopes and destinies are subsumed. Though his analysis was spatially circumscribed, Michel Foucault was right to emphasise the relative lateness of the ‘population’ as a political subject that had been ‘absolutely foreign to the juridical and political thought of earlier centuries’.¹¹⁷ This important shift in thought is overlooked in Colin Bossen’s recent (and otherwise illuminating) attempt to explain *remplacisme* in terms of the ‘theological construction of race’ in fifteenth-century Catholic theology.¹¹⁸ By contrast, as Sarah Bracke, Luis Manuel Hernández Aguilar, and Mark Davis show in their recent studies of replacement theory, biopolitics continues to offer a valuable paradigm through which to contextualise present-day demographic fears and fantasies.¹¹⁹ But that paradigm must be expanded beyond its original form in order to see the expansive scale of empire as the fundamental context to this shift in juridical and political thought.

Any attempt to understand replacement theory must emphasise the indissociable complicity of the political subject of the population with imperialism and especially settler colonialism. The promise to regulate and promote certain kinds of human life was always the inverse of a form of power that also undertook to extinguish other kinds of human life. If this is partly captured by Foucault’s discussion of racism as inserting into biopower ‘the break between what must live and what must die’,¹²⁰ it is also elided by his unwillingness to see that break as corresponding to the bifurcation of the world into White and non-White, or what

Barnor Hesse has called 'the colonially constituted "European"/"non-European" distinction and its territorialization on to diverse human bodies'.¹²¹ This cleavage of humanity across global space was the essential basis of demography, whose enormously productive promise for some people was inseparable from its radically destructive ambitions for others. Demography thus became part of the ideological apparatus of what Achille Mbembe has referred to as 'necropower' – 'maximally destroying persons and creating death-worlds'.¹²²

'Race suicide': old and new anxieties

Demography has evolved since its prehistory in the seventeenth century and codification in the nineteenth century. Yet it is striking to observe the durability of its key premises. From Petty to Malthus to Camus, major formulations of populationism have been united by their allegiance to a global racial order in which 'excess' populations are defined by their structural distance from Whiteness. In this view, the notion of a White surplus is literally inconceivable. What remains is an image that would have been familiar to commentators of the 1880s, 1920s and 1960s: innumerable multitudes from the South and East inundating a racially elite 'European people of white race', to quote Renaud Camus.¹²³ Though Camus is a figure of the far Right, his arguments gain much of their power from their enduring proximity to liberal discourse.¹²⁴ He argues that 'France is much more colonized by Africa than it has ever colonized Africa' because 'demographic colonization is a hundred times more serious than military colonization'.¹²⁵ The inversion reminds us of the Janus-faced nature of the population as a political subject since its inception in political arithmetic – stratospheric growth for some, merciless annihilation for others. 'The rude, fierce settler who drives the savage from the land lays all civilized mankind under a debt to him', explained Theodore Roosevelt. It was of 'incalculable importance' that places like 'America, Australia, and Siberia should pass out of the hands of their red, black, and yellow aboriginal owners, and become the heritage of the dominant world races'.¹²⁶ Such triumphalism was never distant from terror at the prospect of defeat. And so it was the same Roosevelt who warned starkly of White 'race suicide', a proto-*remplaciste* concept that was coined by the sociologist Edward Alsworth Ross in 1901.¹²⁷

A weakened Europe overrun by its uncivilised enemies: this image neatly inverts the triumphalist Anglo settler and racial-colonial literatures of the nineteenth century, which had imagined the decaying world beyond Europe as being replenished and its peoples replaced by the vitalist energies of White bodies. This idea of a wave of 'counter-colonisation' evokes notions – 'reverse racism', 'anti-White racism', 'White genocide' – that symbolically rehearse the overturning of an established hierarchy.¹²⁸ This language can appear to be a form of aberrant racism, distant from mainstream population science. Yet the power of replacement theory to travel into mainstream and liberal discourse has revealed something quite different. The invocation of replacement operates on the level of global

order. There it acts as a restatement of Whiteness: a material claim to global power. And there it finds an uneasy yet undeniable proximity to dominant ideas. Liberal demography has been deeply troubled by its inability to offer an alternative to far-right demographic catastrophism. An ostensibly sanitised and non-ideological demography remains, despite all its ameliorative efforts, awkwardly close to the vision of racialised populations competing in a war for planetary space. Meanwhile, for the prophets of *remplacisme*, the magnitude of the threat merits a substantial response. All options are on the table. 'I prefer war to submission', writes Camus.¹²⁹

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the attendees of seminars at the London School of Economics and Political Science and the University of Nottingham for their feedback on this paper. For their perceptive and critical responses to various drafts, my deepest thanks to Tarsis Brito, Eugene Brennan, Miri Davidson, Jonathan Jacobs, Stephen Legg, Kerem Nişancıoğlu, Lucile Richard, Sam Weisselberg and Asad Zaidi, as well as to the editors and reviewers at *Race & Class*.

References

- 1 The manifesto is available at the following link: <https://www.hoplophobia.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/PG-Manifesto.pdf> (accessed 16 January 2026). See J. Stanley, "Buffalo Shooting: How White Replacement Theory Keeps Inspiring Mass Murder," *The Guardian*, May 15, 2022; Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies, "Buffalo Supermarket Shooting," *Hot Brief* (Vancouver, 16 May 2022); D. Peterka-Benton and B. Benton, "Online radicalization case study of a mass shooting: The Payton Gendron manifesto," *Journal for Deradicalization*, June 30, 2023, <https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/justice-studies-fac-pubs/208>.
- 2 R. Camus, *Le Grand Remplacement: Introduction Au Remplacisme Global*, 5th ed. (Chez l'auteur, 2017).
- 3 *Remplaciste* ideas were cited by protesters in Charlottesville in 2017 in a Unite the Right rally, during which a counter-protester was killed; by the perpetrator of an attack on a Pittsburgh synagogue in 2018, which killed eleven people; by the White supremacist who conducted a mass shooting in El Paso, Texas in 2019 targeting primarily Latinx people, which killed twenty-three people; and by the Australian perpetrator of an attack targeting Muslim people in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019, which killed fifty-one people. The New Zealand attacker's manifesto was titled 'The Great Replacement'.
- 4 Candidates who invoked *remplaciste* ideas collectively received 35 per cent of the first-round vote in the election. Le Pen had already spoken in 2011 about the "submersion" of France "through an organized replacement of our population". (See E. Baldit, "Le grand mytho de Marine Le Pen sur le «grand remplacement»," *Libération*, March 18, 2019, https://www.liberation.fr/politiques/2019/03/18/le-grand-mytho-de-marine-le-pen-sur-le-grand-remplacement_1715850/.) Le Pen's far-right competitor in the 2022 presidential election, Éric Zemmour, often invoked replacement theory. Meanwhile Valérie Pécresse, the main centre-right candidate, declared in a speech on February 13, 2022, that: "Nothing is written, whether it's loss of economic status, or the Great Replacement". See N. Onishi, "In a France fearful of immigrants, another candidate tacks hard right," *New York Times*, December 18, 2021; C. Caulcutt, "France's Pécresse comes under fire for reference to far-right conspiracy theory,"

- Politico*, February 14, 2022; Ivan Valerio, "Pour Marine Le Pen, la théorie du «grand remplacement» relève du «complotisme»," *Le Figaro*, November 2, 2014, sec. Les verbatims, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/citations/2014/11/02/25002-20141102ARTFIG00145-pour-marine-le-pen-la-theorie-du-grand-remplacement-releve-du-complotisme.php>. On the relationship between *macronisme* and the far Right, see U. Palheta, *La possibilité du fascisme: France, la trajectoire du désastre* (La Découverte, 2018), 149.
- 5 See M. Martelloni, "Ius Soli, Meloni Riunisce La Destra Contro La Legge: 'Atto Di Sostituzione Etnica'," *La Repubblica*, June 20, 2017, <https://video.repubblica.it/dossier/riforme-da-non-tradire/ius-soli-meloni-riunisce-la-destra-contro-la-legge-atto-di-sostituzione-etnica/279222/279821>.
 - 6 J. Davey and J. Ebner, "The great replacement: The violent consequences of mainstreamed extremism," *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* 7 (2019): 5, 15–16.
 - 7 *Tucker Carlson Tonight* aired between November 2016 and April 2023. N. Confessore, "What to know about Tucker Carlson's rise," *The New York Times*, April 30, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/30/business/media/tucker-carlson-fox-news-takeaways.html>.
 - 8 M. Davis, "Violence as method: The 'White replacement', 'White genocide', and 'Eurabia' conspiracy theories and the biopolitics of networked violence," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, January 25, 2024, 12.
 - 9 Public Religion Research Institute, "Threats to American democracy ahead of an unprecedented presidential election," October 25, 2023, <https://www.prii.org/research/threats-to-american-democracy-ahead-of-an-unprecedented-presidential-election/>.
 - 10 See H. Mzioudet, "On silence and (in-)visibility: Whither Black Tunisian mobilization in Post-2011 Tunisia?," *Arab Reform Initiative*, July 19, 2023, <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/on-silence-and-in-visibility-whither-black-tunisian-mobilization-in-post-2011-tunisia/>.
 - 11 "Demographization" is from S. Schultz, "Demographic futurity: How statistical assumption politics shape immigration policy rationales in Germany," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 37, no. 4 (2019): 644–62.
 - 12 R. W. Gilmore, *Abolition Geography: Essays towards Liberation* (Verso, 2022), 161. For a helpful discussion of this passage, see A. Toscano, *Late Fascism: Race, Capitalism and the Politics of Crisis* (Verso Books, 2023), 52.
 - 13 D. M. Higgins, *Reverse Colonization: Science Fiction, Imperial Fantasy, and Alt-victimhood* (University of Iowa Press, 2021), 1.
 - 14 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Du Bois: Writings*, ed. N. I. Huggins (Library of America, 1987), 924.
 - 15 J. Romm, "Late fascism: An interview with Alberto Toscano, Part 1," *Protean Magazine*, November 24, 2023; L. Stahl, "Perspective: The latest form of transphobia: Saying Lesbians are going extinct," *The Washington Post*, March 18, 2021.
 - 16 A. M. Chouchene, "Fear, anxiety, panic, and settler consciousness," *Settler Colonial Studies* 10, no. 4 (2020): 443–60.
 - 17 N. Abourahme, *The Time Beneath the Concrete: Palestine between Camp and Colony* (Duke University Press, 2025), 24–25.
 - 18 C. H. Schotten, "TERFism, Zionism, and right-wing annihilationism: Toward an internationalist genealogy of extinction phobia," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (2022): 334–64.
 - 19 A. J. Mayer, *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe, 1870–1956* (Harper & Row, 1971), 104.
 - 20 On the fundamental incompleteness of settler conquest, see Abourahme's *The Time Beneath the Concrete*. On "settlerism," the ideology of settler colonialism, see J. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld* (Oxford University Press, 2009).
 - 21 S. Greenhalgh, "The social construction of population science: An intellectual, institutional, and political history of twentieth-century demography," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38, no. 1 (1996): 27.

- 22 See D. Hodgson, "Demography as social science and policy science," *Population and Development Review* 9, no. 1 (1983): 1-34; D. Hodgson, "Orthodoxy and revisionism in American demography," *Population and Development Review* 14, no. 4 (1988): 541-69; D. Hodgson, "The ideological origins of the population association of America," *Population and Development Review* 17, no. 1 (1991): 1-34; D. Hodgson, "Benjamin Franklin on population: From policy to theory," *Population and Development Review* 17, no. 4 (1991): 639-61; S. Szreter, "The idea of demographic transition and the study of fertility change: A critical intellectual history," *Population and Development Review* 19, no. 4 (1993): 659-701; P. Demeny, "Demography and the limits to growth," *Population and Development Review* 14 (1988): 213-44; Greenhalgh, "The social construction of population science".
- 23 See, for example, L. Schweber, *Disciplining Statistics: Demography and Vital Statistics in France and England, 1830-1885* (Duke University Press Books, 2006).
- 24 T. Zuberi, *Thicker than Blood: How Racial Statistics Lie* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001). The discipline's isolation of this critical work means that Zuberi is not cited in standard textbooks of demography like R. K. Thomas' *Demography: An Introduction to Population Studies* (Springer International Publishing, 2024).
- 25 See especially K. Ittmann, D. D. Cordell, and G. H. Maddox, eds., *The Demographics of Empire: The Colonial Order and the Creation of Knowledge* (Ohio University Press, 2010); J. Johnson, "Categorizing the Maghrib: How Census Data, Demography, and Population Studies Facilitated Governance Strategies and Public Messaging in Colonial and Postcolonial North Africa," in *Fertility, Family, and Social Welfare between France and Empire: The Colonial Politics of Population*, edited by M. C. Andersen and M. K. Byrnes (Springer International Publishing, 2023). On colonial governmentality, see D. Scott, "Colonial governmentality," *Social Text*, no. 43 (1995): 191-220; G. Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton University Press, 2020).
- 26 I have found especially useful historical research on political arithmetic: see especially T. McCormick, *William Petty: And the Ambitions of Political Arithmetic*, Illustrated edition (Oxford University Press, 2009); C. Sussman, "The colonial afterlife of political arithmetic: Swift, demography, and mobile populations," *Cultural Critique*, no. 56 (2004): 96-126; C. Sussman, *Peopling the World: Representing Human Mobility from Milton to Malthus* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020). Histories of the idea of a world population problem have also been essential sources, namely the two landmark studies by M. Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Harvard University Press, 2008) and A. Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (Columbia University Press, 2014). Finally, in theoretical terms I draw on the trenchant critique of the idea of "massified life" in M. Murphy, *The Economization of Life* (Duke University Press Books, 2017); as well as the challenge to populationism in L. Tilley and M. Ajl, "Eco-socialism will be anti-eugenic or it will be nothing: Towards equal exchange and the end of population," *Politics* 43, no. 2 (2023): 201-18.
- 27 S. Bracke and L. M. Hernández Aguilar, "'They love death as we love life': The 'Muslim question' and the Biopolitics of Replacement," *The British Journal of Sociology* 71, no. 4 (2020): 689-92.
- 28 S. Lewis, *Enemy Feminisms: TERFs, Policewomen, and Girlbosses against Liberation* (Haymarket Books, 2025).
- 29 A. McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Routledge, 2013), 26-27.
- 30 Toscano, *Late Fascism*; R. Saull, *Capital, Race and Space, Volume I* (Brill, 2023); R. D. E. Campos, "The international turn in far-right studies: A critical assessment," *Millennium* 51, no. 3 (2023): 892-919.
- 31 M. Obaidi, J. Kunst, S. Ozer, and S. Y. Kimel, "The 'Great Replacement' conspiracy: How the perceived ousting of Whites can evoke violent extremism and Islamophobia," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 25, no. 7 (2022): 1675-95.

- 32 G. Cosentino, "From Pizzagate to the Great Replacement: The globalization of conspiracy theories," in *Social Media and the Post-Truth World Order: The Global Dynamics of Disinformation*, edited by G. Cosentino (Springer International Publishing, 2020).
- 33 C. E. Gentry, "Misogynistic terrorism: It has always been here," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 15, no. 1 (2022): 209–24.
- 34 P. Dixit, "Red pills, White genocide, and 'the Great Replacement': Rewriting history, and constructing White victimhood in/through far-right extremist manifestos and texts," in *Race, Popular Culture, and Far-Right Extremism in the United States*, ed. P. Dixit (Springer International Publishing, 2022).
- 35 M. Ekman, "The great replacement: Strategic mainstreaming of far-right conspiracy claims," *Convergence* 28, no. 4 (2022): 1127–43. For exceptions – historical approaches to *remplacisme* – see especially J. Goetz, "'The Great Replacement': Reproduction and population policies of the far right, taking the identitarians as an example," *DiGeSt – Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 8, no. 1 (2021): 59–74; S. Bracke and L. M. Hernández Aguilar, "The politics of replacement: From 'race suicide' to the 'great replacement'," in *The Politics of Replacement: Demographic Fears, Conspiracy Theories, and Race Wars*, edited by S. Bracke and L. M. Hernández Aguilar (Routledge, 2024); C. Bossen, "Political theology, discovery and the roots of the 'great replacement'," *Race & Class* 66, no. 2 (2024): 3–20.
- 36 A. Koch, C. Brierley, M. M. Maslin, and S. L. Lewis, "Earth system impacts of the European arrival and great dying in the Americas after 1492," *Quaternary Science Reviews* 207 (2019): 13–36.
- 37 G. Glickman, *Making the Imperial Nation: Colonization, Politics, and English Identity, 1660–1700* (Yale University Press, 2023), 6.
- 38 H. Le Bras, *Naissance de la mortalité. L'origine politique de la statistique et de la démographie* (Média Diffusion, 2013), chaps. 1 and 2.
- 39 S. Komel, "Petty's instruments: The Down Survey, territorial natural history and the birth of statistics," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 57, no. 1 (2024): 43–64.
- 40 S. Harper, *Demography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018), chap. 3.
- 41 McCormick, *William Petty*, chap. 5.
- 42 H. Wood, "Sir William Petty and his Kerry estate," *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 4, no. 1 (1934): 23.
- 43 McCormick, *William Petty*, 239–40. Unlike his Irish schemes, notes McCormick, Petty's North American proposal "never developed beyond the sketchiest of drafts" (240).
- 44 Such as Gregory King's 1682 projection of total world population. Bashford, *Global Population*, 33. See also P. Lepenies, "William Petty and political arithmetic: The origins of GDP," in *The Power of a Single Number: A Political History of GDP*, edited by P. Lepenies and J. Gaines (Columbia University Press, 2016).
- 45 Sussman, "The colonial afterlife of political arithmetic," 40; see also McCormick, *William Petty*.
- 46 R. V. Wells, *The Population of the British Colonies in America Before 1776: A Survey of Census Data* (Princeton University Press, 1975), 7.
- 47 Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 6.
- 48 It was followed by numerous additions and amendments; the final edition was published in 1826, and his *Summary View of the Principle of Population* in 1830.
- 49 T. R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* [hereafter *First Essay*], 1st ed. (J. Johnson in St. Paul's Church-yard, 1798), 13.
- 50 Malthus, *First Essay*, 8. Emphasis added.
- 51 T. R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population: And, a summary view of the principle of population* [hereafter *Summary View*] (Penguin, 1985), 249.
- 52 A. Bashford and J. E. Chaplin, *The New Worlds of Thomas Robert Malthus: Rereading the Principle of Population* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 4.

- 53 Malthus, *Summary View*, 227, 254. Although Samatha Iyer suggests that “in 1798, Malthus had identified certain peoples and places as morally and culturally inferior to others, but he never thought to plot regions of the world onto a linear narrative,” in 1798 a broadly linear narrative was already implicit in Malthus’ work, which posited a kind of progress from the “savage or hunter state” (Chapter 3) to the “State of civilized nations” (Chapter 4). By the 1830 *Summary View*, this had become more explicit with the reiterative and favourable contrast of civilised Europe to the extra-European world, not simply as naturally superior but as “improved”. S. Iyer, “Colonial population and the idea of development,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 1 (2013): 65.
- 54 T. R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population: The 1803 edition* [hereafter *Second Essay*], ed. S. C. Stimson (Yale University Press, 2018), 15.
- 55 Malthus, *Second Essay*, 24.
- 56 Bashford and Chaplin, *The New Worlds of Thomas Robert Malthus*, 10.
- 57 P. Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Cornell University Press, 2003), 2.
- 58 Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*, 13. See also K. Tribe, “Professors Malthus and Jones: Political economy at the East India College 1806–1858,” *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 2, no. 2 (1995): 327–54.
- 59 P. Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (Verso, 2015), 11.
- 60 D. Hodgson, “Malthus’ essay on population and the American debate over slavery,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 4 (2009): 743.
- 61 Hodgson, “Malthus’ essay on population,” 745. Emphasis added.
- 62 Malthus is widely acknowledged as a key influence on population science. There is more debate about his contributions to demography, understood as a purely statistical endeavour: “it is unlikely that his contributions to the development of ‘pure’ demography will ever be considered as of consequence,” states C. L. Behar in “Malthus and the development of demographic analysis,” *Population Studies* 41, no. 2 (1987): 281. My claim, though, is that these different strands of population science cannot be so easily separated: the one inhabits the other. As Tukufo Zuberi writes, statistics always require the “context of a common language, marked by some level of agreement about the technical and social purpose.” T. Zuberi, *Thicker than Blood: How Racial Statistics Lie* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xix.
- 63 Bashford, *Global Population*, 11.
- 64 S. Majdoub, “Malthusian fears in current migration debates: Contemporary manifestations of malthusianization,” in *The Politics of Replacement*, edited by S. Bracke, L. M. Hernández Aguilar (Routledge, 2023), 27. Emphasis added.
- 65 F. H. Herrick, “Gladstone and the concept of the ‘English-speaking peoples’,” *Journal of British Studies* 12, no. 1 (1972): 154. As Matthew Connelly notes: “One of the hallmarks of the more extreme population politics was a common rhetoric that construed political problems as biological problems and human history as natural history.” Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 79.
- 66 Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 44.
- 67 Joseph Goebbels writing in March 1942. P. Fritzsche, “The Holocaust and the knowledge of murder,” *The Journal of Modern History* 80, no. 3 (2008): 608.
- 68 M. Trudel, *La population du Canada en 1666: recensement reconstitué* (Les éditions du Septentrion, 1995).
- 69 S. Marzagalli, “The French Atlantic world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World: 1450–1850*, edited by N. Canny and P. Morgan (Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 70 Marzagalli, “The French Atlantic world,” 241.
- 71 R. Scafe and J. J. Davis, “Colonial reckoning: Population, power, and liberty in the French Atlantic, 1660–1787,” in *Fertility, Family, and Social Welfare between France and Empire: The Colonial Politics of Population*, edited by M. C. Andersen and M. K. Byrnes (Springer International Publishing, 2023).

- 72 M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College De France, 1977–78* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 22. Foucault has influenced a rich literature on the emergence of the population idea in France. See J. Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers: Population, Politics, and Gender in Nineteenth-century France* (Cornell University Press, 2000), 28–42; G. Noiriel, “L’identification des citoyens. Naissance de l’état civil républicain,” *Genèses: Sciences sociales et histoire* 13 (1993): 3–28. On French populationist optimism and a rejection of Malthusian pessimism, see W. Coleman, “Medicine against Malthus: François Méliet on the relation between subsistence and mortality (1843),” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 54, no. 1 (1980): 23–42.
- 73 J.-B. Moheau, *Recherches et considérations sur la population de la France* (Paul Geuthner, 1912), 2, 10. My translation.
- 74 C. Blum, *Strength in Numbers: Population, Reproduction, and Power in Eighteenth-century France* (JHU Press, 2002), 152–53.
- 75 T. M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900* (Princeton University Press, 2020), 29.
- 76 Schweber, *Disciplining Statistics*, 42. See also J.-M. Rohrbasser and J. Véron, *Achille Guillard et la science démographique* (Ined Éditions, 2013).
- 77 Schweber, *Disciplining Statistics*, 45–46.
- 78 Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers*, 2.
- 79 D. M. G. Sutherland, *France 1789–1815: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 423.
- 80 A. H. Reggiani, “Procreating France: The politics of demography, 1919–1945,” *French Historical Studies* 19, no. 3 (1996): 732. See R. Tomlinson, “The ‘Disappearance’ of France, 1896–1940: French politics and the birth rate,” *The Historical Journal* 28, no. 2 (1985): 405–15; H. Le Bras, *Marianne et les lapins: L’obsession démographique* (Olivier Orban, 1992), 10.
- 81 V. D. L. Barrusse, “Des liaisons avantageuses: l’Alliance nationale pour l’accroissement de la population française et les fonctionnaires (1890–1914),” *Annales de démographie historique* 116, no. 2 (2008): para. 10; F. Thébaud, “Le mouvement nataliste dans la France de l’entre-deux-guerres: l’Alliance nationale pour l’accroissement de la population française,” *Revue d’Histoire Moderne & Contemporaine* 32, no. 2 (1985): 276–301.
- 82 H. Le Bras, *Il n’y a pas de grand remplacement* (Grasset, 2022), 39–40.
- 83 Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 459.
- 84 Herrick, “Gladstone and the concept of the ‘English-speaking peoples,’” 154.
- 85 Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 503.
- 86 E. Demolins, *A quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons* (Firmin-Didot, 1898).
- 87 Demolins, *A quoi tient*, xiv.
- 88 V. Gay and P. Grosjean, “Morts pour la France: A database of French fatalities of the Great War,” *Explorations in Economic History* 90 (2023): 101550.
- 89 B. Pavard, “The right to know? The politics of information about contraception in France (1950s–80s),” *Medical History* 63, no. 2 (2019): 173.
- 90 Reggiani, “Procreating France,” 728–32.
- 91 P.-A. Rosental, *Population, the State, and National Grandeur* (Peter Lang, 2018); S. Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- 92 A. L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford University Press, 2000), 130. On interwar French immigration control, see C. Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control between the Wars* (Cornell University Press, 2006).
- 93 Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers*, 4.
- 94 E. Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Duke University Press, 2009), 2.
- 95 H. Chapman and L. L. Frader, *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference* (Berghahn Books, 2004), 43.

- 96 "Ethnic substitution" (*la sostituzione etnica*) is an Italian variation whose origins have French roots. See T. P. Njegos, "La teoria della sostituzione etnica in Italia: una narrazione razzista e sessista," *From the European South* 12 (2023): 105–22. "White genocide" is typically traced back to the American Nazi Party in the early 1970s, but it drew on a contemporaneous French far-right discourse that described "race mixing" as a form of genocide. See Bracke and Hernández Aguilar, "'They love death as we love life,'" 9.
- 97 Bashford, *Global Population*, 234.
- 98 Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 113.
- 99 Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 187, 311; S. Chandrasekhar, ed., *Hungry People and Empty Lands: An Essay on Population Problems and International Tensions* (Routledge, 2012).
- 100 See Greenhalgh, "The social construction of population science"; Szreter, "The idea of demographic transition and the study of fertility change"; Hodgson, "Demography as social science and policy science".
- 101 Bashford, *Global Population*, 13, 17.
- 102 M. Connelly, "Population control is history: New perspectives on the international campaign to limit population growth," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 1 (2003): 146.
- 103 Wolfe, *Traces of History*, 4.
- 104 Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 68.
- 105 C. R. W. Dietrich, *Oil Revolution: Anticolonial Elites, Sovereign Rights, and the Economic Culture of Decolonization* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 89.
- 106 Dietrich, *Oil Revolution*, 271.
- 107 D. Schmalz, "The population growth discourse in the first decades of the United Nations: Interpretations of global economic inequality and the struggles for a just international legal order," *Leiden Journal of International Law* 38, no. 2 (2025): 131–47.
- 108 A. Sivanandan, "New circuits of imperialism," *Race & Class* 30, no. 4 (1989): 1–19; J. Narayan, "New times or new circuits: Recovering Sivanandan's political economy," *Race & Class* 65, no. 1 (2023): 14–33.
- 109 P. J. Buchanan, *Death of the West* (Griffin, 2002), 12.
- 110 N. Ferguson, "The Way We Live Now: 4-4-04; Eurabia?," *The New York Times*, April 4, 2004.
- 111 See M. Ekman, "Online Islamophobia and the politics of fear: Manufacturing the green scare," in *Muslims, Migration and Citizenship: Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion*, edited by M. Bulmer and J. Solomos (Routledge, 2016).
- 112 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 654.
- 113 Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 659. On the Black anti-fascist critique, see Toscano, *Late Fascism*, chap. 2; J. K. Hope and B. V. Mullen, *The Black Antifascist Tradition: Fighting Back from Anti-Lynching to Abolition* (Haymarket Books, 2024).
- 114 D. Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). I have previously discussed global scale and its imperial but also liberatory dimensions in M. Younis, *On the Scale of the World: The Formation of Black Anticolonial Thought* (University of California Press, 2022).
- 115 Murphy, *The Economization of Life*.
- 116 The classic study is A. Herman, *The Idea of Decline in Western History* (Simon & Schuster, 2007); see also A. Bonnett, "From White to Western: 'Racial decline' and the idea of the West in Britain, 1890–1930," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 16, no. 3 (2003): 320–48.
- 117 Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 42. He draws this claim from an analysis of Louis-Paul Abeille's 1763 text, *Lettre d'un négociant sur la nature du commerce des grains*. On the use of the concept of population in Foucault's work from 1970–1982, see B. Curtis, "Foucault on governmentality and population: The impossible discovery," *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* 27, no. 4 (2002): 505–33.
- 118 Bossen, "Political theology, discovery and the roots of the 'great replacement'".

- 119 Bracke and Hernández Aguilar, ““They love death as we love life””; Davis, “Violence as method”. Among the many expansions of Foucault’s account of biopolitics, see in particular K. Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Duke University Press Books, 2017); A. G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Duke University Press, 2014).
- 120 M. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College De France, 1975–76* (Picador USA, 2003), 254.
- 121 B. Hesse, “Racialized modernity: An analytics of White mythologies,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 4 (2007): 646.
- 122 A. Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press Books, 2019), 92.
- 123 É. Dupin, *La France identitaire: Enquête sur la réaction qui vient* (La Découverte, 2017), 81.
- 124 A recent study points out, for example, that “liberal environmentalism continues to launder effectively white nationalist priorities”. Tilley and Ajl, “Eco-socialism will be anti-eugenic or it will be nothing,” 201. See also E. F. Elcioglu, “Seeding the divide: John Tanton, the Sierra Club and the struggle over US environmentalism,” *Race & Class* 67, no. 3 (2026): 3–25.
- 125 Dupin, *La France identitaire*, 77.
- 126 C. Erichsen and D. Olusoga, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust: Germany’s Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism* (Faber & Faber, 2011), chap. 7, paragraph 11.
- 127 Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 59.
- 128 Consider, for example, Jean-Marie Le Pen’s claim in 1998 that a type of “racism” was prevalent that was “anti-French, anti-White, anti-Christian”. Palheta, *La possibilité du fascisme*, 138.
- 129 Dupin, *La France identitaire*, 77.