

DEMOGRAPHIC DESTINIES

Interviews with Presidents of the Population Association of America

Interview with Etienne van de Walle PAA President in 1992



This series of interviews with Past PAA Presidents was initiated by Anders Lunde
(PAA Historian, 1973 to 1982)

And continued by Jean van der Tak (PAA Historian, 1982 to 1994)

And then by John R. Weeks (PAA Historian, 1994 to present)

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ETIENNE VAN DE WALLE

PAA President in 1992 (No. 55). Interview with Jean van der Tak at the Population Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, February 17, 1993.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS: Etienne van de Walle was born in 1932 in Namur, Belgium, and remains a Belgian national. He received a doctorate in law in 1956, an M.A. in economics in 1957, and a Ph.D. in demography in 1973--all from the University of Louvain. From 1957 to 1961, he was a researcher with IRSAC (Institut pour la Recherche Scientifique en Afrique Centrale) and demographic adviser to the government in Ruanda-Urundi. In 1961-62, as a Population Council Fellow, he took the special program in demography at Princeton. From 1962 to 1973, he was on the research staff of the Office of Population Research at Princeton, working first on the project that led to the groundbreaking monograph, *The Demography of Tropical Africa* (1968) by William Brass, et al., of which he was one of seven authors, and then on the European Fertility Project. He was a visiting lecturer in the department of demography at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1971-72. Since 1972, he has been at the University of Pennsylvania, where he is Professor of Demography, Director of the African Demography Training and Research Program (since 1980), and has been Chairman of the Graduate Group in Demography (1973-78; 1987-89) and Director of the Population Studies Center (1976-82). Many of his other activities--as a mission or committee member, conference organizer, external examiner at universities, etc.--have been related to African demography.

Etienne van de Walle is renowned in the population world for his research and publications in two seemingly very different areas--European historical demography and the demography of sub-Saharan Africa. In historical demography, his publications include *The Female Population of France in the Nineteenth Century* (1974) and several important papers on the fertility transition in France and in Europe generally and the extent to which this sheds light on the current situation in developing countries. Among his African publications are the recent monographs *The State of African Demography* (1988) and *Mortality and Society in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1992), both published also in French, and numerous papers on mortality, fertility decline, marriage, demography, and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa generally and several focused on Burkina Faso and Mali, based partly on fieldwork that he and his wife, Francine, conducted there in the early 1980s.

In 1992 he brought these two strands of research interest together in his PAA presidential address, "Fertility Transition, Conscious Choice, and Numeracy" (published in *Demography*, November 1992)--an exploration of the history of the notion of ideal family size and the lack thereof in pretransition societies. [Dr. van de Walle died suddenly, in his office, in 2006.]

VDT [from interview introduction]: I thank you very much, Etienne, for giving me time for this interview. You, like Ron Rindfuss, who was president of PAA the year before you, 1991, missed out in getting into *Demographic Destinies* [1991] and this is to be another supplement to that collection of interviews with PAA presidents and secretary-treasurers.

You were born in Belgium [Namur]. Your name is Flemish but you say you are a French-speaking Flemish family.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. The family is from Bruges.

VDT: The University of Louvain is French-speaking?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. The city of Louvain is a Flemish city but it was a bilingual university when I studied there.

VDT: Your studies were all in French?

VAN DE WALLE: All in French, yes. Not at the high school level, however. At the high school level, I had three years in Flemish, and my primary school was Flemish.

VDT: So you really are bilingual?

VAN DE WALLE: I was.

VDT: But your parents spoke to you in French?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes.

VDT: Where did Francine, your wife, get a degree?

VAN DE WALLE: She has an MA in social work, from Brussels School of Social Work.

VDT: But Ansley Coale claims her as one of his students.

VAN DE WALLE: She took Ansley's course. Princeton had this special program for foreign students.

VDT: She took that one-year course?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes.

VDT: Did you meet at university?

VAN DE WALLE: No. I was in school with Francine's brother.

VDT: Ah, very early on. And when were you married?

VAN DE WALLE: We were married in Brussels, in 1955.

VDT [after biographical introduction]: How did you become interested in demography?

VAN DE WALLE: At Louvain, I had no interest whatsoever. I took the licence--not quite an MA--in economics. I had one small course in demography at that time. It was a combination of law and economics; the combination was not unusual. I got a doctorate in law, which does not involve writing a thesis. It's a five-year degree. It's like a doctora in Italy. The title was very useful in the United States, because people typically don't ask you whether [it's the same as a Ph.D.]. I got my Ph.D. in demography in 1973. By that time, I was a full professor.

VDT: You were a full professor by the time you had your Ph.D. Interesting! But you say you took no demography at Louvain?

VAN DE WALLE: I took a small course in demography. And then when I was graduating in economics, my economics professor asked, "Are you interested in a job?" And I said, "Yes. What job?" It was a job in Ruanda-Urundi. He had been asked by the governor of Ruanda-Urundi--the

governor of Ruanda-Urundi was also the vice-governor of the Congo--to find someone to work on demography in Ruanda-Urundi. I was not interested in the job, but my professor said, "Go see him nevertheless." I said okay, and I went to see this very important person, who hired me without asking me if I wanted the job. This was in Belgium. So I decided, well, why not? So we went to Ruanda-Urundi.

The problem in Ruanda and Burundi was that they had been taking demographic surveys, starting in 1952. This was a system of yearly demographic surveys of the same sample; they were the same people visited every year. Mortality was going steadily downward from year to year and nobody really believed that this was true. So there was a need to go back and re-examine the whole thing and see what was happening: why weren't people dying? I didn't know anything about this kind of stuff, but I said, "It sounds like an interesting problem."

So I accepted the job and was hired by this very respectable research institute, called IRSAC, Institute for Scientific Research in Central Africa. It was a Belgian-organized institution, high standard and full of international scholars. Great people have actually worked there, and many of them are still working in the United States. For instance, I'm thinking of the director of the center at that time, Jan Vansina [now in the U.S.], who is a famous historian.

VDT: Did you do any demographic publications there? Because I see you became a member of IUSSP [International Union for the Scientific Study of Population] already in 1960.

VAN DE WALLE: I published a couple of articles on this population, mostly on unemployment in Usumbura, etc. This was basically my training.

I was involved in trying to solve this problem of why there were no deaths. I suggested we should change from this recurrent sample to a continuous, multi-round survey, but then there was this revolution in Ruanda-Urundi and most of my interviewers were either killed or dismembered; it was an awful story.

At that time, I was taking a survey in Bujumbura, the capital of what was at that time called Ruanda-Urundi, and suddenly a taxi stopped next to the house where I was working. A gentleman comes out of it and it was Frank Lorimer [PAA president in 1946-47]. Frank Lorimer at that time was traveling through Africa. His wife [Faith Williams] had just died, and the Population Council had given him some money to write on the demography of that dark frontier; nobody knew anything about the population of tropical Africa. He traveled around to various places where he was told there was a demographer working; there were various people here and there that he went to visit. Someone gave him my name, so he landed in Bujumbura and took a taxi and came to see me. We started talking; he was a very pleasant person. And he suggested that I come to Princeton.

VDT: And that's how it got started! I hadn't known about that.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, and so I started a friendship with Frank Lorimer.

VDT: Indeed. That also was the beginning of the project that led to *The Demography of Tropical Africa*. So you went, then, to Princeton in the fall of 1961 as a visiting student, was it?

VAN DE WALLE: Frank Lorimer got me invited to a conference in Paris, a seminar on African demography, and there--yes--he suggested I apply for this program they had at Princeton for foreign students to spend one year. A number of people at that time came for this one-year program, which didn't give a degree but was a very popular program.

I came; that was in 1961. The Congo had become independent in 1960 and Ruanda and Burundi were becoming independent too, so it turned out that after I was six months at Princeton,

taking courses and working on the African stuff, I got a letter from IRSAC saying, "Your institute does not exist anymore."

So Ansley Coale found some money to keep me there for one more year. He hired me on the African project, together with a number of people--Anatole Romaniuc, who was working on Zaire, and of course Paul Demeny was there; Don Heisel; and Bill Brass was there the first year. These were people who had been working in Africa, at least Bill Brass and Romaniuc. And then, after that second year, when I was a researcher, not a student anymore, I had no job; I had no place to go back to. So Ansley asked me if I wanted to start working on the European Fertility Project.

VDT: Already in the early 1960s, on the European Fertility Project?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. I was the last person on the African project, trying to put things together, doing some editing and cutting and pasting. So I took the boat back to Belgium, basically right from having been editing this manuscript. That was 1962. I went back to Belgium for two years.

VDT: Why was that?

VAN DE WALLE: Because of visa problems; I couldn't come back to the United States. But I was paid from Princeton. We had started the European project and it made sense to be in Europe, to look for the data. I was spending my time in European libraries collecting data for the European project. At that time, John Knodel was in Germany, collecting data on Germany.

VDT: His villages. That was already in 1962-64, very early on?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. Then after these two years, I came back to Princeton as a research associate; the title was Associate Research Demographer. Which was *the* research position at the Office of Population Research.

VDT: Only one person was in it and you were it?

VAN DE WALLE: The others were faculty, and there was this one position which was a research position, which was later occupied by Jane Menken.

VDT: And did you at that time work both on Africa and Europe?

VAN DE WALLE: No, at that time the African project was finished.

VDT: Oh, you only worked on it early in the 1960s?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes.

VDT: When did you write your three chapters ["Characteristics of African Demographic Data"; "Marriage in African Censuses and Inquiries"; "Fertility in Nigeria"]?

VAN DE WALLE: At that time--in 1963.

VDT: You barely knew any demography and yet you were writing about Nigeria's population, with no data . . .

VAN DE WALLE: I had done my learning of demography in the field. I knew a lot from having tried to find dead people in Rwanda and Burundi. I didn't know anything about the theory, but I knew quite a bit about the practice.

VDT: Also you knew about working with missing data.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. Actually, I think some of it was missing, but also mortality had been declining in a fantastic fashion at that time. They had a DDT program and every house of Rwanda and Burundi was sprayed twice a year and that had really decreased mortality quite substantially. I think that was the explanation. Mortality went back up when they stopped the DDT program. For some time before independence, in the 1950s, things were really happening.

VDT: So from the time you came back to OPR, you were totally on the European project?

VAN DE WALLE: At that time I moved completely to the European Fertility Project. Like Ansley, I had been moving from this African project to the European. It's less different than it seems, because after all we were working with the same kind of census data--age distributions and trying to make sense out of incomplete information--and at the same time we were working with high-fertility situations. A number of people have been working both in historical demography and in African demography.

VDT: People there, at OPR?

VAN DE WALLE: No, in general. John Blacker is another example, who wrote his dissertation on French fertility and eventually went to Africa and worked on African demography. So it's not uncommon. Demographers are people who start with data and wherever the data are; whether it's in the 17th century or 20th-century Rwanda, I think it doesn't really make much difference. You try to understand . . .

VDT: Or lack of data.

VAN DE WALLE: Or lack of data. John Knodel became a specialist of Thailand.

VDT: Then you were involved at OPR not only with the people working on Africa but also those in the fertility project. What do you recall of OPR in the time from when you came back in 1965 until you left in 1972? You were not working then with Bill Brass; he had left.

VAN DE WALLE: Bill Brass had left; he only stayed one year. I was working with Ansley; very closely with John Knodel.

VDT: Of course. You and John came up with a number of articles together.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. In those days at the Office there were, of course, the American fertility people, like Westoff, and Ryder eventually came, and Michael Teitelbaum was assistant professor. Paul Demeny was working there too. So there were people with whom I have remained friends. But most of them were also teaching.

VDT: And you too?

VAN DE WALLE: I was teaching the undergraduate course at Princeton, but that wasn't like . . .

VDT: Even without your Ph.D.?

VAN DE WALLE: Even without my Ph.D.

VDT: Was your French female population book [*The Female Population of France in the Nineteenth Century*, 1974] your dissertation?

VAN DE WALLE: That's right.

VDT: How did that come about? You took a while to get into your doctorate. Did Ansley say, "Look, you're writing this book; that should be your dissertation." Or what?

VAN DE WALLE: In between, while I was still at Princeton working on the European project, I was working on an ambitious manuscript on the connection between economic development and population in Africa. That left also some tracks in the literature. I had a couple of articles published, but mostly in conferences in Africa. There was a conference in Ibadan where I gave a paper, which was published by Caldwell in the conference proceedings ["The Relationship Between Population Change and Economic Development in Tropical Africa," in John C. Caldwell and C. Okonjo, eds., *The Population of Tropical Africa*, 1968]. There are a couple of papers that I wrote in those days where I was interested in the relationship between population and economic development.

VDT: That was not quite so popular then; you were a bit early on.

VAN DE WALLE: No, that was the time, for instance, when Ester Boserup was writing, and there were a number of very interesting anthropologists and agricultural scientists working--mostly English. William Allan, for instance, wrote *The African Husbandman* [1965], which is a very basic text on the relationship between density and technology.

Then about my dissertation. At that time I had this manuscript and like every graduate student who's working on a dissertation and doing something else, I was making little progress. So I had this French volume that was taking shape and I asked my professor in Louvain, with whom I'd worked, whether I could use that. He said yes, and that's how it happened.

VDT: They didn't have residence requirements at Louvain?

VAN DE WALLE: I had completed my residence requirements during the two years I went back. I was commuting to Louvain for one seminar a week. You know, at that time Louvain was starting its demography program; Louvain has a Ph.D. in demography. I was one of their first students. That was part of my reason for getting my Ph.D. in demography at Louvain. I was their first Ph.D. in demography.

VDT: So that worked out. What happened to your manuscript on population and economic development, other than the few papers? You abandoned it?

VAN DE WALLE: I gave it up, yes. I maintain an interest in the general topic. Actually, that kept my interest in Africa alive, and I kept reading books while I was working on Europe. I was not writing very much on Africa. Actually, topics tend to follow you. Once you have been declared as a specialist in Africa, people are going to ask you to write papers. So I kept writing a paper once in a while, and

continued to read. Meantime, I was moving into European demography, and by the time I had decided I wanted to go back to African demography, people were asking me to write papers on Europe.
[Laughter]

VDT: I was going to get into that later--interesting how they dovetail. What took you to Penn? Well, first, you say you were asked to go to Berkeley.

VAN DE WALLE: I was asked to go to Berkeley. I had a sort of charmed life in Princeton, where I was not exposed to teaching. I did not have any faculty meetings. So life was nice and I could spend full time on research. And one day I received a phone call from Judith Blake, asking me if I wanted to spend a year in Berkeley, and I said, "Yes, wonderful!"

VDT: That was out of the blue?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. They were trying to beef up their faculty for the demography department.

VDT: Right. They had seven slots, but they never had more than three full-time people.

VAN DE WALLE: That's right. Obviously, I must have been known as being on the market, because an invitation also came, somewhat later, from the University of Pennsylvania.

VDT: You were in California when they asked you to come to Penn?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. I guess you identify people who are likely to move from where they are, at one stage of their career. So I must have been on the list of people who might be moving, so Judith asked me to come to Berkeley.

VDT: Why do you think that; they thought you might have done all you wanted to do at OPR?

VAN DE WALLE: Probably. It's not very respectable to be a full-time researcher in academics. I thought also that perhaps at that point I should fly on my own, get out of the nest. Also, I had the suspicion that perhaps life was more than just doing research. There were students; you would get involved in academic stuff.

When I reflect on it, there was absolutely no concern in my mind about tenure. I didn't know tenure was a problem--in those days. So I went to Berkeley, and came into this very painful atmosphere of almost open warfare. Sam Preston, of course, was someone I knew, and I got to know Nathan Keyfitz. And there were other people there--Eduardo Arriaga.

VDT: The open warfare between the students and faculty, or . . .

VAN DE WALLE: The students and there were two sides of the faculty. On the one hand there was Judith Blake and . . .

VDT: Kingsley Davis?

VAN DE WALLE: Kingsley was not seen very much; he had his own institute [International Population and Urban Research]. And on the other hand there was Nathan Keyfitz. I really didn't know what the background was, but there was a funny atmosphere. Students would start talking to you about the situation and you almost had to take sides. I didn't understand what was going on, except

that obviously the students were alienated from the administration, which was Judith. Students were coming to me and asking me to be on this committee and I discovered that most of the students were not asking Kingsley and Judith. They were asking me and, of course, Nathan had a lot of students, and Sam was on every committee. So it was a strange atmosphere. I think it went back way before I came, and all I could see was a situation where students were very unhappy. And eventually I was taking sides myself without really knowing what I was doing.

The break between me and Judith probably came when I signed a letter which I should not have signed, that had been written by Nathan to whatever administrative authority was responsible. I even forget the content of the letter, but I know I signed it. I shouldn't have, because I was after all a visiting faculty member. I was simply a visitor for one year.

VDT: Was there an intention that you should stay on after that year, perhaps?

VAN DE WALLE: Eventually, yes.

VDT: You came as a visiting what--professor or teacher?

VAN DE WALLE: I was a visiting associate professor. And at some point, Judith asked me if I wanted to stay as a permanent member of the faculty. Now, Sam was very eager for me to stay. Sam Preston will confirm that he told me, "If you stay, I'll stay." Eventually, I thought the situation was very unhappy, and basically I never intended for it to be more than one year from Princeton. I thought I would go back to Princeton. One of the reasons why we thought we didn't really want to go bury ourselves in California was that we keep going regularly to Europe and the West coast was too far from Europe.

VDT: By this time you had children, I guess.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, I had four teenage children, who were smoking pot [as a result of] California. [Laughter] Two children were born in Africa and two of them before I left for Africa, so we had our four children in Africa.

VDT: Oh, so you had them very early on in your marriage.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, very closely spaced.

VDT: Were any of them students at Berkeley?

VAN DE WALLE: No, they were in high school. Then I got an offer from the University of Pennsylvania, which was in a way much closer to Princeton and much less difficult for us to move. They offered me the position of graduate chair, to succeed John Durand.

VDT: Was he at that time chair of the Graduate Group in Demography?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, he had been chair for five years and he wanted someone else to take over for him.

VDT: That's in charge of the administration.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. And in my total lack of knowledge about administration, I thought this

sounded like power and I could shape the place. The place at that time was aged and somewhat at risk of disappearing.

VDT: You mean the Graduate Group?

VAN DE WALLE: The Graduate Group in Demography was going through some kind of crisis. The average age of the Graduate Group was quite old. They had not succeeded in replacing themselves by hiring junior assistant professors. The only assistant professor they had was eventually denied tenure. And there was some unpleasant relationship with the sociology department. So it was touch and go whether the Graduate Group would make it. And most of the students they were training by that time were foreign students. So if you play this game of training foreign students rather than American students for American academic institutions, you're really not setting yourself as a high-priority organization in an American university.

VDT: The Graduate Group is the administration, looking after the training of the students, right? And the Population Studies Center does the research.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes.

VDT: Why was it important that this Graduate Group should survive?

VAN DE WALLE: It probably was not that important in those days. It was dependent on the ability of the Graduate Group to attract major scholars.

VDT: And money to train those students?

VAN DE WALLE: Money was available. There was plenty of money from outside sources, like the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, NIH . . .

VDT: For training of students?

VAN DE WALLE: For training of international students, basically.

VDT: But Penn's sociology department did not really like it that you were concentrating on the foreigners?

VAN DE WALLE: Well, Penn's sociology department has somewhat mixed feelings about its demography component. We tended to be more wealthy and we had captured the library and so on. We were well funded. We had students who tended to keep by themselves. Dorothy Thomas was a very powerful person who kept a very tightly knit group of students, many of them foreign, around herself. The coffee-time was sacred time in the Graduate Group in Demography. So the Graduate Group in Demography was a little bit of a foreign body in the department of sociology.

Also, it had fairly close connections with the economics department, through Richard Easterlin. So, although Vincent Whitney had been the chair of the sociology department, this was felt to be some kind of domination of sociology by demography. So there were a lot of bad feelings about the connection between demography and sociology. Which have persisted to this day, although they are more hidden.

VDT: Maybe that's why they don't have the Population Studies Center listed on the plaque outside the building--only the sociology department.

VAN DE WALLE: And Sam has been the chair of the sociology department for a number of years.

VDT: Since 1989 when Jane Menken took over the Population Studies Center?

VAN DE WALLE: Since 1989, but he had been sociology chair before. Sam has been uncontested as an excellent chair of the sociology department, and he is going to be replaced by Phil Morgan. And everybody in sociology believes they are absolutely wonderful. But there's also the feeling that the qualitative sociologists are dominated by the quantitative sociologists, who got all the power and all the money. So it is somewhat unpleasant--at times, let's say. This is a happy department today, but when I came it was not.

VDT: In 1973. Do you think they reached out for you because you were foreign, European?

VAN DE WALLE: Well, I'm not sure why they reached out for me. I think in those days there were very few demographers in my cohort, so a lot of people like myself were being courted. Actually, I was hired as full professor, and I never suspected that this was a great favor--not having my Ph.D. and so on. Which never was an issue. I got an offer and came, without knowing all the underground discussion that had been going on before.

Then I was chair of this Graduate Group in Demography and we had students, some American students. But one of the characteristics of the Graduate Group in Demography was that the American students they were training had a degree in demography--the only Ph.D. in demography at that time--and it was difficult for them to find jobs in academia. Most of them were not trying. Foreign students were finding good jobs in academic programs.

VDT: In their countries?

VAN DE WALLE: In their countries. For Americans, the notion was that you would get a Ph.D. in demography and then you would go to the Census Bureau or elsewhere in Washington or to a foundation. I'm thinking of Martin O'Connell, who has had a very nice career in Washington, who was one of the students when I was coming in. My first Ph.D. student was Louise Kantrow. She wrote her dissertation on historical demography, so I was the natural person to be on her committee. She is in the United Nations. The idea was that a Penn degree was not a degree that would lead you to become a professor in a sociology department.

VDT: Was that because it was not a degree in sociology or economics?

VAN DE WALLE: That's right. Of course, there was a market and the occasional person would make it into an academic program, but it wasn't per se. Then the next stage was how do we replace people who are going to retire. That included John Durand, Vince Whitney, Ed Hutchinson; they were the three full professors.

VDT: And Dorothy Thomas?

VAN DE WALLE: Dorothy Thomas was gone by that time. Then, of course, there was Dick Easterlin, who was in economics. He was at that time the chair of the economic history program, which also was actually training a lot of demographers. It also had no academic future and was

eventually disbanded. People like Michael Haines, for example, were graduates of that economic history program. He is a demographic historian. He wrote a book with Sam Preston, *Fatal Years: Child Mortality in Late Nineteenth-Century America* [1991]. I took over from Vince Whitney as director of the Population Studies Center.

VDT: That was not when you first came back.

VAN DE WALLE: No, after some time as graduate chair. I was combining both positions then [Chairman, Graduate Group in Demography, 1973-78; Director, Population Studies Center, 1976-82]. For two years, I was both. One of the functions of the chair of the Graduate Group in Demography is to find his own successor. John Durand found me and I found Sam.

VDT: Sam came in 1979, I know.

VAN DE WALLE: Sam had left Berkeley and went to Washington. We still had this kind of mystical bond. Sam thought he would stay in Washington if I came to Washington.

VDT: Why did you have that mystical bond--because of the time at Berkeley?

VAN DE WALLE: Probably because of the time at Berkeley. He thought we would be a good team. So eventually he asked me if I wanted to come to Washington, and I was invited for a visit to Washington. That led to nowhere; it was also on the West coast.

VDT: And wet.

VAN DE WALLE: But it's a nice place. Then Sam moved to the United Nations, and he asked me if I wanted to go to the United Nations. And then I attracted him here, eventually.

VDT: It's a very incestuous field, very close-knit.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, that's right. Sam at that time was being courted by Princeton and there was a long discussion, a lot of debate in his mind about whether he wanted to go back to Princeton, and he eventually decided to come to Penn. Which saved the Penn program. Suddenly the Penn program had the most desirable, the greatest scholar.

VDT: You think Sam was considered that already then, in 1978?

VAN DE WALLE: Sam for everybody, I think, was the coming star, the moral equivalent of Ansley Coale or something like that. Sam basically was the most attractive person to get to any place. So there was no problem getting him at Penn. I think if I had aimed at a somewhat less spectacular replacement, the program might not have survived. But Sam obviously was it. He came and became graduate chairman. Everything was suddenly rosy and he was able to attract very good collaborators, like Jane Menken.

VDT: Of course, Jane didn't come here until the late 1980s.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, but I think that Sam being here meant that suddenly the place looked like being one of the most promising centers, that the university had decided that they wanted to expand.

VDT: The Caldwells, in their book on *Limiting Population Growth and the Ford Foundation Contribution* [1986]--they're talking about Ford-funded centers, only centers that have some Third World interest--they said that Vince Whitney applied for a grant of \$1.2 million in the early 1960s. He only got \$200,000 over five years, but he did get the money, along with Michigan which was funded at the same time. At that time, Penn was not about to shift from their U.S. focus--urbanization, labor force, and migration--and concentrating on formal demography--very little on the Third World--and develop an area specialty. Well, by the mid-1970s, then *you* started to shift the focus toward an area specialty, Africa. How did that come about? They also say that by the 1980s, you had along with Brown and Michigan the most stable, permanent center, and you also had trained most Third World students--more than any other center.

VAN DE WALLE: Well, with Dorothy Thomas, of course, we had been training a lot of Asians, and when I came here, there were several Africans. They were on their way to the Ph.D. and so I became involved. With my interest in historical demography, I felt a little bit frivolous. I thought I should really become more serious; I should go back to African demography.

VDT: Did you feel that everything had been done in historical demography; was that why you switched back to African demography? I had that question here, but you're telling me you thought that people might think it was frivolous. Good point.

VAN DE WALLE: I thought I could continue to do both and that historical demography would be my hobby, but that I would busily try to train people in African demography. I thought, well, the first thing to do is to try to replace this funding that is running out.

VDT: The Ford funding?

VAN DE WALLE: The Ford funding, but the Rockefeller funding was also.

VDT: Rockefeller you had had for what?

VAN DE WALLE: We had had a small Rockefeller grant--I forget how much it was--and we were told by Rockefeller that they were getting out of this center granting.

VDT: In the 1970s, you were told by both Ford and Rockefeller they were getting out?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. So I thought, let me rephrase the Rockefeller grant in terms of African demography and maybe that would be of interest to them. I had some preliminary discussions and then I wrote a proposal and we got site visitors and people laughed at us, "Why Philadelphia?" I remember the comment by one of the reviewers, "Why Philadelphia?"

VDT: Good point!

VAN DE WALLE: Good point. And basically my answer was, "Why not?" It seemed attractive to Rockefeller, who thought they had to do something for African demography, and here I was with some credentials in African demography.

VDT: Somewhat back, ten years earlier.

VAN DE WALLE: Those things follow you through life. Of course, I had been in Africa; I had spent

four years in Africa. I had been working in Africa. The African project book was published with some delay [1968] and it was a while before it got to be known. But it's still a book that sells regularly; it's one of the bestsellers in the history of Princeton University Press.

VDT: Oh, great!

VAN DE WALLE: It was eventually re-edited and so on.

VDT: It came out in more than one edition?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, the second edition--I was checking the library edition here--they corrected the title. On the top of the page there was a title and for a whole chapter it said, "Estimate of Morality."

VDT: So that got corrected in the second edition.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes.

VDT: So Rockefeller thought, after all, "Why not?"

VAN DE WALLE: They went ahead and supported us. Actually, there were a number of good African students. It was not difficult to find excellent students. Somehow we got the reputation as the center that was interested in Africa. And I kept occasionally going to Africa and being involved in various African activities.

VDT: Are we still talking about the 1970s?

VAN DE WALLE: Talking about the 1970s.

VDT: Okay. You hadn't yet gone to do those surveys you did in the early 1980s.

VAN DE WALLE: No. By 1982 I was ready to have sabbatical leave and I went to Mali for one year--to refresh myself in African demography. I felt, "My knowledge goes back to the 1960s." So I decided I would go back and spend one year as the Population Council . . . What was my title? Senior researcher or scholar [Senior Associate].

VDT: You went to Bamako.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes.

VDT: And that was the time that Francine also did her surveys?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, Francine was also involved in research there. At that time also, Sam took over the Population Studies Center.

VDT: The Caldwells said in their book that Penn developed a special interest in Africa, but no one particular country. For instance, do you have students working on data that are collected in Africa? You have African students who come to Penn, and do they take formal demography? What about,

generally, students being involved in a project or country data, such as happens at Michigan being involved in the Taiwan project?

VAN DE WALLE: There was always the problem of data from the start. We were always trying to find some African data sets from surveys. Especially, we have constituted a data bank of African surveys and censuses. And then, of course, the problem was solved by the World Fertility Survey and the DHS [Demographic and Health Surveys]. So today there's no problem to have data. But in the beginning it was difficult for these African students to have something to work on. And there was the occasional African Ph.D. who got his Ph.D. working on an American or even an historical demography data set.

VDT: You had Marvellous Mhloyi. I met her at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare in 1986. I told this story to Jane Menken and Sam [in their interviews].

VAN DE WALLE: Yes.

VDT: I was with my husband on a World Bank mission. I know she's much in demand internationally. At that time, she had collected some data from two small surveys of 120 couples in a rural area which showed that probably the contraceptive prevalence was not nearly so high as the Contraceptive Prevalence Survey showed [for 1984]. I had some correspondence with her and Ethel Churchill, who's in charge of *Studies in Family Planning*, about getting that analyzed and written up. No time; she never did it. And that seems to be the problem that Jane Menken has been going to Bangladesh to help solve. That there is somebody on site in those countries to work with them on data so they get that kind of thing done. Have you done that with Africans?

VAN DE WALLE: Well, we occasionally have. But the problem is that you get students who come here--somehow we get some way of supporting their studies--and then by the time . . . Occasionally they bring their data with them. A couple of times they have been going back the second year or third year to collect data. In most cases, the student is someone you want to get out, because it's very expensive to fund students for a long period of time.

VDT: You want to get him out of his country?

VAN DE WALLE: You want to get him out of the program. We are funding these students from day one, with Rockefeller money--which, by the way, we don't have anymore. So now it's becoming an even worse problem. Our Rockefeller grant has expired.

VDT: How long ago?

VAN DE WALLE: This year.

VDT: And at the moment there's no money for students?

VAN DE WALLE: That's right. I understand the foundation; they don't want to be forever saddled with a very expensive program. But at the same time, it's very difficult to get students out of Africa to start their American studies. We know that there are good students. For instance, I'm the external examiner in Uganda [University of Makerere] today and there are people who seem to be excellent. The last student funded by Rockefeller is a woman whom actually I was introduced to because I was

her external examiner in Uganda. She's here and she still has two years of studies. We have to find the money and it's a problem.

VDT: What did Marvellous Mhyloyi write her thesis on; do you remember?

VAN DE WALLE: Marvellous Mhyloyi wrote her thesis on the Lesotho World Fertility Survey.

VDT: That was straightforward.

VAN DE WALLE: The data from Africa were coming out by that time. Marvellous was an extraordinarily hardworking person. When she came here, we found her in a community college in West Chester [near Philadelphia]. One of our American Ph.D. students was teaching in West Chester and told us, "You know, there's an absolutely fantastic Zimbabwe woman who is lost in West Chester and could you get her into the demography program?" So we were able to fund her with our Rockefeller money. And she was a *great* worker--outstanding.

VDT: Now she feels so isolated. Well, this was five years ago [nearly seven].

VAN DE WALLE: She's not isolated. She has good resources. I think the problem of Marvellous is that she got funded by virtually everyone and that there are too many demands on her time.

VDT: Yes, you're right.

VAN DE WALLE: She's not isolated. She has, for instance, Rushdi Henin, who is a very experienced African demographer, there assisting her.

VDT: He's in Harare?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, having spent most of his career in East Africa.

VDT: Now you've got more data to work with in Africa, both you and your students. Are you still pessimistic about it? Of course, I've read your recent article on AIDS ["The Social Implications of AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa," *The Milbank Quarterly*, 1990], so one can be pessimistic.

And the fertility decline. I read your 1990 World Bank publication, with Andrew Foster ["Fertility Decline in Africa: Assessment and Prospects," World Bank Technical Paper No. 125], and in that you said that although there are signs of fertility decline--thanks to the DHS we see that in Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe. However, there's not stopping behavior. And you and the Caldwells have been having some discussion back and forth [e.g., John C. Caldwell, I.O. Orubuloye, and Pat Caldwell, "Fertility Decline in Africa: A New Type of Transition?" *Population and Development Review*, June 1992] on whether you have to have stopping behavior among older women in order to be certain that a real fertility decline has set in, or if fertility decline will come out of the attempt by young women to avoid premarital pregnancy, because it will stop their education, and contraception by slightly older [married] women for spacing and by the oldest women so they can quit having kids when they're grandmothers. I guess my question is . . . Well, I had two questions in there. One was, are you pessimistic about Africa?

VAN DE WALLE: First, to continue on the earlier topic, I'm pessimistic about African graduate students and about the training of Africans, because the universities in Africa are a complete mess, and the people we are training increasingly are not going back, which was a phenomenon that was limited

to some countries until recently. Now today it's very clear that this is happening. And I understand why--to live on a full professor's salary of \$100 per month is difficult.

This other question, am I pessimistic in general about the development of demography in Africa--mortality, AIDS, and decline of fertility? I expect fertility to decline eventually. I think the demographic transition has started. It has started a little bit after it started in the Asian countries, where we were telling you 20 years ago it was never going to happen. But it's probably going to happen on schedule at some point between now and the end of the century. You're going to have an increasing number of countries. Kenya has started; Zimbabwe has started; maybe Botswana; and there may be other places--South Africa, of course.

If historical experience is valid, a diffusion effect is going to impose the same kind of limiting behavior in neighboring countries. It's first starting among certain social classes that are poorly represented in surveys. The Caldwells said that we're going to have a special transition in Africa that's going to be focused on young women and that spacing is going to be increasingly practiced. And I don't see what the connection is between the spacing behavior, which is very old behavior in Africa, and the transition of fertility.

VDT: In other words, you don't think spacing can be called stopping fertility?

VAN DE WALLE: What is the connection between a desired spaced birth--for example, you can postpone the first birth, the premarital birth--and this behavior which is bringing the family size to two children? I asked the question of Jack Caldwell and he essentially said there's going to be apprenticeship of contraception outside of marriage and then people are going to know that contraception is an option.

VDT: You're very skeptical of that, obviously.

VAN DE WALLE: No, I am not. It has happened already. It's not an unnatural type of mechanism for contraceptive behavior to get in. Now, the other question is that of a crisis-induced fertility transition--whether economic difficulties are compelling people to behave in this way--and in the historical record it's not. If poverty was a factor in fertility decline, India would be one of the low-fertility countries of the world. I think in general the status of women is significantly affected by poverty. Even if women survive the economic disaster more easily than men because women have traditional jobs, that doesn't improve their status.

VDT: And you have said in your World Bank paper that women's status must be improved to bring about the fertility transition. Let's get back to some of the leading questions that I had for you. Who have been leading influences on your career?

VAN DE WALLE: Ansley Coale.

VDT: He considers you and Francine his students. He told me this story in his 1988 interview. He had been down to give a lecture at Penn and a very funny thing happened. "When I was introduced, they said I was the mentor of Sam Preston and Susan Watkins and the two van de Walles"--he included Francine there--"and others and one of the students came up to one of these people and said, 'Does that make him our grand-mentor?'" I loved that! Well, he sort of snapped you up--having been delivered to him by Frank Lorimer.

VAN DE WALLE: He clearly is a great intellectual influence. It's not the only one, but it's my most important demographic influence.

VDT: Ansley Coale?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. Because when I came to the Office of Population Research, I knew very little about formal demography. I knew a lot of things that I had learned in the field, from trying to re-invent the wheel. But clearly I got from Ansley this fascination for empirical constancy of phenomena.

VDT: Empirical constancy?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. You know, he's not a theoretician. He's an empirical wizard. He looks at the shape of a curve and says, "Well, this is the same curve [if you look at it] the same way as this other curve."

VDT: I like that--an "empirical wizard." Very good.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. He's a highly technical type of person, but he makes sense out of things. Also, his range of interest is very large--as an economist and as a sociologist. He has the range of interest of human phenomena. Which you find in Sam Preston as well, but which is not characteristic of all demographers.

VDT: No. Let me quote a piece where this came up in a sense, and in your historical demography. Have you seen Geoffrey McNicoll's article in the just-out [September 1992] *Population and Development Review*?

VAN DE WALLE: No.

VDT: Very interesting; it's one of the typical things that Paul Demeny will put in PDR. It's called, "The Agenda of Population Studies: A Commentary and Complaint." He is saying that demographers are becoming too technical and too narrow. Formerly they were broad-based--like Ansley Coale; like Kingsley Davis. But he makes an exception for historical demography, which he says can be very broad and will take in economic history--certainly you have taken in literature--and you have used the social field far more than other narrow, technical demographers. ["The case of historical demography, at its best intimately allied with social, economic, even environmental history, suggests that considerable success is possible"--in branching out into neighboring disciplines as demography formerly did. McNicoll, page 414.] You're not terribly technical.

VAN DE WALLE: I'm not technical. I've made my mild technical contribution. You know, I'm a Lexis diagram demographer.

VDT: Tell me what you mean by that!

VAN DE WALLE: The Lexis diagram is the relationship between age and time and cohort, so it's the basic representation of demographic reality, on a simple diagram. And I think that the old generation of demographers were trained basically to make sense out of the combination of these variables--cohort, time, and age. I think that's what we were dealing with. That was the contribution of demography. Right from Halley, inventors of demography were playing with these variables and then using them to make sense out of human reality. You know, you would look at a life table and say, "This tells me that there are 9000 young males able to bear arms in Augsburg"--which was one of the conclusions of Edmund Halley, in his 1693 *Degrees of Mortality of Mankind*.

VDT: Never knew that.

VAN DE WALLE: On the basis of the five-year life table. This is modeling on the basis of these very simple parameters. Ansley was basically interested in this kind of relationship. But then the new school of demography is grinding everything through this very powerful econometric model or multivariate model, where age is basically one of the parameters or variables, and if you're a little bit clever you have age squared too. But you've lost what was demography's contribution.

VDT: What do you mean by that--demography's contribution?

VAN DE WALLE: Demography's contribution was to concentrate on this age-time-cohort relationship in an intelligible fashion. You could picture it in your mind, and you have entire textbooks of demography which are all based on the Lexis diagram. I'm thinking of the French school which does that. Pressat, for instance; there's a Lexis diagram on every page of Pressat's *Measures of Demography*. We've lost this kind of comprehensibility of phenomena--simple, two-dimensional model. You can't see it nicely with the multivariate tables. You've lost the intrinsic power of demography, with the strength of these black boxes through which we run our models.

VDT: Who else has influenced you? Ansley in particular, you say, was the leading demographic influence.

VAN DE WALLE: I admire Jack Caldwell very much. And I think I probably got influenced by some of the French school, like Sauvy, of course.

VDT: Did you work with him?

VAN DE WALLE: No, I never worked with him. He was one of the demographers that I went to listen to when I was a student in Louvain. Louis Henry was someone I knew. I went to talk to him when I started the French project. I told him, "Here I am. Is there still something to say about French demography?"

VDT: You mean the French female population?

VAN DE WALLE: The French female population in the 19th century.

VDT: By the way, what happened to the second book you were supposed to be writing at that time [a larger study of French fertility decline]?

VAN DE WALLE: It's somewhat [delayed], but it's still . . .

VDT: It's still alive?!

VAN DE WALLE: It's still alive; it's not dead. Do you still want me to talk about my future plans?

VDT: Yes, but I'm afraid I'll miss that point. What happened? What are you going to do with that?

VAN DE WALLE: Well, I think I'm moving increasingly in the direction of my presidential address ["Fertility Transition, Conscious Choice, and Numeracy"] and try to write a history of family limitation. Not a history of contraception, which seems to be what people have been writing, starting

with Norman Himes's *Medical History of Contraception*. There are a number of histories of contraception that have been written. The last one is Angus McLaren's, *A History of Contraception* [1990].

VDT: You mean when people stopped having more than, say, three/four children?

VAN DE WALLE: That's right. First of all, family limitation deals with families. It is family behavior--behavior of married couples. It's not the use of contraception outside of marriage, which was one of the main uses in the past.

And secondly, it's about limiting. It's not about controlling, and I think that Angus McLaren has written a history of fertility control. For instance, breastfeeding is a form of fertility control; late marriage is too. But I'm interested in family limitation; once you marry, how do you decide on the size of your family? Then you can go back and use a number of different sources, including the historical demography sources.

VDT: That was a fascinating speech. I loved your showing the portraits of noble families with two or three children. We had never had a presidential address like that before. And there were the literary sources and then, of course, the quotes from Francine's survey [of women in Bamako, Mali, 1983].

VAN DE WALLE: That's right. And I think if you look at family limitation as a type of new behavior, which did not exist in most societies of the world, you can really find some commonalities between African peasants and urbanites and pre-modern Europeans.

VDT: Some PAA presidential addresses have been on topical topics. You know the famous one of Ansley Coale which was on "Should the U.S. Start a Campaign for Birth Control [Fewer Births]?" [Boston, 1968]. And some have very obviously have been syntheses of one's research, as Ron Rindfuss's was last year, looking at young cohorts ["The Young Adult Years: Diversity, Structural Change, and Fertility"]. We all wondered what yours would be. Was it going to be Africa or was it going to be historical demography? You put them together. It was marvelous. [Laughter] And it was a very intriguing topic. Had you been thinking about that before? How did you choose your presidential address topic?

VAN DE WALLE: Well, a bit because of this increasing fascination with this problem of this break in human behavior, which is known as family limitation. And I thought it was a way to bring back my African and historical interests.

VDT: So you really deliberately did that?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, I wanted to put them together. And I also wanted to deal with this issue of family limitation, as the fertility decline condition.

VDT: Family limitation has to be within the calculus of conscious choice?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. And I figured it was also a way of paying some tribute to Ansley Coale's influence on my thinking. [Coale used the term "calculus of conscious choice" in a classic 1973 paper enumerating the three necessary preconditions for fertility decline.] But I'd also been working increasingly on this volume that I want to write on the history of family limitation, and when I was asked to become president, I immediately started thinking what I was going to talk about. At that time I was writing a chapter for a French interpretative book on the history of European population. They

asked me to write about the history of the fertility decline in Europe. So it came together.

VDT: You'll never not be known as a historical demographer. Which do you prefer--the African demography or the historical demography?

VAN DE WALLE: When I retire, I'll retire in a library full of old books.

VDT: You won't retire in Africa, [Laughter] out there in the field with a survey?

VAN DE WALLE: Probably not, although that's another attractive possibility. But I think that's something you can do when you're increasingly crumbling, is to read on and discover voices of the past. It's so clear to us now that limiting one's family size is the normal type of behavior, but it was not to people like Montaigne, who was one of the great geniuses of common sense. These were not stupid people. They were extraordinarily well informed and asking interesting questions. They were not asking questions about family size. So I think it's an intriguing, central concept that I was thinking about at that time, and I thought it was a good topic for a presidential address.

VDT: Great. I was going to ask you which are your favorite publications, but maybe your favorite is still to come. But which do you think are your most influential publications?

VAN DE WALLE: In African demography, probably my chapter in *The Demography of Tropical Africa* on marriage ["Marriage in African Censuses and Inquiries"] is the one that I'm most cited on and pleased to have worked on. It stated some issues in social demography which are more central than the narrow focus on, let's say, African fertility--from the process which is central in constituting a building block of African society. You get to issues like premarital fertility, status of women, AIDS--you can go on citing these peculiar customs, like polygamy, female circumcision, whatever. You have a series of interconnected topics which can be centered on women marrying. And it has been traditionally the favorite topic of anthropologists and so it connects sociological interests, anthropological interests, demographic interests.

VDT: So that was your favorite in the African area?

VAN DE WALLE: I think that's probably the one that, looking back, I'm most likely to continue to work on.

VDT: What about on the historical side?

VAN DE WALLE: In historical demography, I think my first book [*The Female Population of France in the Nineteenth Century*] has an afterlife--in France. The French have discovered the book, somewhat late, but I keep being quoted in *Population*. I think in a way my favorite piece is more in the cultural history of contraception. I wrote a piece called "Means and Ends in French Fertility"--or whatever the exact title is ["Motivations and Technology in the French Fertility Decline"].

VDT: Where was it published?

VAN DE WALLE: It was published in a collection edited by Tamara Hareven and Bill Wheaton.

VDT: Right, I know of it [*Family and Sexuality in French History*, 1980]. That's a favorite of yours, or do you feel it had some impact?

VAN DE WALLE: I think it's probably a favorite of mine in terms of asking questions about fertility decline which don't have a numerical answer but have to be answered in cultural terms. This was perhaps the emphasis of my presidential address.

VDT: Right. I missed the question on some of your outstanding students--students that you're proudest of.

VAN DE WALLE: I think I would have to categorize them into American students, European students, and African students. Probably the students that I'm most in contact with today--I keep corresponding with and seeing--are the African students. Among the favorites there is Cheikh Mbacke.

VDT: What country?

VAN DE WALLE: He is a Senegalese. He worked with me on the data I collected in Africa. You were asking about surveys; how do your students actually get survey data? When I went to Bamako in 1982, I worked on an infant mortality survey.

VDT: The multi-round survey?

VAN DE WALLE: Multi-round survey, the IFORD survey. At that time he was a student at Penn and he came to work on the project and wrote his dissertation using some of these data. He's now the representative for the Rockefeller Foundation in Nairobi, in Kenya. So he's one. Another one is Uche Isiugo-Abanihe.

VDT: Is this someone you've published with?

VAN DE WALLE: No, I didn't publish with him. He wrote a piece--which was part of his dissertation--on fosterage in *Population and Development Review*.

VDT: Fosterage.

VAN DE WALLE: Which is one of the strange and interesting African customs.

VDT: Where does he come from?

VAN DE WALLE: He's at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria and he was a visiting scholar here last year. He's now working on the bridewealth, which is another one of these fascinating African social customs.

VDT: Tell me, the bridewealth is when the male has to buy the bride? I get confused between the dowry and the bridewealth.

VAN DE WALLE: That's right. The husband or the male or the family of the husband giving money to the family of the woman. There's a lot of objection to the term "buying." The term "bridewealth" seems to be more politically correct than "brideprice."

VDT: Was he a student of yours here?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, at the University of Pennsylvania.

VDT: And now among your European students.

[The tape ran out unnoticed here, but van de Walle mentioned Michel Garenne and Wolfgang Lutz in this category.]

VDT: And among the Americans, you have mentioned . . . Well, you started to say and you haven't said.

VAN DE WALLE: I'm thinking among the people whom I would legitimately claim as having made some difference. Actually, I made a list before you came [looking for list]. Among the most recent, Emily Rosenbaum, who is at Columbia, and Harold Lentzner, at CDC [Centers for Disease Control].

VDT: I had also this big question: What accomplishments in your career have given you the most satisfaction? Of course that includes many of the things we've been talking about.

VAN DE WALLE: Well, probably I can be given some credit for the Population Studies Center and the Graduate Group in Demography--to have been here at the right time and attracting Sam to settle down here. I think also I probably made a difference in African demography--that our program has trained something like 40 PhDs from Africa.

VDT: Forty Africans.

VAN DE WALLE: Africans who have gone through here since I have come here. It's made a significant impact on whatever future African demography has.

VDT: Very good. Now I wanted to ask a question about IUSSP. Marc Lebrun, in the office in Liege [Assistant Executive Secretary], was delighted to know that I was going to interview you--Belgium's great gift to U.S. demography. Of course, you're international too.

VAN DE WALLE: You know, I'm probably the first PAA president who is not a citizen of North America.

VDT: Are you still not an U.S. citizen?

VAN DE WALLE: I'm not a U.S. citizen.

VDT: Neither am I.

VAN DE WALLE: There are Canadians.

VDT: That's right. The others would all at least have been naturalized. There was Lotka [Polish-born PAA president in 1938-38] . . .

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, and Paul Demeny [Hungarian-born PAA president in 1986. Also Louis Dublin, PAA president in 1935-36, born in Lithuania].

VDT: But they all had U.S. citizenship by the time they were president. Why did you never take U.S.

citizenship?

VAN DE WALLE: I don't see the point in taking it. I'm sure that's the reason why you didn't.

VDT: Right. I like to stay Canadian, frankly. But I have a green card. Do you have one?

VAN DE WALLE: I have a green card, yes.

VDT: That's a good point. You probably are the first [foreign-born] PAA president who was not a naturalized American.

VAN DE WALLE: I always thought it would eventually exclude me, that someone would find out.

VDT: But Norman Ryder [Canadian-born PAA president in 1972-73], is he naturalized or not?

VAN DE WALLE: He's Canadian, and so was Nathan Keyfitz [president in 1970-71].

VDT: Right, but they're both naturalized now, I expect.

VAN DE WALLE: But not by the time they were president.

VDT: No? Norman Ryder had remained a Canadian?

VAN DE WALLE: He's become American since he was president.

VDT: Only in recent years! I didn't know that. And Nathan Keyfitz?

VAN DE WALLE: I believe Nathan Keyfitz is still a Canadian. So there were Canadians, but I'm the first European.

VDT: Now, about IUSSP. You've been on a number of their committees. The committee on mortality, was it?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, I've been on mortality [Committee on Social and Biological Correlates of Mortality, 1985-89. Also, the IUSSP Advisory Group on Training, 1990-].

VDT: Do you think it's an important organization?

VAN DE WALLE: I think it's a very important organization. It probably has tended to have a positive impact on the field, internationally. It has given it a bit more international content than the PAA. The PAA is making a very great effort to attract outside [foreign] members. And, of course, students become members of the PAA, but when they go back to their countries they very rarely are able to continue to pay their dues. But the IUSSP has been supporting a great many international students--bringing students, members, from various parts of the world to conferences and seminars. They also have this intellectual focus on various topics, like mortality--bringing out books and getting them published.

VDT: There was your excellent book on *Mortalite et Societe en Afrique au Sud du Sahara* [edited by Gilles Pison, van de Walle, and Mpembele Sala-Diakanda], based on the seminar you [IUSSP] had in

1987 [in Cameroon].

VAN DE WALLE: This one was published in English [1992]. It was published both in English and French.

VDT: Well, I read the French version.

VAN DE WALLE: The French version came out earlier [1989].

VDT: There's one on the demography of Africa--*The State of African Demography* [edited by van de Walle, Patrick O. Ohadike, and Mpembele D. Sala-Diakanda, IUSSP, 1988]. I couldn't get that.

VAN DE WALLE: *The State of African Demography* was published in two languages too. If you want to have a copy, I'll get you one.

VDT: That would be very nice. The Population Reference Bureau did not have it in the library. Do you recall what committee it was that sponsored that one?

VAN DE WALLE: They wanted to have a series of white papers. They called them "livres blancs," white books, like this parliamentary tradition in England of having white books. So this would be a white book on a topic of actuality. Then apparently the idea petered out and this was the only one they produced. But it was going to be a series. This was basically produced here.

VDT: Sam Preston tossed out the idea that you might start a journal of African demography here.

VAN DE WALLE: At one point, we had this idea that there was a need for a journal in African demography.

VDT: Sam mentioned this in his interview [June 1988]. Whatever happened to that?

VAN DE WALLE: Well, about that time the journal of the African population society came out.

VDT: I don't know about that.

VAN DE WALLE: I could have shown you a copy but it's at home.

VDT: Published out of where?

VAN DE WALLE: Out of Dakar. And the present editor is Cheikh Mbacke. It's not a very well-produced journal. Before that they had another journal. It was called *Jimlar Mutane* and had, I think, four issues.

VDT: That was on African demography?

VAN DE WALLE: That was an African demography journal. Then by the time I wanted to produce an African journal from here--actually I wrote a number of letters and so on--this African association had become a little bit more firm and had started to get funding from outside, so they got into publishing this journal, which is coming out regularly.

VDT: Good. Now, let's leap on to PAA. Can you remember the first meeting you attended? Here's a list of meetings. You mentioned at the beginning of your presidential address that you first heard Kingsley Davis talk about the demographic transition in one of the early meetings you attended. Now, that could have been any one.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes, and I was unable to find reference to that paper of Kingsley Davis. I'm sure I heard it.

VDT: You know, of course, he and Judith Blake were presenting their intermediate variables paper about 1964, but you probably went before that.

VAN DE WALLE: The first one I probably went to was Madison.

VDT: In 1962 [year of the meeting in Madison] you were at OPR.

VAN DE WALLE: That was the campus of the University of Wisconsin.

VDT: Norman Ryder attracted PAA there in order to publicize his new Center for Demography and Ecology.

VAN DE WALLE: I went to visit my old head of center, IRSAC, who was Jan Vansina, whom I mentioned before. I went to their house in Madison at that time, so that may be the only recollection that I have. I have a recollection of the Philadelphia meeting the very next year [1963]. Who was the president?

VDT: The president in 1963 was Kingsley, giving his famous multiphasic response address ["The Theory of Change and Response in Modern Demographic History"].

VAN DE WALLE: I remember very distinctly Kingsley's address.

VDT: So *that's* where you heard him. Well, he wasn't talking about the demographic transition.

VAN DE WALLE: No, no. But I heard Kingsley about this idea of the paradigm of demographic transition. It was the first time I heard the word paradigm. He had picked up the idea of a paradigm from Thomas Kuhn. I'm not making it up; he gave a paper on the demographic transition as the major paradigm in demography. I was unable to identify the meeting at which I heard him.

VDT: You first heard him probably in 1963.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes.

VDT: I've just spent a day at the archives of the PAA [at Georgetown University] and I could have put my hand on the 1963 program so I could tell you if he had a paper in addition . . . Well, he wouldn't have had--in addition to his address. What do you remember about early meetings you attended? But then you went away to Europe for two years and came back; what do you remember about the early meetings?

VAN DE WALLE: I remember this crowd of very important people, who were all obviously much more knowledgeable about anything than I was, and I was kind of scared. It was suddenly a very

important occasion. I remember having seen some people there whose articles were in the readings I was making at Princeton. I didn't really get around very much in talking to them because I was intimidated. But at some point, I became part of the crowd and that's something that must have happened quite a bit later. By the time of the Atlantic City meeting [1969]--that was organized by Princeton--that was probably the one where Ansley . . .

VDT: The president would have been Dudley Duncan.

VAN DE WALLE: When did Ansley give his address?

VDT: Ansley's was 1968, and that was at Boston.

VAN DE WALLE: Ansley organized the Atlantic City meeting [as local arrangements committee chair. Everett Lee, as first vice president, chaired the program committee]. Princeton was closest to Atlantic City.

VDT: Right. You remember that one, Atlantic City?

VAN DE WALLE: I remember most of them in some vague fashion.

VDT: What about the early 1970s, when there were hot and heavy debates in the business meetings on various topics, wanting PAA to get more policy-oriented--on abortion and on family planning in the Third World. Does that linger in your mind?

VAN DE WALLE: I remember there was a discussion about the women's caucus. Let me see when that would have been. I was a member of the Board. I was a director of the Population Association from 1975 to 77. At this stage, there were great discussions about the women's participation in the association and boycotting certain states where women were not admitted [boycotting--as meeting sites--states that had not passed the Equal Rights Amendment]. I remember in those days my own discoveries of the women's movement as something that was new and somehow I didn't fully understand, but I was willing to trust my female colleagues about the subject.

VDT: When did Francine go back to university or become interested? Did she get you involved at that time?

VAN DE WALLE: No, she didn't. I got her involved in demography, but she was not very politically active. And, in a way, we were kind of . . . Belgium turns out to be a very traditional society, very stratified. America was somewhat more advanced from this point of view than Belgium. So in a way it was a new problem to me and to Francine.

VDT: Women?

VAN DE WALLE: This claim of women for equal status--which I was perfectly willing to grant them, but I didn't feel like there was a problem. Then at the time of these directors' meetings at the Population Association, I remember we had some discussion on some motion that the women's caucus wanted us to vote on, and my own position--I remember stating this to the Board--was that I didn't fully understand what it was all about, but if the female members of the Board were in favor I thought that we should trust them, because they knew more than I did. I don't remember whether the motion carried or not, but my position was that I was quite willing to trust the specialists. Probably if I had

been a woman I would have reacted in the same way. Reflecting from the point of view of 1993, I can see that it seemed to me at the time that this whole thing was basically going on behind men's backs, in the same way that I was not really aware when I was at Princeton in the early days that there was a color barrier in the restaurants between Princeton and Washington--that when you drove there, blacks would not be admitted on both sides of the restaurant.

VDT: They would be in Princeton?

VAN DE WALLE: In Princeton they would, but not in Virginia or Maryland. I was not aware of any of this. Probably my feelings would have been very much in the right place, but they were never provoked in any way.

VDT: I see. What other issues do you recall through your years at PAA--were important in the organization--to you, that you were aware of?

VAN DE WALLE: To me, probably the importance of getting more developing world participation at the meetings of the PAA, because they have a unique position in the world as the one annual meeting of demographers. Although the IUSSP also has these international conferences which play the same role--there are a number of interesting series of them that produce high-quality international papers--the PAA meeting is way more important.

VDT: The PAA is more important than IUSSP?

VAN DE WALLE: To international demography. I think it [the annual meeting] is a world resource.

VDT: That's interesting. Of course, IUSSP only happens every four years [general conference].

VAN DE WALLE: Well, they have their regional conferences and they have their seminars.

VDT: Ah, the other ones.

VAN DE WALLE: But the PAA has more impact, I think--by the number of foreign people who participate. At this point, I'm the chair of the PAA outreach committee, where we're giving money--which, of course, comes from Mellon and Hewlett--to bring participants from all the various countries of the world to the meetings.

VDT: Did you have something to do with this? Because you said you've always . . . It wasn't so 20 years ago, was it?

VAN DE WALLE: This is a fairly new phenomenon. But, of course, there were always foreign students, and there were always American people writing on the demography of the world. There are now scholars who come back year after year to the PAA meeting from Europe. I'm thinking, for instance, of Ron Lesthaeghe and Hillary Page.

VDT: They were at Princeton, of course.

VAN DE WALLE: That's true of an important number of demographers in the world--they studied somewhere in the U.S.

VDT: Like Livi Bacci, who was at the meeting last year.

VAN DE WALLE: Hundreds of people who benefited from fellowships from, for instance, the Population Council, in the 1960s--like myself. There were hundreds of people who were brought to the United States.

VDT: Were you on a Population Council fellowship when you first came?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. These fellowships, and then the fact that most demographers in the world got trained in American institutions--a good majority of present PhDs in demography in the world, or working in demography.

VDT: So you think that U.S. universities are still very important for demography generally?

VAN DE WALLE: There's no substitute; they are among the only places where you train people. Not the only places, if you include the London School of Economics and the Australian National University, and then of course you have Louvain which has been training Africans in large numbers. But in general, you don't have anywhere else this massive training of PhDs in demography that you have here.

VDT: What about training of masters--more practicing demographers?

VAN DE WALLE: You have the UN centers, for instance in Yaounde [Cameroon] and Accra [Ghana], but these are sick institutions that are going out of business. And I don't think the kind of training that you get there is the equivalent of an American training.

VDT: So the PAA meeting gathers all these people together and you feel that is an important aspect of PAA?

VAN DE WALLE: I think it's a world resource. It has provided a kind of system of communication and standardization of the quality of research.

VDT: Okay. How did you handle the program in your year [1992] as president? You had the most sessions there had ever been up till that time; you had all this mass of material. You had 95 sessions, which is a record--there'll be more [101] this year--nine overlapping sessions at a time. This year there are going to be up to 12 overlapping sessions. What do you think about that--too much?

VAN DE WALLE: Well, I think there's been a tendency--and I helped--to maximize the number of participants, because the meeting is actually the most important source of money for the PAA.

VDT: Good point!

VAN DE WALLE: That's a very crass point, but it was certainly a consideration.

VDT: By maximizing participation, you mean maximizing the number of papers on the program and then . . .

VAN DE WALLE: Hoping that people would come.

VDT: Okay. And you had over a thousand [1,085 registered attendees].

VAN DE WALLE: Absolutely.

VDT: Which Jen Suter [PAA Executive Administrator] thought was amazing for a recession year--in Denver.

VAN DE WALLE: Absolutely. We tried very hard to do so, and when it's to be a place like Denver people have to have a strong incentive to come.

VDT: Exactly.

VAN DE WALLE: And so with the next one [1993] in Cincinnati, I think the same kind of incentive exists. When it meets in Washington, we can get back down to a small number.

VDT: A smaller number of papers, you mean?

VAN DE WALLE: Of papers--or sessions.

VDT: We had 1,399 people at the Washington meeting [in 1991].

VAN DE WALLE: We can be more choosy. But what's important, also, is the high quality of these papers. In general, you know, you end up with all these papers that you turn down, but which are not that much worse than the ones you accept. They are the same kind of quality; they involve a lot of work. There are obvious rejects--in any conference there are people who shouldn't be there--but in general the quality of the PAA papers is remarkably high. And not all these papers eventually get published. It's a highly productive community of scholars.

VDT: In other words, you have to be there to hear those papers, know about them, because you're not always going to find them published.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. I think probably most of them get published in some form or another. But you end up with 90 sessions, four papers each--it's a large number of high-quality papers.

VDT: Did you enjoy your presidential year?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. I was not a very active president, I think. Some of the presidents are, you know.

VDT: What didn't you do?

VAN DE WALLE: Well, I don't know. There were lots of things going on in Washington, organization of the profession, lobbying. One of the main issues was whether we should have a representative in Washington full-time or part-time. We ended up with Anne Harrison Clark [PAA representative for public affairs, part-time, with full-time assistant]. That was one of the main issues. That was debated under my presidency--whether we could afford it; how much we could afford, and so on.

VDT: And you were not terribly engaged with that issue?

VAN DE WALLE: I was engaged by it, but there were people who basically were much more activist than I was. I think that includes my successor, Al Hermalin [1993 president; president-elect in 1992].

VDT: Who helped start the Public Affairs Committee.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. I was fortunately able to get off some of these activities to him; he was very active as the president-elect.

VDT: Do you think PAA should have such a representative--in the situation it now is?

VAN DE WALLE: I have mixed feelings about it. It seems to be very useful and to draw the attention of the association to some things and represent us and defend our interests. I'm somewhat ill at ease about this whole idea that our interests are material and financial and not purely scholarly. But, of course, that's the way it is. And Washington is a very strange place, where things can happen to you. They can eliminate centers; we would never know unless we were informed. So, I feel the need for it, but I don't feel that I should really be actively involved.

VDT: And there was the issue of the special interest groups, last year. The business and state and local demography in particular, which had been committees, were downgraded, they felt, into interest groups, and Larry Bumpass was chair of the committee looking into that. Were you involved in that issue?

VAN DE WALLE: I was a bit involved in that issue at the time of organizing the meeting, because you discover that there are a number of people who expect to have sessions and the choice of papers is in their hands, and there are very strong interests that you feel are handled with some kind of priority which maybe they don't deserve. This is an ongoing debate and I don't think it's solved by any means.

VDT: A debate about . . .

VAN DE WALLE: About whether we're going to move away from this idea of having interest groups. The Bumpass report, as far as I know, has not been acted upon or even fully approved. This is something that's going to be discussed again in the next meeting of the Board.

VDT: A small matter. PAA's number of members has fallen in the last two years. It went up the year [1990] that the transition [of the business management] was made to the American Sociological Association [PAA's own office in the ASA headquarters], and the dues went up from \$40 to \$70. Then it's fallen, down to 2,525 [end 1992; end 1989--2,679; end 1990--2,752; end 1991--2,647]--which is about what it was in the mid-1970s. Do you think we should go out and actively recruit members?

VAN DE WALLE: No, I don't think so. It looks like a very stable curve. One can get away from the tendency to extrapolate a small movement on that curve. I think we're going to probably be stuck to that level of members.

VDT: It's been leveled off since the mid-1970s.

VAN DE WALLE: It's leveled off. But it's one of the most active and the most popular associations that exists.

VDT: Popular?

VAN DE WALLE: None of us would miss a PAA meeting. That's the only professional meeting that I go to. And it seems to be a nice group of very pleasant and interesting people. Perhaps we should *not* attempt to increase these numbers. The need to have a typical number of people is basically mostly present when you're thinking about having a representative in Washington or balancing your budget in some way. But if you're looking particularly at the intellectual content of the meeting and the usefulness of the association as a place where people are able to meet among themselves and discuss interesting issues, it's a very healthy association. I wonder why the numbers are declining.

VDT: It's the recession, probably. I sent a check to join PAA to my new demographer niece, who's now working for Compusearch in Toronto--she was Paul Voss's student; got her master's at Wisconsin last June--and she still hasn't joined. I said, "Why not?" She said, "Well, my company won't pay my dues."

VAN DE WALLE: Yes.

VDT: And the second year--\$70--is a lot.

VAN DE WALLE: It's probably a lot of money.

VDT: For young people. But it is also the recession. You can see the student members are down too a bit [509 to 470--end 1991 to end 1992]. We must end. You've talked about your future plans, which is this book, perhaps, on family limitation. What is Francine's role in your work? You've collaborated on a number of papers, based on the research that you did in Africa in the early 1980s. Have you continued to do that?

VAN DE WALLE: We continue to work on various African-related topics. We are now writing a paper on the status of women for an IUSSP meeting in Dakar. Of course, it's better to have a woman delivering the paper than a man.

VDT: Where did the data come from?

VAN DE WALLE: This is a literature review, and it's going to be for this meeting.

VDT: On?

VAN DE WALLE: Basically on the notion of the status of women, or the importance of the status of women, in African demographic research. This whole meeting is devoted to the status of women in Africa.

VDT: Popular topic.

VAN DE WALLE: It's a popular topic. It's an important topic and it has attracted a lot of papers, because the status of women seems to be so awful in Africa with the economic crisis and with AIDS, which is almost a--I was going to say an occupational hazard. A lot of young women trying to make a living in this hostile environment of the city are resorting to various forms of commercial sex, which does not have the same kind of negative connotation that it has in the Western world.

VDT: There's an excellent series of articles on women in developing countries running right now in *The Washington Post*; some are on Africa. You should read those if you're writing on women's status. It's depressing.

VAN DE WALLE: Yes. I wrote that paper on AIDS. One of the issues is women have been gaining a lot in education and labor force participation quite recently in Africa and that is removing them from the protection--which is at the same time a kind of moral protection--of their families. You would run the risk of sending your daughter to the city so she would get some kind of degree and education and prospects, and then it also exposes her to this terrible disease. So what is going to be the next reaction of those parents? They are going to try to marry these young girls off to reliable males in the village. So it has enormous potential implications for the status of women.

VDT: What happened to your four children? What are they doing? Any demographers or quasi-demographers among them?

VAN DE WALLE: Some of them have touched demography, actually. One of them was at the Futures Group in Washington.

VDT: Who's that--son, daughter?

VAN DE WALLE: That was my last one. Demographers from Washington--the crowd of the Futures Group and USAID-connected people--keep asking me about him. He's now in London. He works for Columbia Pictures.

VDT: That's a shift!

VAN DE WALLE: I have a daughter who is working on at least demography-related topics at the World Bank. She's working on poverty.

VDT: Really! What department?

VAN DE WALLE: Research--I can't really give you the exact title.

VDT: Is she an economist?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes.

VDT: All World Bankers are economists.

VAN DE WALLE: She has a Ph.D. in economics from Australia--from ANU.

VDT: How did that come about?

VAN DE WALLE: Because she married her instructor at the London School of Economics and then he got an invitation to teach at the ANU and she followed and got her Ph.D. on poverty. And then was exactly at the right place--with her Ph.D. on poverty, living in Washington--when the World Bank decided to devote its *World Development Report* [1990] to poverty.

VDT: *The famous one!*

VAN DE WALLE: She was part of the team that wrote the poverty report, and she stayed on.

VDT: Does she use the name van de Walle?

VAN DE WALLE: Yes [Dominique van de Walle].

VDT: I should know that; I know that report quite well. Where's the husband?

VAN DE WALLE: The husband is also at the World Bank. Her husband is Martin Ravallion. He has also been working on problems of famine and poverty--in Asia.

VDT: Is he English?

VAN DE WALLE: He's Australian.

VDT: And the other two?

VAN DE WALLE: Then I have one who is assistant professor at Michigan State, who also has been almost on the border of demography. He's in the political science department, and works on Africa.

VDT: And the fourth one?

VAN DE WALLE: The fourth one has an MBA from the University of Pennsylvania, from the Wharton School next door. He's in New York.

VDT: What's he doing?

VAN DE WALLE: Investment banking. Two non-academics and two academic--two PhDs and two MBAs.

VDT: What an interesting crew! Grandchildren?

VAN DE WALLE: Three grandchildren. In a way, one of the incentives to come to the University of Pennsylvania was that tuition was free [for children of faculty members] and at that time I had four children, who were spaced one year apart. So I had the world record--having four students at the same time at the University of Pennsylvania.

VDT: They all were here, at one time!

VAN DE WALLE: At one time--all of them undergraduates. And then two of them got an MBA at Wharton. So I saved heaps of money. [Laughter]

VDT: Besides having an interesting career, because I think you feel you've had an interesting career.

VAN DE WALLE: I've had an interesting career.

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Etienne VAN DE WALLE 1932-2006

par Henri LERIDON

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Etienne VAN DE WALLE

1932-2006

Etienne van de Walle died suddenly in his office at the Population Studies Center in Philadelphia on 21 March, shortly before his 74th birthday. He was a leading personality of international demography, one of those rare researchers who built bridges between demographers from three continents – Europe, North America and Africa – and who developed very special relations with his colleagues in France, and those at INED especially.

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After obtaining a degree in economics at the University of Louvain, Etienne van de Walle spent four years (1957-1961) conducting socioeconomic surveys in Ruanda-Urundi, at that time under Belgian rule. This experience was to lay the foundations for his future, both by fuelling his interest in the African continent and by progressively focusing his attention on population questions. The second defining moment of his career was in 1961-1962, when he followed a demography course at the Office of Population Research in Princeton. Ansley Coale quickly spotted his particular talent and his exceptional human qualities, and from 1962 to 1973, Etienne van de Walle occupied a number of research positions at the center, continuing to work on Africa while developing a new interest in historical demography. He was to become a linchpin of the major project initiated by Ansley Coale on the demographic transition in Europe, and took charge of the volume devoted to the population of France (*The Female Population of France in the Nineteenth Century*) published in 1974.

In 1972 he became a professor at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. He occupied this position until 2001, serving both as director of the Population Studies Center, and as Chairman of the Graduate Group in Demography. At that time, the University of Pennsylvania offered one of the broadest teaching programmes in demography, including Masters and PhD courses, and welcomed students from across the world, both from industrialized countries (Europe, Canada, etc.) and from the South. From 1980 to 1995, Etienne van de Walle also headed the African Demography Training and Research programme. His work often took him to Africa, notably to Mali where he was advisor to the newly-founded Institut du Sahel. In 2001 he was named Professor Emeritus of the University of Pennsylvania and continued to pursue his research activities.

As mentioned above, his earliest research concerned the demography of Africa, with a first series of articles published in 1960-1962 in the journal *Zaire* and in *Recherches économiques de Louvain*. From 1965, his articles featured in the most prestigious demographic journals, including *Population Studies* and *Demography*. In 1968, he contributed to a collective work coordinated by William Brass et al. (*Demography of Tropical Africa*), which remained a key reference in the field for many years. In the 1980s he co-edited four books in the *International Studies in Demography* series published by Oxford University Press, and wrote numerous articles. His strong interest in African demography accompanied him throughout his career.

Etienne van de Walle was also an authority in the field of historical demography. Following the publication of his book, he became a recognized specialist of French population history. He was also interested in the demography of Belgium, and in particular of his home village, La Hulpe, whose registers he analysed in detail. His attention progressively focused on the origins of fertility decline, and on the methods used by couples to prevent births. He reread, and sometimes translated, the earliest written documents on this question, and carefully explored all possible sources – including electronic ones – to bear out his view that the role of traditional methods, before the diffusion of modern birth control techniques, was generally under-estimated. One of his last articles, published in *Population & Societies* in December 2005 was entitled “Birth prevention before the era of modern contraception”.

In these two areas of research, Etienne van de Walle always adopted a highly critical approach with regard to data sources, and warned against over-standardized methods and over-hasty comparative analyses. With regard to nuptiality in Africa – one of his favourite fields – he showed for example that marriage is often a multi-stage process that cannot be summed up by a single date and age.

Born in Belgium, Etienne van de Walle settled in the USA in 1961. He nevertheless remained strongly attached to his European roots and had many friends in France and Europe. In 1975, he translated into English (with Elisha Renne) the demography manual written by Louis Henry (*Population. Analysis and Models*), and in the early 1980s, he prepared a new English version of the United Nations *Multilingual Demographic Dictionary*, based on the French text drafted by Louis Henry. In 2002, when the English version of *Population* was launched, he readily agreed to serve as Associate Editor, and the journal editors are extremely grateful for his valuable assistance. Over the last six months, he also contributed to the English texts of *Population and Societies* posted on-line on the INED website. In mid April he was scheduled to come to Paris to sit on a thesis jury.

Alongside his responsibilities at the University of Pennsylvania, he headed numerous working groups and training programmes in his many areas of interest. He was President of the Population Association of America in 1992.

*

With his constant good humour, his intelligent wit, his courtesy and immense erudition, it was always a great pleasure to be in his company. Yet the last years of his life were saddened by the illness of his wife, Francine, who was not only his life companion, but also his research associate, notably in the field of African demography.

*

To his children Dominique, Jean-François, Nicolas and Patrice, and to his seven grand-children, may we express our deepest sympathy. We would like them to know just how greatly their father and grand-father was respected and admired.

Henri LERIDON

Fertility Transition, Conscious Choice, and Numeracy*

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One of the preconditions of the fertility transition, as stated by A.J. Coale, is that reproductive decisions must be within the calculus of conscious choice. It is suggested that the change in mentality which leads to family limitation includes "numeracy about children," a clear notion of what family size ought to be and the awareness of individuals of where they stand with respect to the norm. The article explores the hypothesis that numeracy about children appeared historically in various times and places, and that the conceptualization of family size was a necessary condition for adopting family limitation.

When they came to announce to the King [Louis XV of France] that another girl had been born instead of the Duke of Anjou whom he expected, someone asked him whether she would be called Madame Seventh, He answered: *Madame Last*. Whence it was concluded that the Queen would be very neglected.

—*Memoirs of the Marquis d'Argenson*, July 1737.

The Theory of the Demographic Transition was once the dominant paradigm in demography. I recollect Kingsley Davis arguing the case in one of the first meetings of the Population Association of America that I attended. In the 1980s, however, something strange happened to paradigms and terminology (see Figure 1). During that decade, the phrase *demographic transition theory* was revived briefly in articles that either were critical of the concept or were trying to rescue it, and then it was progressively abandoned. It has not been used for some time in the titles of publications inventoried by POPLINE; even if one is generous and includes such expressions as *demographic transition model*, the topic clearly has ceased to be an area for theory building. *Demographic transition* (without *theory*) persists today as a convenient shorthand for the change from high to low birth and death rates, an obvious and noncontroversial empirical description. But we are far from the *Theory* of the Demographic Transition, with its succession of stages (beginning with "incipient mortality decline") and its dynamic principle which was found in socioeconomic change (industrialization and so on). Today it would be difficult to agree on more than very general links: that fertility and mortality often, but not always, tend to decline at approximately the same time, and that all highly developed countries are characterized by low levels of vital rates.

The term *fertility transition*, on the other hand, appeared in the literature in the early 1970s and was given a precise meaning—"from natural fertility to family limitation"—in

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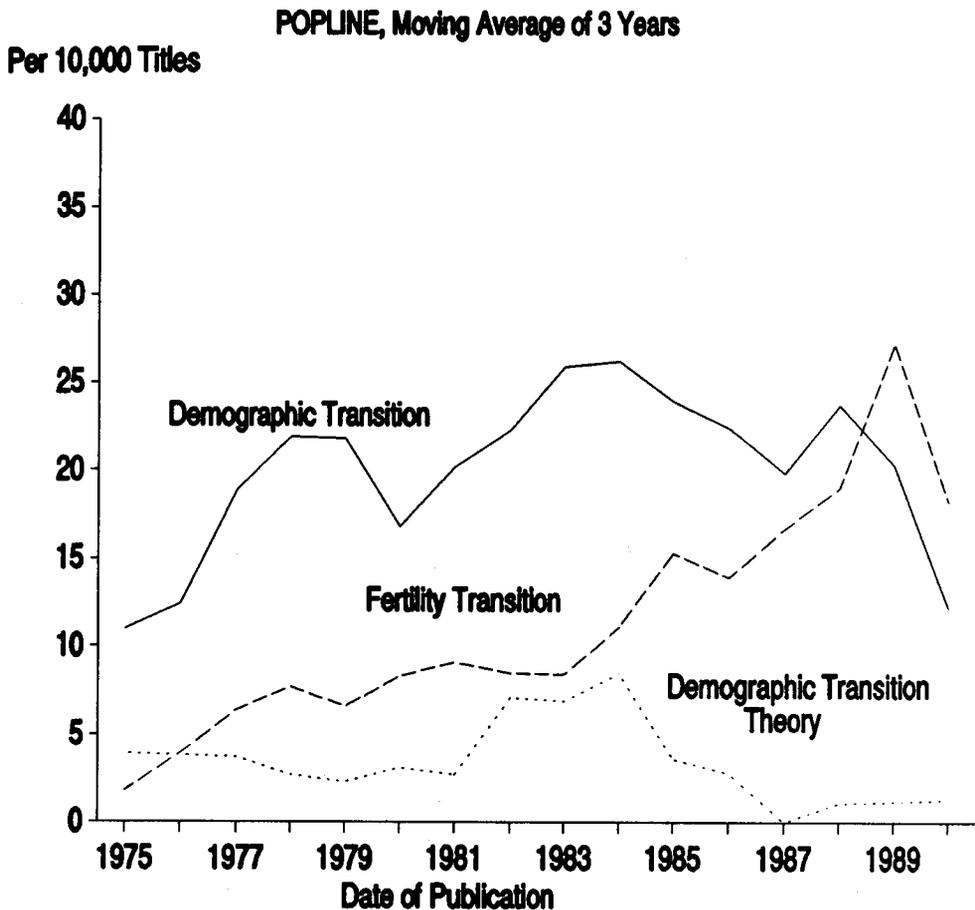


Figure 1. Use of the Word *Transition* in Demographic Titles

the writings of John Knodel and John C. Caldwell (Caldwell and Ruzicka 1978; Knodel 1977, 1979;). Transition, in this case, refers to an inflection in the curve and not to a series of stages—to a mutation in behavior and not to a slow adaptation of the demographic regime over time. Whereas the demographic transition is often viewed as a secular process with its roots in the Renaissance (see, for example, Chesnais 1986), the transition in marital fertility can be dated with some accuracy.

A radical modification has taken place in the behavior of married couples. Before the transition, their fertility was not affected by their previous number of children; now, after the transition, they modify their behavior as a function of parity, presumably because they have reached a number of children that they do not want to exceed (Coale 1986). Increasing parity-specific limitation appears clearly in time series of marital fertility, and can be monitored in precise ways—for example, by the decline in the mean age at last birth, or by an index (m) that measures the steepness of the decline of marital fertility with age (Coale 1986, p.12). The robustness of these indicators is now attested in a wide variety of contexts, and many demographic studies are revealing the suddenness and decisiveness of the onset of “stopping behavior” or of family limitation (for example, Knodel 1987; Wilson 1984.) I do

not want to dwell here on the statistical record. Instead I shall focus on the behavioral and psychological context, particularly that of pretransitional populations.

If the fertility transition truly occurs at a datable point in time in a particular population (be it socially or geographically defined), and if it is truly decisive and irreversible, then it must entail a mutation in the history of mentalities and cultures. The new behavior is not adopted by individual couples here and there as economic circumstances warrant, but massively; it can be viewed as social and is grounded in culture, the product of new norms that are shared and transmitted. A profound divide exists between the moral economies of families practicing each type of fertility regime. It is as hard for contemporary Western laymen to understand that fertility was unlimited among their ancestors as it is for couples in a natural fertility regime to understand that family size can be an object of conscious choice.

Dating cultural change is inherently difficult, and it is remarkable that we have accurate statistical indicators to help us do so in this instance. We are less successful in explaining it, perhaps because the fertility transition was a silent revolution that has left few direct traces in the writings of the West. Learned observers of the moral scene at the time of the Western transition were remarkably unperceptive about what was taking place. Our novels have been dominated by pretransitional concerns—frustrated love and thwarted marriage—and not by the day-to-day managing of (in Bongartian terms) the aggregate potential of 15.1 children per woman. When the partners had triumphed in the marital contest, “they lived happily ever after and had many children.” Because of this prejudice in our literature and the absence of KAP surveys in our historical record, we must turn to evidence from populations where a regime of natural fertility still prevails (something that I shall attempt presently) to understand the rationale of past couples.

Whereas the classical demographic transition theory had postulated one sufficient condition (a change in the motivations to have children), in 1973 Ansley Coale enumerated three necessary preconditions for the fertility decline. He posited that three circumstances account for natural fertility: reproductive decisions are not “within the calculus of conscious choice,” reduced fertility is not advantageous, and effective techniques of fertility reduction are unavailable. The one precondition that everyone likes is similar to the old “sufficient” condition: there must be motivation to limit the number of children (see, for example, Demeny 1992, who argues that the two other conditions are superfluous). Availability of techniques to reduce fertility is a precondition that most academics grant reluctantly but think fairly unimportant: where there is a will, there is a way; where there are motivations, fertility will be reduced. Program officials, however, believe strongly that contraceptive supply can awaken a latent demand and thus can exert an impact of its own. Still controversial is the matter of interpreting the historical record on the importance of availability of contraception in explaining the timing of the fertility transition is still an area of heated controversy. (Van de Walle 1980, for example, argues that it was important.)

The first precondition, however, has puzzled many people: What is the meaning of “being within the calculus of conscious choice”? Several interpretations are possible; Coale explained as follows:

Potential parents must consider it an acceptable mode of thought and form of behavior to balance advantages and disadvantages before deciding to have another child—unlike, for example, most present day Hutterites or Amish, who would consider such calculations immoral, and consequently do not control marital fertility (Coale 1973, p. 65).

If the stress is on *within* (the calculus of conscious choice), then religions that enjoin unrestricted fertility and prohibit the use of contraception come to mind; they are *outside* the

calculus because their reproductive rules conform to a higher order of motivation than mere rationality. If the emphasis is on *conscious choice*, then this phrase evokes populations that do not respond rationally to economic pressure, are too primitive to care, or are too ignorant to know that it is possible to check reproduction. Finally, the word *calculus* evokes numeracy and the existence of situations where the "cultural formation of an ideal family size" (Seccombe 1990, p. 170) has not yet occurred. Of course these explanations are not mutually exclusive. The Old Order Amish, for example, profess an ideology that forbids the use of contraceptives, but older Amish women most frequently declare in surveys that their ideal family size is "as many as come" or "don't know" (Ericksen et al. 1979, p. 268).

Neither the first interpretation (religious or moral injunction) nor the second (lack of rationality) is intellectually attractive or convincing. Religious and moral rules are often codifications of particular modes of survival prevailing at a given time in a society; although contrary examples may be cited, the perception of economic advantage often prevails in the long run in case of conflict with religion. Ericksen et al. (1979) allude to "an alternative form of population control among the Amish, that of leaving the religion" (p.276), and suggest also that sterilization is becoming widespread in that group. On the other hand, the image of traditional populations of the past and of distant lands as primitive and irrational does not conform with their proven intellectual achievements and their demonstrated wisdom. The last explanation, then, is the most interesting. We propose the hypothesis that numeracy about children—that is, the perception of a particular family size as a goal in a long-term strategy of couples—may be a cultural trait present in some places and times but not in others; and that without this perception, it is unlikely that family limitation could exist.

We will begin by drawing on information from several contemporary African societies to show that in the recent past substantial proportions of women would not give a numerical answer to questions on desired family size, even with strenuous probing by aggressive interviewers. We then look for evidence of numeracy in the western European past, surveying memoirs, autobiographies, novels, and paintings from England and France. These materials are unconventional sources for demographers, but they are the only available means to tell us about the mentalities of western European pretransition populations.

NUMERACY IN CHILDREN

The term *numeracy about children* refers to a clear notion of what family size ought to be and to individuals awareness of where they stand with respect to the norm. Examples are the Dick and Jane norm instilled by primary school readers, or the ideal number of four children reflected in many KAP surveys of Asia. Numeracy about children is quite different from the perception that one has "a multitude of children" or "few children," a feeling that probably is perceived very widely by many parents in all times and places. An analogy is the precise knowledge of one's age which is drilled into the memory of small children by most Western parents but is deemed irrelevant in many societies where there are otherwise clear notions of who is young or old. Age, for us, is an element of our personality. Similarly, our own family size and our number of children are defining characteristics; before numeracy in children had been attained, they were not important. Of course, women in a natural fertility regime know how many children they have, but they do not generalize to other women, and they believe that their own family size is the result of happenstance (God's will), not design.

We find it difficult to accept that family size and the correlate notion that it can be manipulated by parents are not conceptualized universally, because the contemporary

Western mind is obsessed with numeracy;¹ we define ourselves and other people by number of children or number of siblings. We are expected to perceive a desired family size at an early age. Most undergraduates in American colleges, for example, seem to have made up their minds on the subject well before they are married. Westoff and Potvin (1967), who investigated fertility ideals among college women, did not report the existence of nonnumeric answers in their large and varied sample.

Because the concept appears so obvious, we include questions on desired family size in fertility surveys. We are aware, of course, that the question may present problems, such as *a posteriori* rationalization. Nonetheless, the WFS or DHS think nothing of posing the following complex mental puzzle: "If you could go back to the time you did not have any children and could choose exactly the number of children to have in your whole life, how many would that be?" The question works in general, but not in certain contexts. In the 1987 DHS of Mali, for example, nonnumeric responses (such as "up to God") were given by 25% of the women. Matters were worse in earlier KAP surveys; it is likely that notions of family numeracy are gaining. In the 1963 KAP survey of Ghana, for example, 45% of women in the rural areas and 36% in the urban areas answered "don't know" to the question "How many children is a good number for a woman to have?" This high percentage was interpreted at that time as the result of "the difficulty . . . with conceptualizing in a quantitative manner" (Pool 1967, p.12). In the Ghana DHS of 1988, the proportion of nonnumeric answers on the mean ideal number had fallen to 12.8%.²

In a 1983–1984 survey in Ilori, Nigeria, more than 50% of the women gave a nonnumeric response. McCarthy and Oni (1987) interpreted the nonnumeric responses in terms of Coale's first precondition. They believed that women who answer "up to God" to a question on the number of children wanted have not yet reached a first stage of the fertility transition, which includes awareness of family size and the possibility of influencing it. Only in the second stage may people act on the realization that their family is too big or too small, because they have a standard (ideal, or wanted family size) against which to measure it.

Francine van de Walle conducted a small, intensive survey of women in Bamako, the capital of Mali, and tape-recorded their answers. The survey reflects the time when it was taken (1983); a clear "natural fertility" culture no longer may exist in that country today. The interviewers were given a series of topics to discuss (concerning children, postpartum behavior, and reproductive goals) but were left with a great deal of freedom on how they would phrase the questions. The goal was not so much comparability as insight, and the researchers thought that the interviewers' own approach would contribute an interesting point of view.

One of the topics was "ideal family size." In analyzing this material we distinguished two groups of women: the younger ones, whom the interviewers asked about a precise number of wanted children, and the older ones, who were asked about intentions to have more children. The results are presented in Figures 2 and 3.

Among the younger women represented in Figure 2, a common reaction was to refuse to state the number of children they wanted, other than "as many as God will send." In such instances, further probing sometimes elicited a preference. In the "no number" category, however, women were unwilling to respond, even when offered the option to negotiate with God.

Age 28, Seven Children

Q. Maimouna, how many children would you like to have in your life?

A. Ah, what God gives me, that is it . . . I cannot tell the number I will have in my life . . . [laughs]

Numeracy Status

Younger Women: Bamako, Mali

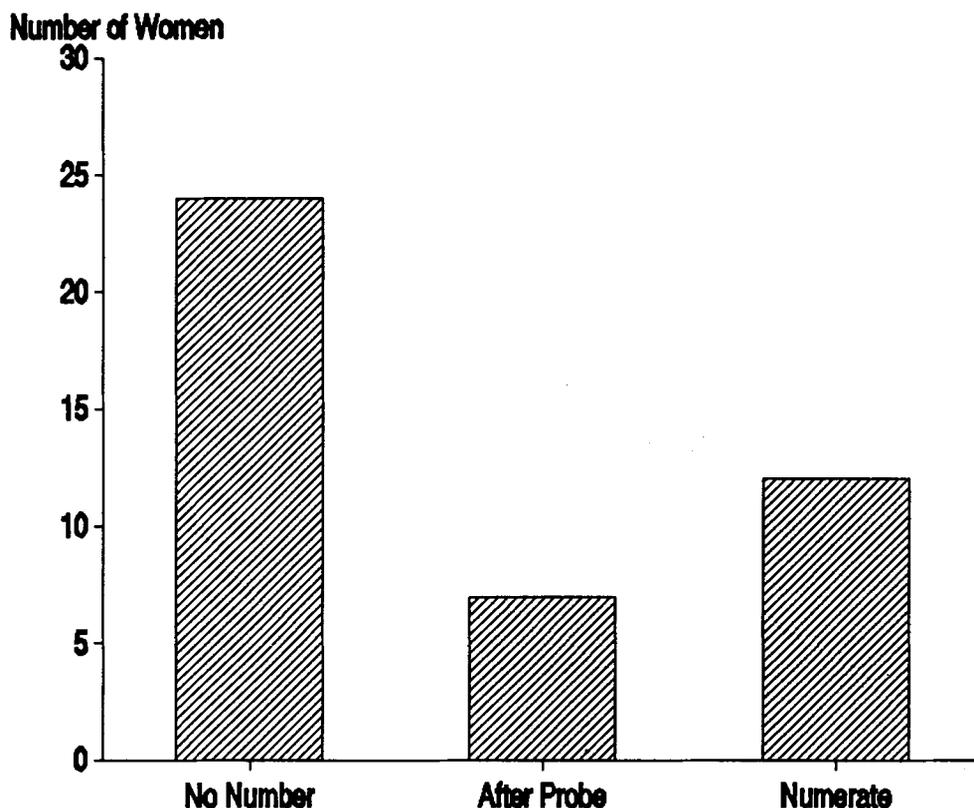


Figure 2. Response of Younger Women in Bamako to Question: "How many children do you want?"

- Q. It is true that God is the one who gives the child, but if God asked the number of children you wanted, how many would you say?
- A. Oh, me, I cannot tell the number of children to God. What he gives me is good, that's enough. To say that I can stop and say the number, to tell God what to give me, I could not do so.
- Q. Even if God asks you?
- A. Even if He asks me, I cannot say it.
- Q. Would you like to have many children, or not many?
- A. Only what God gives me, that's what I want.
- Q. Do you want more than those you have now?
- A. What I say is that what God gives me, that's what I want.
- Q. And if God gives you 12 children now?
- A. Ah, if God gives me 12 children, then God created them.
- Q. So you like that?
- A. Ah, what God makes, that is that.

After probing, however, some women were willing to "suggest a number to God."

Age 19, 1 Child

- A. How many children I want? How many [laughs] . . . Can you know how many children there are in your blood?
- Q. It is true that the number in your blood, nobody knows that. You are young, you had your first child. If God asks you how many children you want, what will you say?
- A. If I could say . . . if I could say, it would be six children.

And finally, a number of women adopted “modern” attitudes, and had clear notions of an ideal number of children:

- Q. Sanou, you are young, 28 years; you had four pregnancies but have only two children alive, how many would you like to have in your life?
- A. I don't want to exceed four.

These women were willing to practice family limitation because they had a clear perception of a target.

Older women in the sample were asked whether they wanted to avoid another childbirth (see Figure 3). For a substantial proportion, it was God's decision, or something that their husband controlled.

Age 43, 10 Children

- Q. After you deliver this child, would you like to have another pregnancy?
- A. This will depend on God [laughs]. This will depend on God.
- Q. Korotimi, would your husband like that you have many more children?
- A. Eh! He likes children, one does not refuse a child [laughs].
- Q. How do you know that he wants many children?
- A. He takes good care of his children.
- Q. Do you ever discuss the issue of children with him?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Does he tell you the number of children he would like to have?
- A. No, he hasn't told me.

Although women in the next group acknowledged that God's will would prevail, they said they would prefer no more children. The following woman alluded to a weak preference for a number of children already exceeded, but would do nothing to avoid additional births:

Age 40, 10 Pregnancies

- Q. Now you have had ten pregnancies. Do you want any more?
- A. Truly, the number of children I wanted was four, but going on to ten was God's work.
- Q. If it depended on you, would you like to stop?
- A. Yes, this is what I would like.
- [The interviewer starts discussing the subject of contraception.]
- A. If God does not want it, it is impossible to stop pregnancies. It cannot succeed . . .

Attitude to Stopping

Older Women, Bamako

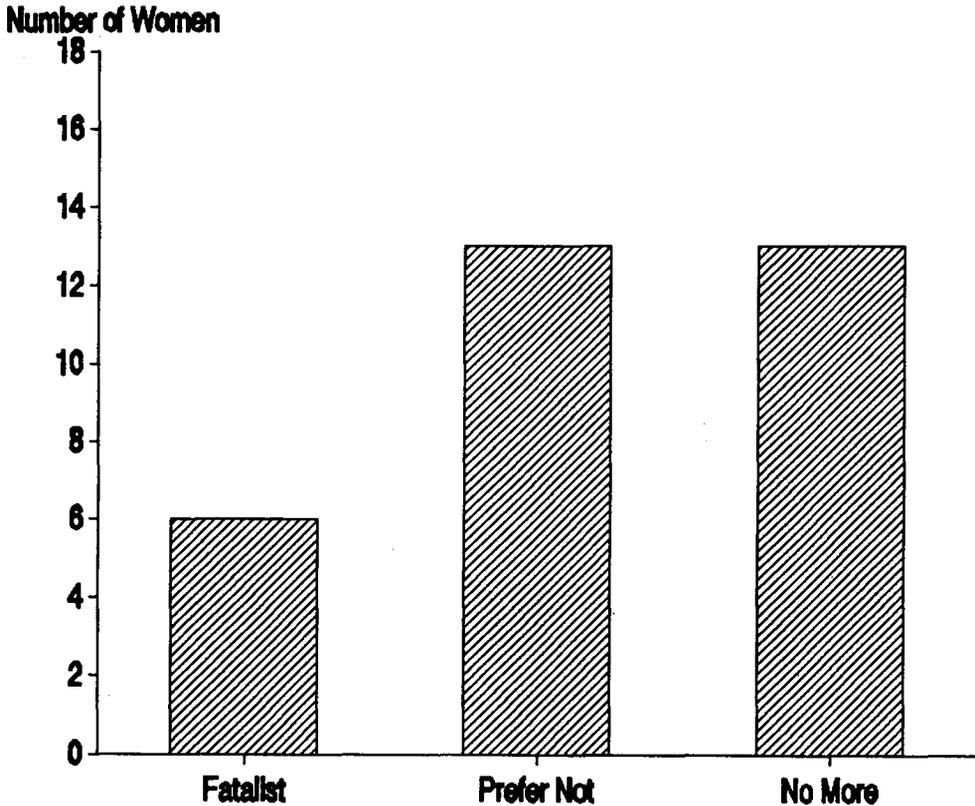


Figure 3. Response of Older Women in Bamako to Question: "Do you want to stop?"

Other women wanted no more children, but were not doing anything about it.

Age 41, 12 Children

Q. Why don't you go to the Planning?

A. I simply don't like it.

Q. Are there folk methods which prevent a women from becoming pregnant?

A. No, I don't know any.

Q. You had 12 deliveries, would like to have more?

A. No.

Q. Why?

A. Because a delivery is difficult. Most of all, when the woman gets old, she becomes weaker and weaker.

Q. You want to stop at 12, is it also your husband's opinion?

A. It cannot be his opinion, but I want to stop at 12.

- Q. Since you are not going to the Planning, what are you going to do not to have another child?
- A. Eh! It all depends on God.
- Q. But if it depended on you, what would you do?
- A. I would do nothing.

We were surprised by women's passive attitudes towards spacing. It is well known that most respondents in sub-Saharan Africa are overwhelmingly in favor of well-spaced births, and they express strong reservations about short birth intervals. They are in favor of abstinence, and some eventually resort to refusing their husband as long as feasible. (In this respect, they do not differ from the English working-class women at the turn of the century who resorted to "staying up mending" after their husbands had gone to bed; Seccombe 1990.) The long taboo on intercourse during breastfeeding is not practiced widely in Bamako; 40 days of abstinence after a birth comes closest to the norm. If this society once knew a long taboo and has relinquished the custom recently, there would seem to be an ideal market for adoption of contraception. Even so, spacing seemed more an impossible ideal than a practical goal to the women in the sample (see Figure 4). The large majority did not attempt to delay the next birth. They were not aware of the effect of prolonged nursing on delaying the resumption of menstruation; beyond the notion that a breast-feeding woman should avoid intercourse so that her child will not become sick (van de Walle and van de Walle 1991), they mostly trusted their luck and did nothing to prevent conception once intercourse had resumed regularly. Only a handful were contracepting to space the next child or stated that they intended to do so if they were pregnant. Many were opposed on principle, for religious reasons, or because they believed their husbands would not let them go to the family planning clinic, whose existence was known to a large majority of women in Bamako in 1983. Some were wary of contraceptives for health reasons.

Age 40, 10 Children

- Q. Korotimi, according to you, how many years should a mother leave between her children?
- A. The mother must leave several years between her children, but this depends on God . . .
- Q. Eh! Why does it depend on God. [Laughter.]
- A. [Laughs.] We wait . . . we don't know at what time the child comes . . . What time there must be between one child and the next, one does not know . . . God only knows it.

Perhaps women were not motivated strongly enough to care. A number said they were willing to contracept, but did nothing.

Age unknown, 9 Children

- A. Ah! Truly, my children are spaced too closely, often I would like to go [to the Planning].
- Q. And what prevents you from going?
- A. [Laughs]. I say I am going to go, and then I forget.

This type of material allows us a clearer understanding of the preconditions of fertility

Spacing Status

Bamako, Mali

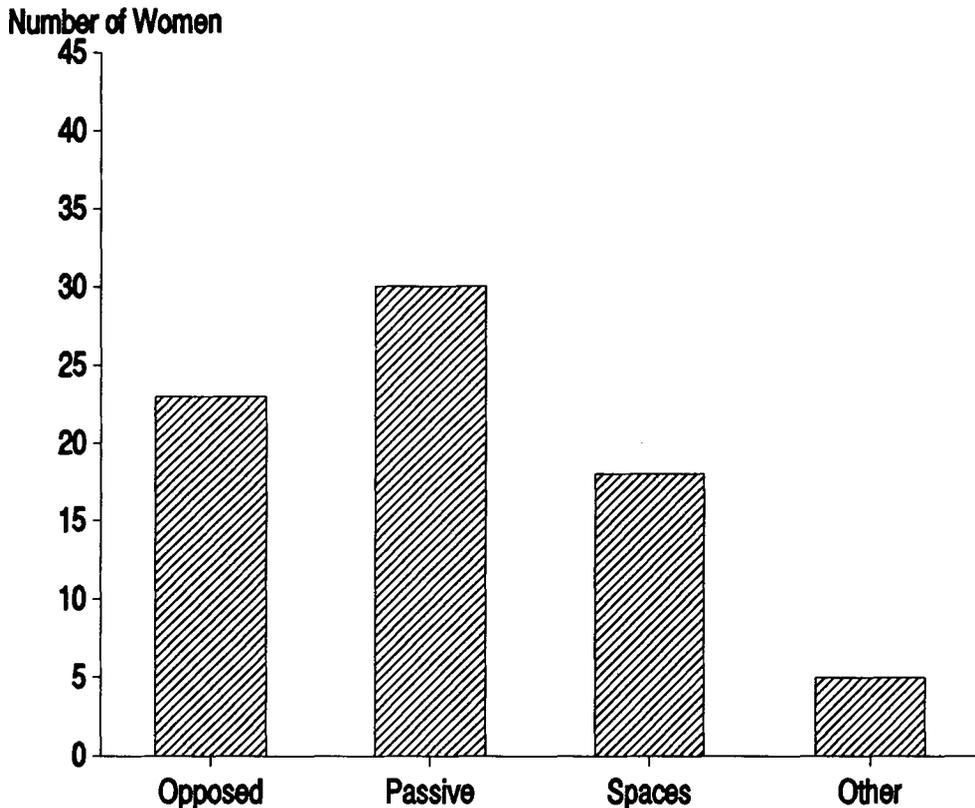


Figure 4. Attitudes toward Spacing among Women in Bamako

decline. Means of control are not available; motivations are weak; but above all, the women lack the frame of mind and the clear numerical standard that would allow them to make sense of small families and the means to obtain them.

Did numeracy about children exist in Western countries before the transition, or is Africa exceptional in this respect? Of course, one cannot transpose the Malian reproductive views literally to historical Western Europe. Rather, we are trying to prove a negative, that is, the nonexistence of numeracy about children in the past, and we seek for constants of human psychology. The shreds of testimony for pretransition Europe—drawn from novels, biographies, and other literary forms—permit us to speculate that had it been possible to interrogate their authors aggressively, they would have been as indeterminate about ideal family size as were Maimouna and Korotimi. The circumstances in Mali and in Europe were different, but the pretransition psyches often seem remarkably similar.

THE WESTERN TRANSITION

Historians have not tackled the favorite subjects of modern survey takers: ideals for family size, the demand for children. Do we know how the number of children wanted

evolved? It would be useful to have a survey taken in 1800 in England or in 1750 in France, in which women were asked: "If you could start your life all over again, how many children would you like to have?" Of course we have no such survey, but it is not entirely fanciful to consider whether *the question* itself would have made sense to our ancestors. The closest we have to a statistical probe into the issue is Lewis-Faning's (1949) retrospective inquiry on family limitation among 10,000 women in Britain's 1946–1947 hospital population. The results show a steady increase in the proportion of women who could remember that they had planned a definite number of children at the outset of marriage, from 15% for those who married in 1910–1919, to 47% for those who married in 1940–1946. (There was remarkably little evolution in the planned size, which was a little above two children throughout the period.)

This evidence presents many problems. Not the least is the difficulty, increasing with time, of recalling one's attitude and intentions at the time of marriage; I would be unable to do so. Moreover, we know little about how ideal family size evolved in time, or whether the concept was meaningful before the fertility transition started. The following survey of European materials is sketchy and tentative, and is meant only to suggest where one might look for evidence on numeracy about children. The indications are that there was only silence for several centuries; then, in the social classes that left written descriptions of their attitudes, we find a determination to have a particular number of children in the seventeenth century in France and the eighteenth century in England.

We begin with moral and medical treatises of the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. In the scholastic style used by many writers of the past, a question is asked, often as the title of a chapter, and pro and con arguments are provided in reply. Alternatively, a subject is proposed to the protagonists in a discussion, and they review the relevant opinions. A related genre, the essay, consists of reflections on a theme. The questions and the themes reflect a world view; many of the subjects are demographic, but the tone is normative rather than descriptive in tone. Favorite topics include the ideal age at marriage, the acceptable difference in ages between spouses, breastfeeding, and whether sexual relations should be limited to the periods of fecundity. Sometimes, even birth spacing and abstinence are discussed. For example, in Laurent Joubert's *Popular Errors*, a sixteenth-century treatise of popular medicine, one subject is "Against those who never stop embracing their wives in order to have children; and against those who do it rarely to have fewer" (Joubert [1578] 1989, p. 109). Yet I do not believe that numerical family size, ideal or actual, is ever discussed in this kind of literature. All kinds of questions are asked, but I never could find "How many children should the good man (or woman) have?" The absence of interest in family size may be meaningful in itself.

What happens when we turn to memoirs and autobiographies, in which the authors wrote what they wanted others to know about themselves? From my eclectic reading, my hypothesis is that the authors rarely discuss their family size before a certain date—the seventeenth century in France and probably later in England. Of course they know the number of children, and may allude to it in passing, particularly to the number of boys; but it is not a defining characteristic or an important part of an author's personality. This situation changes when the French nobility become acutely aware of issues of inheritance; at this time, too, this social class embarks on family limitation. Montaigne ([1595] 1969), in his *Essays*, alludes in passing to his brothers (but never to his sisters). He had six daughters, of whom only one survived, and he describes his own family desultorily in the following way:

[The children I had] . . . they all died upon me at nurse; but Leonor, an only daughter who escaped this misfortune . . . (Vol. 2, p. 60).

A typical example of the new voice is found in Saint-Simon, the great memoirist of the reign of Louis XIV. This is how he introduces himself:

I was born in the night of 15 to 16 January 1675, of Claude, Duke of Saint-Simon, peer of France, etc., and of his second wife, Charlotte de l'Aubespine, the only child of this bed. From Diane de Budos, first wife of my father, he had an only daughter, and no boys. He had married her to the Duke of Brissac, Peer of France, only brother of the Duchess of Villeroy. She had died in 1694, childless, long since separated from a husband who did not deserve her, and by her testament had made me her universal heir . . . ([1829–1830] 1947, pp. 15–16).

In the first three sentences of his *Memoirs*, Saint-Simon has given us the family sizes (girls included) of four persons, and he clearly believes the information is important in defining his place in the world. Of course he is a snob, but we are looking for people and social groups who are numerate about children, not for representativeness. As to the intellectuals, moralists, and memoirists of the past who did not consider family size at all, their silence too is meaningful. If we are to find the early appearance of family size norms anywhere, it is among them, and not among the lower classes.

It would be wrong to attribute innumeracy about children to the high level of mortality that prevailed in the past. Child mortality had not declined appreciably at the time when people became aware of family norms; when they did become so aware, they were likely to include dead children in their accounting. This mention of dead children may be the result of Western beliefs in the immortality of the soul; other cultures might exclude them.

In the novels of the nineteenth century, the situation is clearly different. Precise statements about numbers of children appear as part of the plot. Jane Austen, for example, invariably gives a full genealogy of her protagonists in the opening pages of her novels. *Persuasion* begins with an excerpt from the *Baronetage*, with exact dates of the children's birth including a stillborn son; the plot of *Mansfield Park* hinges on the respective family sizes of three sisters (Austen [1814] 1966, [1818] 1984). Balzac reproduces the calculus of conscious choice of one young married woman in the following words:

It is possible to have a dozen children in a marriage, by getting married at our age [17 years]; and if we had them we would commit twelve crimes, make twelve unhappy beings . . . On the contrary, two children are two gifts of happiness, two blessings, two creations in harmony with the mores and the laws of the time ([1842] 1979: 147–48).

We can explore one more source on numeracy in the European past. Long before their models started to limit fertility, paintings recorded family size in the number of children clustered at their feet or held in their arms. Yet although we as viewers can count the number of children, it is likely that neither the subjects nor the artists were counting. I would argue that the paintings are purely descriptive, without judgment or ideological content. They tell us about the artists' rich patrons' pride of success, including reproductive success. Proud parents show off their children together with other worldly possessions—their castles, their servants, their dogs. The paintings tell us about gender preference: richly dressed boys occupy the center of the picture, and the girls remain demurely in the background. Sometimes they even tell us about dead children (included in the painting in more or less symbolic form) and about the constant threat of child death. The number of children in itself, however, does not appear particularly important. The subject most frequently represented in the history of Western painting, the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus, in my reading is not a statement about complete family size; to individual parents, the image must have appealed more as the representation of the relationship between a mother and her child than as a symbol of marital chastity.

In genre paintings, where more ideological statements are made, the scenes representing families of the lower classes do not appear to bear judgment about the number of children before the eighteenth century. At that time we find an association of lower-class families with high fertility, which takes two forms. At first, at least in France, we observe an image of the healthy peasant girl who bears repeated maternity with good grace and a blooming health; this may be a proceptive message addressed to the upper classes who buy the paintings and limit their families. Later, however, a large family becomes an attribute of poverty. A class antagonism appears in England, where the Poor Laws compel the rich to pay for what they perceive to be the reproductive irresponsibility of the parish's paupers. This evolution also corresponds to the association between pauperism and the principle of population made by Malthus and the classical economists.

In the First Essay, Malthus himself alludes to the myth of the healthy and prolific lower classes:

Indeed, it seems difficult to suppose that a labourer's wife who has six children, and who is sometimes in absolute want of bread, should be able always to give them the food and attention to support life. The sons and daughters of peasants will not be found such rosy cherubs in real life as they are described to be in romances. It cannot fail to be remarked by those who live much in the country that the sons of labourers are very apt to be stunted in their growth . . . ([1798] 1959, p. 25).

Not surprisingly, Malthus is numerate about children. So are other economists, even though Adam Smith's numeracy lacks a solid empirical basis:

Poverty . . . seems to be favorable to generation. A half-starved Highland woman frequently bears more than twenty children, while a pampered fine lady is often incapable of bearing any, and is generally exhausted by two or three . . . ([1776] 1937, p. 79).

Precise reckoning of the average family size, in the aggregate, is well established in the writing of the political arithmeticians and the economists. In their analyses, these writers use the available information on the topic, in contrast to the moral and medical writers of an earlier time. The notion of the average size of the laborer's family dates back at least to Gregory King, who used it as a multiplier to estimate the size of the population of England on the basis of counts of hearths (King [1696] 1973). King uses *family* to denote what we would call households. Elsewhere, he computes the number of births per marriage (Laslett 1965, p. 19) on the basis of parish data.

In Richard Cantillon's *Essay on the Nature of Trade*, the ideal average family size for laborers is the number that will satisfy the demand for labor without depressing wages; it is related to the "reproduction" of the labor force (Cantillon [1755] 1964). Laborer parents should replace themselves, says Cantillon; with the ongoing mortality, about four children will be required. Adam Smith, who follows Cantillon, considers extremes of mortality under extreme conditions of poverty:

It is not uncommon, I have been frequently told, in the Highlands of Scotland for a mother who has borne twenty children not to have two alive . . . ([1776] 1937, p. 79).

This analytical concern of the economists will eventually permit the theoretical link between family size and family limitation. Smith believes that high mortality alone will regulate the supply of labor. Malthus, however, says that a *preventive* check will serve the same end: children can be prevented by delaying or forsaking marriage. This check entails neither stopping nor spacing births; the key is starting or not starting childbearing. Many enlightened people thought that this choice was not realistic; foremost among them were

Francis Place and the American Robert Dale Owen. Place uses the expression "limiting the number of children" in his "diabolical handbills" of 1823 (Himes 1936, pp. 214-17). Owen, in his *Moral Physiology*, describes explicitly how "the calculus of conscious choice" led French middle-class parents to use contraception:

A French lady of the utmost delicacy and respectability will, in common conversation, say as simply (ay, and as *innocently*, whatever the self-righteous prude may aver to the contrary) as she would proffer any common remark about the weather: "I have three children: my husband and I think that is as many as we can do justice to, and do not intend to have any more" (Owen [1859] 1972, p. 23-24).

In contrast, John Stuart Mill in his *Principles of Political Economy* deplors the absence of numeracy in the British working classes:

That it is possible to delay marriage, and to live in abstinence while unmarried, most people are willing to allow: but when people are once married, the idea, in this country, never seems to enter anyone's mind that having or not having a family, or the number of which it shall consist, is amenable to their own control. One would imagine that children were rained down upon married people, direct from heaven, without their being art or part in the matter; that it was really, as the common phrases have it, God's will and not their own, which decided the number of their offspring (Mill [1848] 1976, pp. 155).

These are the terms in which social scientists discussed the size of the family in the nineteenth century: either prevent, or limit. It is remarkable that spacing is hardly mentioned, although Robert Dale Owen suggests marrying early and delaying the first child.

The role of spacing in the fertility transition has become the focus of much recent demographic research, particularly in the United States (Anderton and Bean, 1985; Morgan 1991; Tolnay and Guest 1984; for a similar argument about Geneva, Switzerland, see Perrenoud 1988.) Effective spacing would not require numeracy about children, and in theory could reduce the size of families. A concern about delaying the next birth for the sake of the mother's and child's health is widely recognized in Africa, and the use of prolonged abstinence to space births is well documented. There is no reason to assume that such a concern was not present in western populations well before the fertility transition, or that women at all times have not opted to space in order to rest and preserve their health, and in support of healthy children.

Perhaps the most famous advocate of spacing in the history of literature was Madame de Sévigné, the great seventeenth century French letter writer. In 1670, after her daughter had borne a first live child, a girl, the good Marchioness wrote her a most extraordinary series of letters recommending abstinence for spacing. Even though the birth of a male heir was of primary concern in this social group, Madame de Sévigné believed that healthy spacing was more important than another attempt at conceiving a son. Efforts at spacing (which eventually were frustrated, because her daughter ultimately had six births in six years) involved mainly a resort to separate beds, and admonitions of abstinence to her son-in-law (Sévigné [1646-1696] 1972.)

Observation of spacing and stopping by older women in Bamako suggests that it is not easy to assess the role of spacing. Attempts to stop may result in the appearance of spacing by prolonging birth intervals; attempts to space may constitute a normal part of natural fertility if they are a common trait of couples subject to the health risks and economic burdens of repeated childbearing. Yet even the widely touted African pattern of long abstinence, when combined with prolonged breast-feeding, may not contribute more than a modest "bonus" to the interval between births (Lesthaeghe 1989). We may think that the

taboo on intercourse is breaking down, but probably eager males always have encroached upon it. The story of a time when abstinence customs were enforced may be one of those myths of the golden age, when the people were virtuous. Doubts about the effectiveness of spacing attempts are borne out by a large amount of empirical evidence. Abstinence, like any contraceptive technique, is probably most effective after the couple has reached the number of children they do not want to exceed.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of preliminary impressions, I hypothesize that numeracy about children and the norm of an ideal family size appeared not long before the fertility transition. A fertility decline is not very far away when people start conceptualizing their family size, and it cannot take place without such conceptualizing. Social scientists have largely assumed that family norms are bred into little children everywhere with basic socialization. I submit that in our own Western culture, the question was completely irrelevant before a certain date.

This is not a momentous discovery, with ponderous policy implications. Most populations now have become numerate about children; the event is interesting only in retrospect and has little bearing on the future. If the hypothesis is verified, however, it may provide a clue for reassessing the evidence on the fertility transition by dispelling a little of the cultural misunderstanding that separates different reproductive regimes. It may facilitate our interpretation of a change in behavior which is one of the most profound in social history.

NOTES

¹ Cohen (1985) argues that a culture of numeracy appeared historically at specific times and in specific places. She defines the term, however, in a way that is unsuitable for the present argument, which is concerned about what we call "numeracy in children."

² Neither the question nor the survey methodology (e.g. use of probing questions) are comparable. In the Ghana Fertility Survey of 1979-1980, about ten percent of women gave nonnumeric answers.

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