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Introduction

WILLIAM VOCKE: Welcome to the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs.

We are here this evening for an interesting discussion of the Carnegie New Leaders Program. Welcome to all of you. Glad to have you here today.

We are going to handle this discussion in something of an interview format, fairly casual. So please get your questions in mind and think about what you want to ask.

Our guest today is Michelle Goldberg. Michelle, welcome.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: Thank you so much for having me.

WILLIAM VOCKE: We're glad to have Michelle here. Michelle is a journalist and author. Her most recent book is *The Means of Reproduction: Sex, Power, and the Future of the World*. This particular book won the John Anthony Lukas Award. Michelle is also a senior correspondent with *American Prospect*. Michelle is a noted expert in reproductive issues and reproductive rights.

Michelle, I'd like to just ask you, if you don't mind, to give us a short précis of the book, a short background on the book.

Overview and Discussion

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: Sure, certainly. Thank you so much for coming to hear me tonight.

I wrote a book that came out in 2006 about religious fundamentalism in American politics. When I would talk about that book, people immediately understood what I meant. You know, even if they didn't know the details, everybody knew that religious fundamentalism in American politics was a phenomenon that you could kind of summarize.

This book is about the global battle over reproductive rights. One of the things that I found while talking about it, and in fact one of the reasons I wrote it in the first place, is that nobody outside of people who work directly on these issues really knows what that even means. It's international in scope. It's actually quite profound and far-reaching in its effects on people's lives. It involves all these fascinating characters and strange alliances.

But most of the coverage of the lives of women in the Third World is not a topic of major concern to the mainstream media to begin with, and a lot of these debates are cloaked in this really choking bureaucratic language that leaches all the drama out of it.

So the essential story is not only that the story hasn't been told in a really mainstream, accessible format; it's that very few people are even aware that there is a story to tell.

The essential argument of the book is that there is a global battle over reproductive rights, that women's human rights are the major human rights struggle of our time, and that reproductive rights are
at the center of them, that there is a global international network of fundamentalists who have mobilized and sometimes worked in alliance against reproductive rights, who tend to see women—actually I think correctly—see women’s increased autonomy as harbingers of modernity, of globalization, of urbanization, of everything that social traditionalists tend to hate; and so often see putting women back into a subordinate or traditional role as being a way to reassert a world that is slipping away from them.

Then finally, the final piece—and we’ll get into how this works, I guess, as we talk—is that I wasn’t trying to be either immodest or hyperbolic when I used “the Future of the World” in the subtitle.

These issues are not just about women’s lives, although women’s lives are obviously a hugely important and neglected topic. Many of the major onrushing catastrophes facing the planet, in terms of the environment and national security and hunger and poverty and development—there will be no progress on these issues as long as women’s rights and reproductive rights are ignored.

I traveled all over the world to report this book and I spent lots of time digging through archives and doing lots of interviews. The story starts really in the 1950s, when there was this panic over overpopulation, often among national security types who believed that overpopulation was going to cause so much misery that it was going to lead to widespread communist revolution.

So you had these certain, not social radicals at all but pillars of the establishment, build this family planning infrastructure that was, I think, probably one of the greatest social engineering experiments in human history. This infrastructure was gradually taken over from the bottom up by women’s rights activists, who fundamentally transformed it. Groups of fundamentalists mobilized in response.

So now what you have are two things:

First, something that I think is very poorly understood but to me is fascinating is that reproductive rights have entered international law in a real way. There has been a whole series of cases at the United Nations, at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, that have all ruled that reproductive rights are a component of human rights under international law and that women who have been denied medically necessary abortions by countries including Peru, and Poland, and Chile, are entitled to some kind of redress.

This creates some of the same tensions that Roe v. Wade created, but on a global scale, where you have this kind of centralized authority, as opposed to groups insisting on their own local autonomy. That theme is not just about this. That’s a theme throughout the whole book. As women’s rights and the institutionalization of women’s rights become internationalized, they often become conflated with Westernization, globalization, and so all of these local right-wing movements erupt up in response.

One thing I did in this book was to trace how these eruptions play out in various corners of the world. You see some of the same characters, you see some of the same arguments, you see some of the same dynamics, but of course the narratives are quite different, subject to local history and local conditions.

WILLIAM VOCKE: That’s a great overview. Thanks.

I’m going to start out with a few questions of my own here and then ask you to run up to the mike. As I see you coming up to the mike I’ll call on you. So help me out.

First of all, women’s rights and reproductive rights—what’s the difference?

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: Well, reproductive rights are a subset of women’s rights. I would say that women’s rights also includes the right to own and inherit land, the right to freely enter into marriage, the right to an education, the right to work, the right to own property.

Reproductive rights is both a subset of women’s rights but also in many ways a kind of precondition of them. It’s the first step toward becoming economically empowered, to being able to pursue an education. All these things are very tied up with a woman’s ability to control her own fertility.

WILLIAM VOCKE: I have trouble with that because I have trouble understanding why reproductive rights precede other women’s rights, for instance, the right to an education. I would think the right to an education would be in part education about reproductive rights, about reproductive options. So why wouldn’t you be talking about education of women as one of the first things?

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: I am certainly not saying that I think education of women is a tertiary issue. I think that there is a virtuous circle.
One major reason that girls end up dropping out of school is because they get pregnant. So that's a first step.

But then, on a slightly more meta level, what you see is that women who are educated are far more likely to send their daughters to school in the first place. This is borne out in the literature of economics and sociologists and the like.

And also, women who are educated and women who work outside the home or have some kind of outside income typically have more control over their families' finances, which itself then has this kind of second-order effect of more money being devoted to children's education and to girls' education. But again, a woman with eight children or seven children or nine children is going to have a very difficult time having any role besides a domestic one.

So it's very much tied together. Delayed childbearing leads to education, which leads to working outside the home, which leads typically to women having fewer children who are better educated, girls getting greater shares of the family resources.

**WILLIAM VOCKE:** I guess the only point I was making here was in terms of causality and in terms of causal circularity, they all seem to be interrelated rather than positing that one, reproductive rights for instance, is somehow a precedent for the others.

**MICHELLE GOLDBERG:** Again, I'm not trying to create a hierarchy, so much as I think that there is causality that goes both ways. But yes, a woman who starts childbearing at 13 or 14, all kinds of other oppressions flow from that.

**WILLIAM VOCKE:** Right.

Let me talk about another issue here, about fundamentalism and the linkages. Would you talk about that a little more, and the role of religion in that? Is it primarily a religious issue, or are there other linkages? Is there traditional society?

**MICHELLE GOLDBERG:** There is some overlap actually. Sometimes you're talking about fundamentalism and sometimes you're talking just about traditional patriarchal cultures that don't necessarily express themselves in religious terms but they do in terms of age-old values.

When I talk about there being an international network, I mean in some sense sometimes it's just a network of affinity, and sometimes there's a real level of cooperation and there are very strange bedfellow arrangements.

You really started to see it in 1994. In 1994 there was a big conference in Cairo, the United Nations Conference on Population, that created a lot of the language and a lot of the base-level understandings about reproductive rights as human rights that have then been interpreted by all these courts and have changed the way the whole international system works. This conference was a very historic moment.

**Pope John Paul II** saw this coming, was incredibly concerned. Some people said that they had never seen him so alarmed or so upset about anything. Seeing that he wasn't going to be able to build alliances either with the United States, because **Bill Clinton** was in power, or with other European countries, he saw that there was a common interest between the Vatican conception of the family and those that prevailed in the Muslim world.

There is a quote. Do you mind if I read it?

**WILLIAM VOCKE:** Please.

**MICHELLE GOLDBERG:** Hopefully I can get this quote quickly. There is this fascinating quote.

So he reaches out. Diplomatically, they mount a kind of full-court press. They reach out to Iran. At one point they send emissaries to Libya, saying, "We'll help you achieve a rapprochement with the rest of the world," Libya was kind of a pariah because of the Lockerbie bombing. They were saying, "If you'll stand with us against this expansion of women's rights at the United Nations, we will help your reentry into decent society."

So there is a quote at the time from the Iranian deputy foreign minister, **Mohammed Hashemi Rafsanjani**, and this is when he's in talks with the Vatican in 1994:

"The future war is between the religious and the materialists. Collaboration between religious governments in support of outlawing abortion is a fine beginning for the conception of collaboration in
other fields."

So this alliance, basically an axis of fundamentalists, although they're very much at each other's throats in all kinds of other aspects of human affairs, when it comes to women's rights, and specifically women's rights on the international level, there is this kind of amazing ecumenical cooperation. You saw it with the Bush Administration, when Bush delegates would be negotiating very closely with Iran and Saudi Arabia whenever some resolution or some initiative on women's rights came up at the United Nations.

And you continue to see it. There is actually something called the World Congress of Families, which happens every two years in various cities in the world, which brings together representatives of various religions and various social traditionalist movements: Mormons, evangelicals, Catholics, Muslims, usually a couple of rabbis, Eastern Orthodox. Sometimes very high-level people come, high-level people from the Vatican, from the Polish government, from the Bush Administration during the Bush Administration.

Basically, the premise of this event is that they can momentarily put aside their very severe theological differences and join hands against what they see as the real enemy, which is secularism and feminism and liberalism.

I actually see that alliance as being very clarifying, because I have always believed that fundamentalists of all stripes essentially have more in common with each other than they do with liberals and moderates within their own societies. I think it's fascinating to see that they have realized that as well.

WILLIAM VOCKE: So, in terms of modernism and its relationship to, not really feminism but the role of women in the world—and you distinguish between the ideology and the role of women in the world—you're suggesting that there is a real conflict between the two, between modernism and the promotion of women's rights?

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: Oh, no, no, no. I'm actually saying that modernism is very much tied up with the expansion of women's rights, and that often opposition to modernism takes the form of opposition to women's rights.

WILLIAM VOCKE: I'm sorry. Yes, indeed you did. My apologies. I got that wrong.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: There is a lot of really interesting academic data about modernization and urbanization changing women's roles in really predictable ways—not the same everywhere, but one can say relatively broadly that modernization and urbanization to some extent starts to level off gender hierarchies; it starts to confuse sex roles, it breaks down some of the really profound divides between what is historically seen as men's realms and women's realms.

Margaret Mead often pointed out that men's and women's roles very much differed across cultures. In some cultures, women were seen as sexually rapacious. In some cultures, they are seen as sexually frigid. So these aren't essential categories.

But what is kind of essential, or what is kind of universal, is that every society has this dichotomy, or had this dichotomy, and that was actually at the core of their cosmology: "This is male, and this is female."

What modernism does is it breaks that down and scrambles it and panics people. So people often see the changing role of women as the most visible sign of modernity that is threatening to them in all kinds of ways.

WILLIAM VOCKE: I think what I was trying to ask before is, not the conflict between modernity and women's rights, but the contrast you make between the need for fundamentalism to hold down those women's rights and modernity. Just a couple of simple illustrations:

In Turkey, I remember one of the most interesting things I saw was a number of young women in long, full coats—not abayas, but long, full coats—completely covering themselves, with head scarves on, etc. But the coats were Gucci and the handbags they were carrying were Louis Vuitton. And they were carrying briefcases, they were lawyers or whatever. Clearly part of the modern world, clearly wanting to be part of the modern world, but still reflecting that respect to tradition and fundamentalism and traditional culture.

Or in Saudi Arabia, going to a party at someone's home, women all arriving in abayas, fully clothed, fully covered, with their driver because they're not allowed to drive, coming into the house, and again being doctors and lawyers, and kind of happy, at least from their expression, with the fact that they didn't have to worry about any of these other things. Again dressed to the nines, looking incredibly modern, and with incredibly what we would consider secular modern ideas.
Am I seeing a dichotomy here?

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: I think that what you’re seeing is something I point out. Women’s rights activists are a minority in our country and they’re a minority in most countries. I mean this kind of traditional order that I’m talking about is something that gives meaning and structure to the lives of both men and women. So to say that women are as invested in it as men is clear.

But it is also true, I think, that, unless we’re going to get into a kind of very deep philosophical debate about cultural relativism, I think that for the purposes of our discussion we can say that the abuses visited on women in Saudi Arabia are profound and terrible. The fact that many women have made their accommodation with that system doesn’t change that fact.

WILLIAM VOCKE: I wasn’t trying to make that argument.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: There’s an anecdote in my book—more than an anecdote, there’s quite a long section in my book—about a woman Ph.D., a global sophisticate, who goes back to Sierra Leone to undergo female circumcision because she sees that as being her link to her ancestors and her link to her culture. It’s something that she defends very staunchly against those who would try to eradicate this practice.

So again, there’s never these bright lines. People’s lives are always very complicated and people make their peace with their societies and internalize their societies in different ways.

WILLIAM VOCKE: I was just trying to get to the point about the linkage between the conflict or the posited inherent conflict between traditionalism and the modern role of women, or fundamentalism and the modern role of women. I was just saying—I think you just said—that there are multiple ways people accommodate to those.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: Certainly, right.

WILLIAM VOCKE: There’s an absolutism there that I didn’t quite understand.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: Well, yes and no. If you’re going to talk about Saudi Arabia being an example, Saudi Arabia I don’t think is an example of a place where fundamentalism has reached a decent accommodation with the modern role of women, despite the fact that there are certainly Saudi women who are living fulfilling and modern lives.

WILLIAM VOCKE: Those are different levels of analysis, though. That was my point, that, at least on an individual level, I see people making a fairly easy accommodation between those two things. But I certainly wouldn’t argue that Saudi Arabia is a paragon of women’s rights.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: I think when you read a lot about Saudi Arabia being such an incubator for dangerous fundamentalism, I think it has a lot to do with the rigidity of gender roles, the extreme gender segregation and separation of the sexes.

Turkey is actually a more interesting in certain ways and more ambiguous case. To a certain extent, you have basically women asserting their right to—

WILLIAM VOCKE: Female prime ministers.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: Well, there have been female prime ministers in Bangladesh in fact.

WILLIAM VOCKE: Sure, all over the world.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: But you have women in Turkey asserting their rights against the ruling regime by demanding their rights to wear head scarves. So it’s more complicated. It’s a more interesting case.

WILLIAM VOCKE: That's right. It's fundamentalism asserting itself and women asserting their right to be a fundamentalist.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: I am from Turkey. I came from the picture that you describe, and, after all, those experiences with religion and culture, in whatever shapes, and I experienced that. Religion has a huge, enormous impact over our culture. All those years I became a nonbeliever. It is hard for me to relate recreation and reproduction as human rights in terms of the rights of women.

I have one question. You mentioned that you interviewed some people. I just want you to talk more
about those interviews. Which is the most interesting one and most significant one? And what do you think about the reproduction or recreation as human rights and making it more related to the religion?

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: I can just talk about how I went about interviewing. Let me give you an easy example.

Right when I began my book, abortion was outlawed in Nicaragua in all instances, even when women's lives were at stake. So one of the first things I did when I started my book was just show up in Nicaragua.

People have often asked me, "What was your methodology for this book?" My methodology was really a journalistic methodology, which is just show up, show up and talk to whomever will talk to you, and hope that they lead you to more people.

So what I tried to do in Nicaragua—and this was in the very early stages of the book, maybe before I had even formulated some of the overarching ideas—was try to figure out how this had happened, and specifically how this had happened under Daniel Ortega, who is this ostensibly leftist politician.

What I saw there, just from talking to people in the women's movement, people in the anti-abortion movement, people at clinics in different cities, people in politics, professors, journalists—I would just talk to someone and then say, "Who else should I talk to, who else should I talk to"—you know, the way everybody does.

I was actually able to piece together this narrative, not just of the immediate effect that this was having, which was horrific—you had a doubling of maternal mortality within a year, women hemorrhaging to death in hospitals, going untreated during miscarriages, or being left to wait for their fallopian tubes to burst if they had ectopic pregnancies—but there was also a way in which this whole story started way back when, with the internationalization of the women's movement.

You had all these women's health clinics getting a lot of support from Europe and the United Nations and outside forces, and then being demonized as colonialist powers that were subverting Nicaragua from within and undermining the Nicaraguan family and bringing Western values into this country.

And then, meanwhile, you had the Nicaraguan Right become globalized, start getting a lot of support from the American anti-abortion movement, start sharing techniques and sharing language. And then, at the same time, you have this changing global regime.

So basically, just by interviewing people and trying to get as many details as possible about their own experiences, you can eventually see the places where they intersect and piece it all together.

QUESTION: What I wanted to ask you about was delivery. I find that in discussions about women's issues generally, and especially reproductive issues, men become very uncomfortable, whether it's that you say "fallopian tube" and they don't have one, or it's that they feel like they can't talk about it. So if you could just address engaging men and boys in these issues a little bit.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: On the one hand, that's a question that activists and advocates are very, very concerned with. They are doing a lot of work about how to engage men and boys in these issues, how to engage men and boys in fighting violence against women, how to engage men in facilitating safe deliveries, and all these things.

On the one hand, when you write a book like this you put yourself in an interesting position, because actually journalists by their nature are not activists. Journalists tend to be more interested in problems than in solutions. Actually, I think, journalists tend to be more interested in the kind of ambiguities and the grey areas than in building the kind of coalitions that you need to solve all these problems. So to a certain extent, I see some of that as being almost beyond my purview.

I would say this. I think that in the 1950s and in the 1960s, when this issue was considered, when people were very concerned about the national security implications of overpopulation, you had a tremendous interest by men, if not by boys. You had the powers that be in many, many countries who were willing to mobilize vast resources and create vast new structures because it wasn't just about women's rights; it was more about the future of society.

I think there is some ambivalence now about making those kinds of arguments, because it seems to treat women as if their concerns are just tertiary. But I actually think that there are repercussions environmentally and economically and in terms of poverty and in terms of things that people who are concerned about the human future care about. I think if you can show them the connections, which are pretty clear, you can hopefully engage more people than just those who are already part of this
discussion about reproductive health.

WILLIAM VOCKE: Let me read a quote here from the cover: "Women's rights are often treated as mere appendages to great questions of war, peace, poverty, and economic development." Not that women's rights aren't crucial, but are women's rights equivalent to war and peace? Or are they appendages?

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: No, I don't think that they are appendages. It's not that I'm going to say that abortion rights and the toll of unsafe abortion is equivalent to the toll of war. That's not the argument I'm making. The argument I'm making is that you're never going to get anywhere in terms of addressing war, in terms of addressing the causes of war and the causes of instability and the causes of all these other world subjects, like terrorism, until you take this very fundamental issue seriously.

To go back before to when we were talking about education and how education then changes the number of children that a woman has and whether they're educated and all these things, when you have educated women who have control over their own fertility, you have smaller families who are better educated, who are healthier.

And actually, no other factor it turns out has such an impact on the kind of health and welfare of a family as a woman's education—not the wages of a husband, not the development in her community.

And so when you have educated women you have more stable communities. When you have women who are basically enslaved by the dictates of men and biology, you have societies that are of very large, poor, often poverty-stricken families, which create the underlying conditions for all kinds of terrible disorder.

WILLIAM VOCKE: I'm not trying to suggest that women's rights aren't important. That's certainly not the issue. What I'm trying to get at and I'm trying to push you more on is the issue about first order, second order, third order of importance. These are all vitally important things. And the thing you just talked about, about education, I think there's massive amounts of research that shows that if you educate a young girl in the Third World that's the best thing you can do on poverty issues, on lots of other issues.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: Right.

WILLIAM VOCKE: The problem, of course, from a policymaker's perspective is there's only so much time, there's only so many resources, there is only so much energy. They talk about a president having only three to five issues at most that they can concentrate on to really make something happen.

So I'm trying to get you to talk about the question of relativity here, not that it's not a vital issue, but what order among all the vital issues.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: Part of the question, I think, is whether you are being reactive or not. Obviously, the president—and thank God I'm not in that position to have to make those kind of calls—has to respond to onrushing catastrophes rather than the structural causes of them.

Right now Obama is being faced with the Taliban's march on Pakistan and doesn't necessarily have the luxury of considering the underlying causes that create fundamentalism and poverty and disorder.

But actually, somebody in government and people who are making policy and thinking about these things—you know, we have a huge aid bureaucracy, we have huge parts of the government that are concerned with these fundamental underlying causes.

Again, I'm not saying that the goal of the United States at this point should be to send battalions of people to liberate the women of Central Asia and South Asia. But what I am saying is that long term, although you have to deal, again, with the kind of conflagrations if they come, long term, like you just said, there's no greater investment in peace and stability and environmental renewal than taking women's rights seriously.

WILLIAM VOCKE: What I hear you saying—and I was trying to push you in the other direction—is that it's not a zero-sum game, that you don't have to choose one or the other.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: No, you don't have to choose one or the other. This is an example, though, I think. Right now there is a temptation in Afghanistan and Pakistan to work with them, to say that "We can't deal with these women's issues at all because we have huge catastrophes to deal with." And again, I'm not saying it's a zero-sum game in that you need to make women's rights the center of your foreign policy. But you also just can't jettison them as soon as something that seems more pressing and urgent comes along without ultimately playing the price.
QUESTION: I want to probably take it back a little bit, although you were just discussing the Obama Administration, and ask you how you think that the change in administration will affect these sorts of policies, with Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State and with the Obama Administration having already made a lot of moves towards a more friendly atmosphere towards reproductive rights.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: One of the points of my book is that American abortion politics actually end up having a bigger impact on the lives of women worldwide than they do on the lives of women here at home. There's actually only so much that one president to the next can do. They chip away at the edges, but we are basically protected by Roe v. Wade. You don't see wild swings from when a Democrat is in office or a Republican is in office.

Abroad it's quite different, because of the Global Gag Rule, because of whether or not we fund UNFPA [United Nations Population Fund], the makeup of diplomatic missions, the kind of politicization of the aid bureaucracy, you see huge changes from one president to the next.

You know, clinics closing in whole parts of a country, reopening when the next president comes along, closing when the next president comes along. You see a huge difference in whether the U.S. delegation—and the United States is still the major world power—is over there caucusing with Iran and Sudan, or whether the United States is leading the charge, as it did during the Clinton years, for an expanded definition of reproductive rights as human rights.

Hillary Clinton was a champion for this, has been for a long time. She gave a speech in 1995 in Beijing about women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights once and for all. I think that now that she is Secretary of State we are going to see, and one of the things I think is going to be most interesting to see, is what does a foreign policy that takes women's and girls' rights seriously really look like.

The first big changes have all been to these kinds of really backward-looking policies on reproductive rights. So they get rid of the Global Gag Rule, they restore funding to the United Nations Population Fund, they get rid of at home a lot of this “abstinence only” stuff.

The other day, Hillary Clinton was in a congressional hearing. If you haven't seen this, you should really Google it; it's really astonishing—Congressman Chris Smith, who has been very much a leader of the global anti-abortion movement, is constantly intervening in other countries whenever they are thinking about liberalizing their abortion laws, was questioning her and saying, "Are you going to, or is the United States now going to, try to undermine anti-abortion legislation in Africa or in Latin America?"

I won't even try to paraphrase it, but she gave this reply, the most eloquent and strong and unconditional reply, about reproductive rights are human rights, talking about the horrors that she has seen around the world because of the lack of reproductive rights, from hospitals in Brazil where half the women are there delivering babies and half the women are there recuperating from botched abortions, seeing the toll that child motherhood takes in Africa, and the suffering that she has seen in Asia.

She basically said, "You are free to push your policies on the world stage and so are we, and we believe that reproductive rights are fundamental and that abortion rights are a component of reproductive rights." You couldn't have imagined—if I may, it was a better summary of my book that I could have ever stood up here and given you. But it also just marked a sea change in the American approach to these things.

QUESTION: I would just mention one thing. It seemed to me in the questioning that oftentimes traditionalism and fundamentalism were used interchangeably, and I would guess sometimes they are the equivalent. But at least in my mind I often think of them as very different concepts.

But you made the point that journalists are often more comfortable covering a situation rather than being policy advocates. I wondered if in the research that you did in the many countries that you visited, whether it was with regard to reproductive rights or other issues, you found mechanisms or forums whereby communities or countries or whatever group of people had effectively managed to combine traditionalism and some of the impetus for what was being described as modernity, again whether with regard to women's rights or not.

To the extent there are communities that are effectively, not necessarily losing their traditional aspects, but incorporating the aspects of modernity we would like them to have, 1) have you seen examples of that; and 2) to the extent that you have seen examples of that, even though you may not want to make policy implications, what do you think that might suggest in terms of how, whether it's U.S. foreign policy or aid organizations, policies could be directed to promote the development of additional initiatives like that?
MICHELLE GOLDBERG: Certainly, traditionalism and fundamentalism are not equivalent concepts. Actually, fundamentalism in many ways is a kind of modern phenomenon. It's a modern desire to recreate a kind of traditionalism that maybe never actually existed.

All the same, you often see people organizing and militating against women's rights in the name, not just maybe of religious ideas, but maybe in the name of "African values" or something like that; "Nicaraguan values" is a good example.

But absolutely there are people working on the ground all over the world who try to combine things that they value in their culture with new modes of gender, new ways of dealing with women's rights.

One example I'll give you really quickly is in Kenya, where there is this really astonishing and inspiring place called Tsalu Ntomonik, run by this woman named Agnes [Pareyo], who's a Maasai woman who herself underwent female circumcision, became an anti-circumcision activist within her own community.

She had a model of a woman's reproductive tract commissioned from a local woodworker and would take it, walking from village to village, to try to convince people to give up this practice. And then, a few years ago, girls started running away to her town, saying, "I heard that there's a woman named Agnes who says we don't have to be cut and we can stay in school."

She eventually opened a shelter where these girls can come. They run away by the hundreds. It's really astonishing. They live in pretty remote villages and they hear—there's just a rumor—of something else, that they don't have to live the way people have been living in their communities since time immemorial. They pack their things and off they go through the bush to find this place.

So on the one hand there's obviously a break there from the Maasai tradition. But Agnes definitely doesn't want these girls—she enrolls them in school, and some of the first to them are now in college—she doesn't want them to turn their back on the Maasai. So what she is trying to do is she tries to reconcile them with their families if their families will agree to leave them uncut, not give them away in marriage before they're 18, let them continue their education.

But she has also created this alternative rite of passage ceremony, which tries to do socially what the circumcision ceremony did. The circumcision ceremony was about going from being a child to a woman and learning the secrets of adulthood. So she has tried to recreate that, again, so that the girls can be both Maasai and healthy and autonomous adult women.

One of the arguments I try to make in this book is that, just as we think of our culture as being dynamic and capable of changing and evolving without losing what's essential about it, that we should pay other people the same respect and assume that other women have as much right to change and modify their own cultures without sacrificing what's valuable or what's essential, that it's not just the most far right forces that have the right to speak to cultural authenticity.

WILLIAM VOCKE: We have time for Michelle to respond about one more time. So let me ask any of the rest of you who have questions. We'll take all the questions that are remaining. Please go to the mike and we'll take all the questions, and then Michelle can respond to all of them at once.

QUESTION: In the beginning when you introduced your book, you talked about reproductive rights and how, outside of those of us who work in reproductive rights, it is not a fully understood or recognized area and seems kind of so mysterious and not really the full impact of it is understood.

I know you also said that as a journalist you look at the problem, you don't look at solutions. But I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about what you think are some of the barriers to that and what you think could be done to create and broaden the understanding around the impact that reproductive rights has on women's lives. Thanks.

QUESTION: I know in your book you discuss a case with a nine-year-old girl that was raped apparently and then went through an abortion and then years later found out that it was really her stepfather. How do you in your opinion, going off of what you said—you're not a problem solver—but in your opinion, how do we avoid people hiding behind the reproductive rights movement as abusers? That would be my question.

QUESTION: You've talked mostly about abortion with women's rights, and I hadn't heard anything about birth control. I thought it was interesting to hear your thoughts on that, because to me it's the first step instead of ending up with everyone getting an abortion.

WILLIAM VOCKE: So there are three questions, if I got them: solutions and barriers to understanding the issue; abusers hiding behind reproductive rights, if I got that correctly, and then talk about birth
MICHELLE GOLDBERG: Do you mind if I do them in reverse order and talk about birth control first?

WILLIAM VOCKE: Any order you'd like.

MICHELLE GOLDBERG: Yes, absolutely. You know, we end up talking about abortion because abortion is where so much of the political heat and conflict is. But absolutely, birth control is fundamental.

I have often said that I think women everywhere in the world deserve abortion rates as low as those in Western Europe, which has the lowest abortion rates in the world because of access to family planning and access to sex education. The highest abortion rates in the world are in Latin America and in sub-Saharan Africa, where abortion is broadly illegal but family planning and sex education are different, depending on the region, but are in many places in short supply.

Actually, there has been a real decrease, partly because of the work in politics. There used to be a consensus around the need for family planning, and it was because of the national security rationale—and this goes to your question as well. It was when people believed that there were major questions of planetary survival at stake, there was a huge amount of support.

So during the 1960s these were issues that were in *Time* magazine, these were issues that presidents had to answer questions about. *Eisenhower* and *Truman* were the co-chairmen of *Planned Parenthood*. It was very much in the public conversation, almost the way that global warming is today. And so you had a real consensus about getting birth control to the developing world.

There have been a number of backlashes and a number of reasons why that consensus has fallen apart, from left-wing anti-colonialism, right-wing anti-abortion, the conflation of contraception with changing roles of women. So it has become very, very politicized. As a result, you have seen a real drop-off in the amount of public attention and public funds and public support.

I was talking to somebody who I quote in this book, who said she saw better contraceptive access at clinics in the 1970s in cities that she knew in sub-Saharan Africa than now. I think between 1995 and maybe 2007, or something around there, aid for family planning was something like $100 million. So there was just a real fall-off.

Some of that was because scarce resources were diverted to HIV/AIDS, which is understandable.

But yes, absolutely, dealing with birth control is the key to the problem. It’s absolutely crucial.

In terms of how to make this stuff relevant, I sometimes think that part of it is that because it has become so controversial, there is something of a desire among people who work in the field to speak about it in purely technocratic terms, to speak about it in terms of programs and supply, and to speak in this kind of jargon of ever-multiplying acronyms—you know, “Oh my God, we have to get SHRH into the MDGs,” sexual and reproductive health into the *Millennium Development Goals*—and to allay some of these real existential questions about who has the right to intervene in the sexual practices of others and how you balance individual rights versus community and societal autonomy, all what I think are juicy, fascinating issues that the right has absolutely dived into.

And so when they speak about these issues, they are speaking about Western corruption and speaking to, I think, people’s very real sense of discombobulation, their very real sense of being threatened by globalization, of having their own cultures being undermined in various ways. They speak to all these really deep issues and use their analysis that it’s all about the spread of family planning, the spread of abortion, the spread of this pernicious disease of feminism.

So sometimes I think part of it is talking, just bringing it back to the big philosophical, powerful issues. Although, again, I understand why people who work in this field are not eager to do that. Again, that’s why I’m glad I’m a journalist and not a policymaker.

And then finally, the other part of it is, I think, to connect these issues to bigger issues, to the environment and national security. All the different issues that originally surrounded discussion of population fell off the map for really obvious reasons, because they were often used to make women’s rights. This is something that I think is hard for us to remember, but women’s rights were often seen as secondary to population control, and there were huge abuses of women’s rights in the name of population control.

Because of that, it became really politically incorrect to even talk about population as a problem in and of itself and some of the second-order effects of giving women control over their own fertility. It became all
about women themselves and their own rights and their own lives. I think it had to. That was, I think, a necessary stage.

But I also think there is room, now that some of that stuff has been established, to broaden the discussion and make people see what else is at stake.

And then, the final part, about how do you stop predators from hiding behind reproductive rights. This case in Nicaragua was a very tragic and complicated case.

Again, you have to make it not just about the right to abortion, it's not just about the right to get contraception; it's about the right to make your own decisions about your own sexual and reproductive lives.

One of the aspects that I deal with in the book in a chapter about forced abortion in Asia is that the right to have a child is also a component of reproductive rights. The bedrock here is female autonomy and the right to make all these decisions for oneself. You know, there are always going to be abuses, but I think it makes it less likely that, again, abortion or contraception or all these other things will just be ways for men to cover up their crimes, I guess.

**WILLIAM VOCKE:** That's an interesting note for us to end on. Thank you, Michelle.

**MICHELLE GOLDBERG:** Thank you so much.

**WILLIAM VOCKE:** Thank you for joining us.