

Population Changes and Perspectives for Arab South Mediterranean Countries in 2011

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In the history of the Arab world and of humanity itself, 2011 will be considered an *annus mirabilis*. The upheavals underway – in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, etc. – are vectors of considerable transformation on all levels: political, social, economic, cultural, ideological and religious. Are we sufficiently aware that they also have a demographic underpinning?

This article will first describe the demographic changes underway since our last assessment, published in the *Med.2007 Mediterranean Yearbook*, then it will go beyond description to show to what extent demographics is implicit in current or future events.

The most significant finding is a phenomenon of demographic convergence with the north shore of the Mediterranean at a sustained rate in the great majority of Arab and non-Arab countries in the South. The fertility rate was chosen as the focus from among all other indicators, as it carries the strongest emotional and psychological charge, and moreover has served to lend a repulsive image of the Arab and Muslim worlds, as in the writings of the journalist Oriana Fallaci. It reveals that the degree of convergence is remarkable in the cases of Lebanon, Tunisia, Turkey and, a bit farther away, the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the rates are on a European level or even lower. This same convergence will reach Morocco in only a few years, perhaps Algeria as well, and even more surprisingly, Libya, where the fertility rate continues to fall. On the other hand, the demographic transition seems to have slowed down or be at a standstill in Egypt, Syria and Jordan. But the most distressing changes have to do with the Israel-Palestine tandem.

Curiously, the countries where a revolution took place or is underway – Tunisia, Egypt and Libya – all display different demographic figures. In some countries where instability is intensifying, there is a completed demographic transition – Bahrain – and in others, this transition is but at an embryonic stage – Yemen and Sudan. However, demographic transformation concerns all Arab countries and everywhere it is bringing grandiose political change.

In **Morocco**, the fertility rate has decreased steadily since 1975 while life expectancy has increased. In the 2004 census, the fertility rate was at 2.47, which is quite low (cf. France: 2.02). The panel survey of 2009-2010 confirmed the decreasing trend (2.36), but the pace of decrease had slowed (-0.9% per year), which is logical at such low fertility rates. The fertility rate remained stable in urban areas, thenceforth predominant, at a sub-replacement fertility level (2.05 children per woman), the decrease involving only rural areas (2.8 as opposed to 3.0 children 5 years earlier).

In **Tunisia**, recent total fertility rates have for a decade now been below the replacement rate (2.10). The last one was calculated in 2009 and is 2.05. The difficulty common to all Maghreb countries is to predict future fertility now that rates have fallen so low. Several years ago, in 2002, Tunisian demographers had projected a very low fertility rate, of only 1.5. The most recent projections, in 2005, estimated a floor value of 1.75 as of 2024, that is, less than the values estimated by the United Nations – concerned with maintaining a certain global homogeneity – in their hypotheses. More recently, in 2009, the projected decrease is on a more modest scale: 2.01 by 2029, to stabilise thereafter.

Algeria has long stood out for its very high pre-transitional fertility rate, which surpassed that of Morocco and Tunisia by one child per woman. Its later transition than its neighbours is less due to

populationist and pro-natalist government policies than to the effects of the rentier economy. However, in two decades, the Algerian fertility rate has caught up with that of Tunisia and Morocco. But since 2000, contravening the laws of demographic transition, the fertility rate seems to be rising. The rise in fertility since 2000 is too significant to be ascribed to a statistics problem. It is perhaps even too significant to be ascribed to nothing but short-term factors, as improvement of the economic situation, an abatement of the crisis and a decrease in political violence, which would have increased the propensity to marriage – the country went from 280,000 marriages in 2005 to 341,000 in 2009 – and consequently to engender more children. Perhaps what is behind it is a revision of procreation strategies bringing Algerian demographics closer to that of the Middle East. In fact, this is not so. The rise in fertility rate is entirely due to the increase in marriages. Marital fertility has continued to decline. But it should be noted that the last survey (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – MICS 3, 2006) revealed a lower fertility than the Register Office: 2.27 as compared to 2.71.

Underpopulated and with a rentier economy, **Libya** has experienced a demographic transition similar to that of the oil-producing Gulf States. For a long time, official pro-natalism was rewarded by a generous redistribution of oil revenue. The oil counter-shock followed by the international embargo led the Libyan population towards Malthusianism. This country, one of the most enigmatic insofar as demographics, rarely discloses statistics. However, we have managed to ascertain that the Libyan fertility rate continued to decrease to reach 2.68 in 2003, a figure very close to that of Algeria.

The incredible stability of **Egypt's** fertility rate contrasts with its current political instability. Or perhaps the former accounts for the latter? Despite an extremely high population density due to the fact that only 4 to 5% of the million-km² territory is habitable by a population of 85 million, the population continues to rise at the surreal rate of 2% per year. This strong growth is due to a very high fertility rate – considering the context – that shows no tendency towards stopping and has levelled off at over 3.02-3.25 children, i.e. 50% greater than Morocco or Tunisia. There is no single, simple explanation for this complex phenomenon. On the contrary, it can be ascribed to a whole series of cultural, political and ideological determinants, or associated with migra-

tory flows that lead Egyptians to prefer the Persian Gulf as a destination over Europe, the destination chosen by Maghreb populations; with the consequences that this destination implies on choices of family planning.

This same stability is the case in **Syria** and **Jordan**. Despite the enormous progress made in both countries in education and the eradication of illiteracy, the fertility rate remains very high, surpassing 3.5 births per woman. The decrease in fertility quickly slowed down to practically disappear in the 1990s (3.5 births per woman in 2005). The latest health survey, effected in 2009-2010, confirms this stable, high fertility rate at 3.5 births. In Jordan, fertility is even higher (3.59) and has stabilised. Here also, as in Egypt, there is no simple reason but rather a combination of factors: the absolute patrilineality and the overbearing need to have a male descendant explains the fact that fertility has stabilised at such a high rate, in contrast to the Maghreb, where numerous couples have freed themselves of this categorical imperative. Confessional and regional rivalries, as well as those of ethnicity (Palestinians / Transjordanians) slightly curb the decrease in fertility rates by the effect of competition between different groups.

Lebanon, on the other hand, is an entirely different world – highly modern in its low fertility rate (1.69) and in the fact that this low rate has become the privilege of all confessional groups, from Maronites to Shiites, not to mention Greek Orthodox, Catholics, Sunnis and Druses. Here, the demographic rivalries occurring in the 1960s and 70s before the civil war and which contributed to fuelling it evaporated, giving way to a country appeased on the demographic level and pending appeasement on the political level as well.

The demographic transition in **Turkey** has greatly progressed, with a fertility rate of 2.09, thenceforth below the replacement rate. In other words, despite an Islamist government in power that is pro-natalist, as was the regime of Necmettin Erbakan, civil society and families can freely decide on the number of children they will have and are limiting births.

Another illustration of this phenomenon of dissociation is that of **Iran**, theoretically Islamist, where the fertility rate is even lower than in Turkey: (1.83). The difference between these two countries most likely resides in the fact that Iran has integrated its Kurdish minority better than Turkey, where Kurds display

AFRICA-EU MIGRATION, MOBILITY AND EMPLOYMENT (MME) PARTNERSHIP

The second action plan for the Africa-EU Migration, Mobility and Employment (MME) Partnership, covering the period 2011-2013, was approved at the third Africa-EU Summit, held in Tripoli on 29-30 November 2010. The MME Partnership was launched in 2007 at the second Africa-EU Summit of Heads of State and Government in Lisbon in order to promote better management of migration flows and stimulate employment and free movement.

Cooperation between origin, transit and destination countries must be based on human rights and the economic, social and cultural rights of migrants and asylum seekers and be aimed at finding common and balanced solutions for mobility, employment and development. The main areas of cooperation within the Partnership include the Diaspora, legal and circular migration, illegal migration and human trafficking, and refugee protection.

The new plan aims to enhance political and strategic dialogue between the two continents and to implement concrete actions encompassing

the inter-regional and inter-continental dimensions of the Partnership. A number of actions have been envisaged building on the achievements of the previous 2008-2010 plan and the proposals put forward at the AUC-EC Joint Workshop held in Dakar in June 2010. Of special note, higher education has been given a higher profile within the Partnership; courses of study are being harmonised under the "Tuning" programme in order to achieve the mutual recognition of higher education qualifications and diplomas.

For further information:

www.africa-eu-partnership.org/node/1744/

http://ec.europa.eu/development/services/events/3rdsummit/side_events_en.html

http://ec.europa.eu/development/services/events/3rdsummit/documents/publications/fr/6-DGDEV_Africa_Migration_Mobility_Employment_FR.pdf

a significantly higher fertility rate than the national average.

In fact, all of these trends were more or less expected according to our last assessment in 2007. The major surprise lies with the **Israel-Palestine** tandem, or rather with the demographic behaviour of Jews and Palestinians. The fertility rate among Jews has continually risen year after year, today reaching the symbolic threshold of 3 births per woman, whereas the rate continually falls among the Palestinians in the occupied territories: the West Bank (and Jerusalem-East), and even in the Gaza Strip, where it was at a world record high during the years of the First Intifada. Today the fertility rate is at only 3.5 births, which is low given the conflictive demographic situation (see Chart 28). The paradox is that Palestinian fertility is becoming more modern under the effect of the emergence of the individual, whose values are no longer societal values, whereas the fertility of Jews in Israel is becoming "Arabised", subscribing to patriarchal norms, also therefore populationist, pro-family and pro-natalist, which are those of the Establishment in power since the creation of the Jewish State.

A Demographic Reading of the Revolutions Underway

The Arabs took the world by surprise, not only with their revolutions, but also due to the fact that it was Tunisia that lit the fuse. However, revolution was inevitable. Demography attests to this. The process

experienced by Europe as of the 17th century spread throughout the world. It could not spare the Southern Mediterranean, which for four decades now has been experiencing the same demographic, cultural and anthropological transformations as Europe since Cromwell in England to Robespierre and the French Revolution, followed by other European revolutions up to Lenin in 1905-1917. The Arab world is not a preserve or an exception. To believe the contrary is to be essentialist, to invent a *homo arabicus* or a *homo islamicus*, by definition averse to progress.

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The progression of education, the eradication of illiteracy, first among boys and then among girls, has brought the transformations we are currently experiencing. With the exception of the Lebanese Christians, who have benefited from the presence of Christian missions and their universities since the 19th century, the Arab world began to metamorphose thanks to higher levels of education and decreases in fertility rates beginning in the 1960s in the most advanced countries. In certain countries, such as Tunisia under Bourguiba, there was the will

	Population in 2010 (thousands)	Recent Fertility Rate	Maximum Fertility Rate	Year	Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000 live born alive)	Literacy Rate		GDP per capita (USD)
						Young Men (%)	Young Women (%)	
Morocco	32,911	2.36	7.40	1972	31	81	61	4,330
Algeria	35,423	2.27-2.71	8.36	1962	31	94	86	7,940
Tunisia	10,374	2.05	7.25	1962	20	96	92	7,070
Libya	6,546	2.68	7.62	1982	18	98	97	15,630
Mauritania	3,366	4.52	6.79	1987	73	68	56	2,150
Egypt	84,474	3.02-3.25	7.07	1962	35	90	79	5,460
Sudan	43,192	4.23	6.67	1972	69	85	71	1,930
Iraq	31,467	3.50	7.30	1957	33	89	81	2,300
Syria	22,505	3.50	7.80	1982	16	94	90	4,350
Jordan	6,472	3.59	8.00	1967	19	99	99	5,530
Lebanon	3,762	1.60	5.74	1948	15	99	99	10,880
Palestine	4,409	4.31	8.00	1962	16	99	99	1,100
Saudi Arabia*	26,246	3.41	8.45	1976	18	96	96	22,950
Yemen	24,256	5.00	8.70	1982	55	59	44	2,210
United Arab Emirates*	4,707	2.93	7.50	1982	10	93	93	24,090
Kuwait*	3,051	3.24	7.50	1962	9	100	100	52,610
Oman*	2,905	2.85	8.70	1986	12	98	97	20,650
Qatar*	1,508	2.38	7.75	1972	8	95	98	52,000
Bahrain*	807	2.30	6.21	1972	9	97	97	21,290
Turkey	75,705	2.09	6.90	1953	28	98	93	13,770
Iran	75,078	1.83	7.00	1963	31	99	97	10,840

* National populations, not counting foreigners.

Sources: Calculations based on national sources (official registers, censuses, etc.) and the results of various surveys, i.e.: World Fertility Survey (WFS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Pan-Arab Project for Child Development (PAPCHILD), Pan-Arab Project for Family Health (PAPFAM); as well as the following works: United Nations, *World Population Prospects as Assessed in 2008*, New York, 2009; US Census Bureau, "IDB Data Access - Spreadsheet, 2010"; Population Reference Bureau, "World Population Data Sheet", Washington DC, 2010; Youssef Courbage, *New Demographic Scenarios in the Mediterranean*, INED, Paris, 2002.

to modernise by providing access to education for boys as well as for girls. In Morocco, this was the case under the first governments after independence, which had made education their priority before they put a damper on it because it could call into question political hierarchies. Until the accession of Mohammed VI to the throne, the highest levels of power at times blocked the advance of education. Which explains why Morocco is behind in literacy today, above all among girls and in rural areas.

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Generalised education has led to birth control and the use of contraceptive means, whose economic

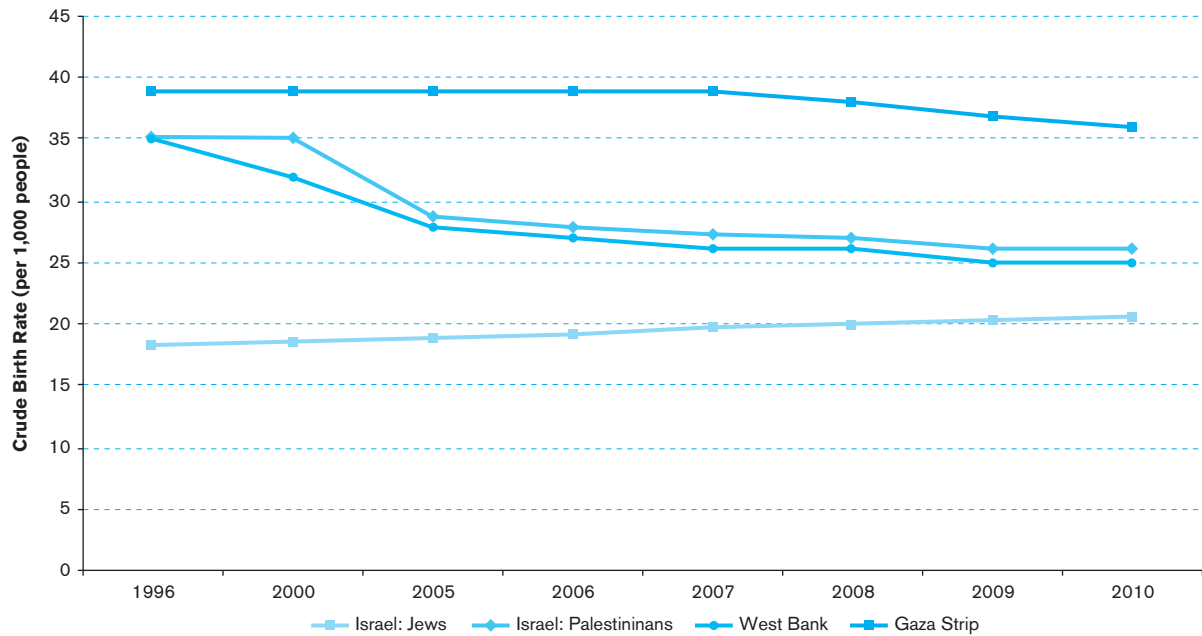
advantage need not be demonstrated, but which can be a temporary factor of uneasiness within families. The decrease in fertility rate, which has fallen to two children in the most advanced Maghreb countries, has been so strong that traditional values of a patriarchal nature have been shaken. The calling into question of the *pater familias* leads to the calling into question of all the "*fathers of the people*", as has occurred in Tunisia and Egypt.

Moreover, endogamy, that is, isolation of the family group leading to closed social groups and rigid institutions is decreasing. A less endogamous society opens up to the outer world and is potentially more liable to revolt when it is under authoritarian or despotic governance. Generalised schooling and a decrease in birth rate can also indirectly cause greater awareness and revolts.

These two elements lead to disruption of the family unit. The effects are both positive and negative. Positive, because when the parents limit their descent, they can care for their children better, feed them better and allow them to be educated better

CHART 31

Birth Rates in Israel - Palestine: Rising among the Jews, Falling among the Palestinians



and longer. Thus, in a smaller family, the model towards which the Arab and Muslim family is moving, mother-father, parent-children interactions become more democratic, which cannot but have positive repercussions on society and politics. Negative, because, as these societies have been patriarchal, as soon as an educated child and a father who is illiterate yet holds absolute family power are living together, family life becomes troubled. Such family problems can temporarily lead to problems on a more general scale and partially account for Islamist phenomena.

A less endogamous society opens up to the outer world and is potentially more liable to revolt when it is under authoritarian or despotic governance. Going from generalised education for boys and then for girls to greater awareness due to learning to read and write leads to a secularisation, a “disenchantment” with the world, and to lower fertility

rates – indispensable ingredients of the famous “democratic transition.”

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It is true that unemployed young Arab university graduates were the first to revolt. But from Morocco to Jordan, all age groups and genders were present among the protesters. In no case can the revolutions be considered an exclusive exploit of youth. Nor is it an Islamic revolution; this ground swell is essentially of secular origin.