

**The political dimensions of fertility decrease and family
transformation in the Arab context**

***Seminar on Impact of changing population dynamics on the Arab
family***

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Presentation

- 1. Demographic transition, in **broadest sense**:
- -**universal** phenomenon encompasses now the **Arab world**.
- Element of **social disruption**. Not a “new “ idea
Stone’s law: : When a population reaches the **threshold of 50% young literate**, beginning of political troubles (L. Stone, “Literacy and education in England , 1640-1800”).
- Stone considered only education but other aspects of demographic and family transition may have the same outcome.

FROM THE DEMOGRAPHIC-FAMILY TO POLITICAL TRANSITION

- Since December 2010 Arab world living a sort of political.
- **Same processes** which took off in **England** (XVII th century) then burgeoned in **France** (XVIII th) and **rest of Europe** (XIX th) and the **world** (XXth),
- would have **inevitably reached the Arab** region (XXth).

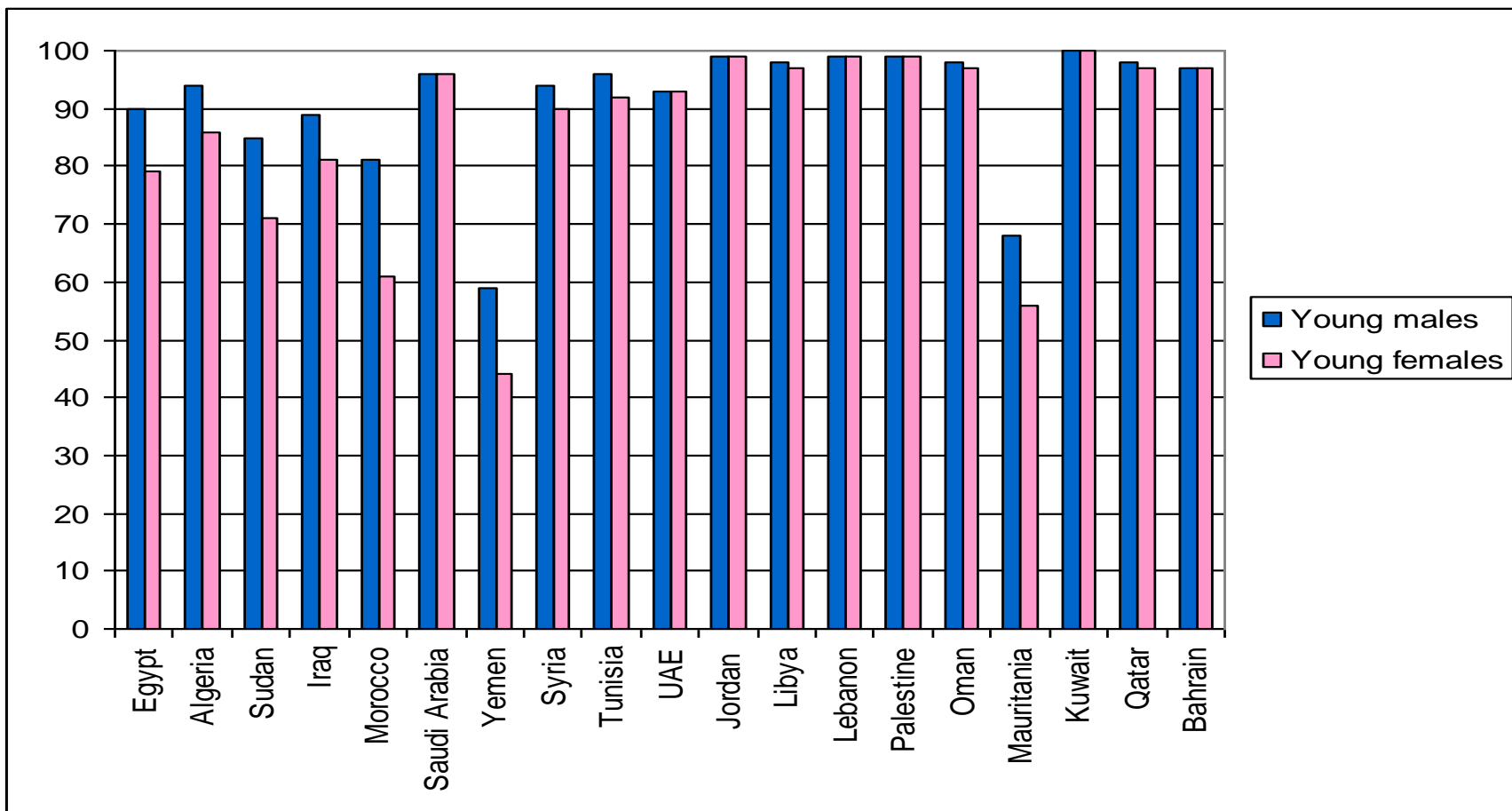
No exception to modernization process

- Is experiencing **cultural, demographic, anthropological and family transformation close to those of Europe** in the past.
- It does **not stand as an exception.**
- To **think otherwise** means to qualify it as **intrinsically averse to human progress,**
- **in contradiction with present history.**

Education at the root of the transformations

- Multiple transitions triggered by access to **education**: boys then for girls.
- **Most youth (15-24 years)** –almost completely illiterates few decades ago - now **able to read and write (Chart 1)**.
- **Demographic effects of education well-know.**
- **Lack holistic vision: multiple stages from education to political changes.**

Chart 1 : Arab youth by sex (15-24 years) able to read and write (%), by country ranked by population size, 2010



Literacy and individuation

- **Individuation** at the root of **modernization** process and **demographic transition**
- **ability to read and especially to write** essential step for individuation and **acquisition of autonomy.**

Fertility and mortality declines

- **Fertility** most significant **affected by education.**
- Education triggered also **mortality decrease.**
- also a **precondition for fertility decrease.**
- Arab fertility wouldn't have fallen without mortality decline: **life expectancy at birth has increased from 40 years in 1950's to over 75 years now.**

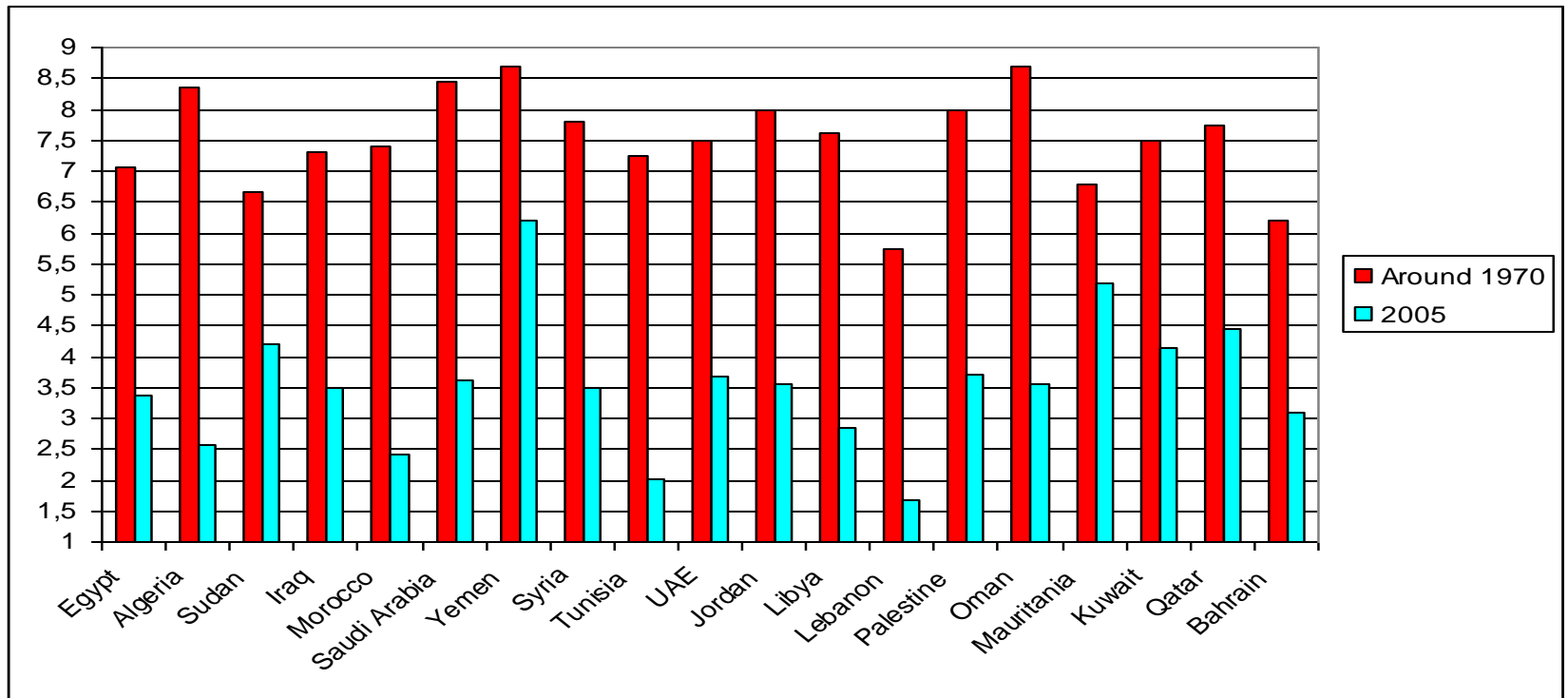
Mortality fall is akin to a mental revolution

- **Mortality reduction spectacular** by its demographic effects.
- **Not only by demographic** standards.
- **Arab populations** often -hastily- characterized as **fatalist**, even by themselves.
- Were **so accustomed to death**, such a **banal phenomenon** in every corner.
- Therefore, **mortality fall akin to mental revolution: reshaping of the psyche** of populations moving **away from fatalism**.

Fertility convergences (the panorama in 2007)

- **Arab population adhered to fertility control, indispensable to cope with growing population.**
- **Fertility fall from 7.5 children per woman on average in pre-transitional years to less than 3 in 4 decades.**
- **Several countries around below replacement level. Lebanon –TFR =1.6- lower than Belgium (1.8). Tunisia (2.05), Morocco (2.19), are at few decimal points from France (Chart 2).**
- *This was the panorama in 2007 (what would it be today in 2013? We'll return to this important matter in the discussion)*

Chart 2: Total Fertility Rate in the Arab countries before transition and in 2005



Family transformations

- **Marriage no more the sacred religious and social obligation** it used to be.
- An example. Morocco (2010), 42% of males and 33% of women 30-34 years are **still bachelors and spinsters**, some by **personal choice**.
- Same in Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, **single mean age at marriage around 30 years**, (twice of the 60's).

« Arab marriage »?

- **Endogamy**, or this so-called “**Arab marriage**” cut by half (Morocco marriage with relatives fell from 30% to 15% between 1995 and 2010).
- Endogamy implied **sealing of extended family, closure in social groups** ending up in **stiffened mind set and institutions**.
- Conversely, with shift to marriages **outside the family, the group or the tribe**, its **potential to openness** is enhanced.

A first glance on politics

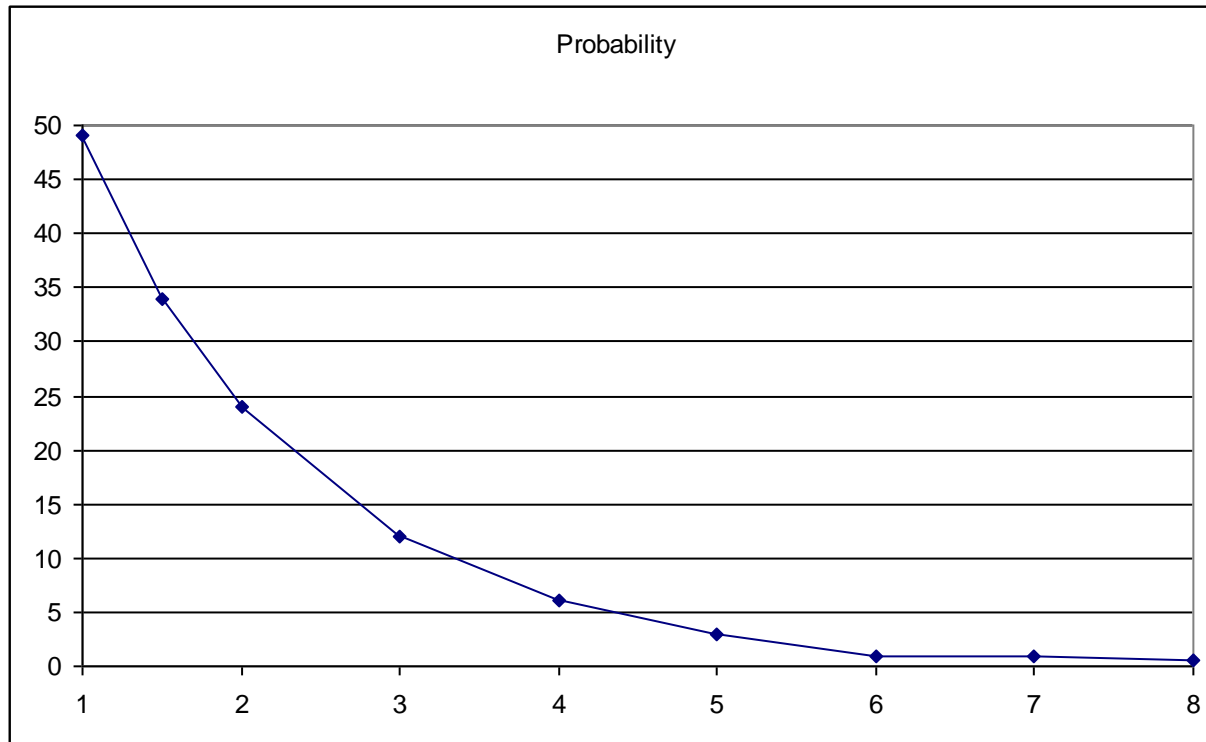
- Going a **step further: more openness** might open the **way to challenge established order**.
- Hence **inter-connected demographic-family changes**:
 - -mass **education**,
 - -**individuation**
 - -**mortality decline (less fatalistic)**
 - -**marriage and fertility free choice**
- might **act behind the scene to illuminate the why of the Arab upheavals**
- Over and above the well-identified pre-conditions: **absence of freedom, youth unemployment, worsening living conditions, corruption...**

Patriarchy on the decline

- Deeply **rooted patriarchal structures and mentalities** affected by **demographic changes**.
- -Women becoming more and more heads of families
- -by personal choice, rejection of arranged marriages
- -increase of divorce
- -internal and external migrations (Morocco from 11% in 1960 to 19% in 2010)

- In **Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon (also Iran and Turkey), some Syrian regions (coastal provinces, Jabal el Arab...)**, fertility is now **close or below 2 children**.
- **Odds not having a son increase with fertility fall**
- **Negligible when TFR over 4 children, it becomes high when TFR approaches 2.**
- Today **25% of couples** in the Maghreb, Lebanon, (Turkey or Iran) parts of Syria, **accept to limit family size to 2 daughters regardless of a male heir,**
- in contradiction with deeply rooted patriarchal ideology (Chart 3).

Chart 3: Probability (%) to remain sonless by average number of children



From extended to nuclear family

- “Classical” nuclear family: father, mother, children now dominant (Morocco nuclear families 51% in 1982, 63% in 2004. Extended families fall from 41% to 28%).
- Extended vertical families: authority used to belong to the older male: less educated, more conservative.
- Mother-in-law tended to undermine authority of daughter-in-law, interfere in education of the family children.
- Present structure of the **nuclear household** favours **egalitarian values in the family**.

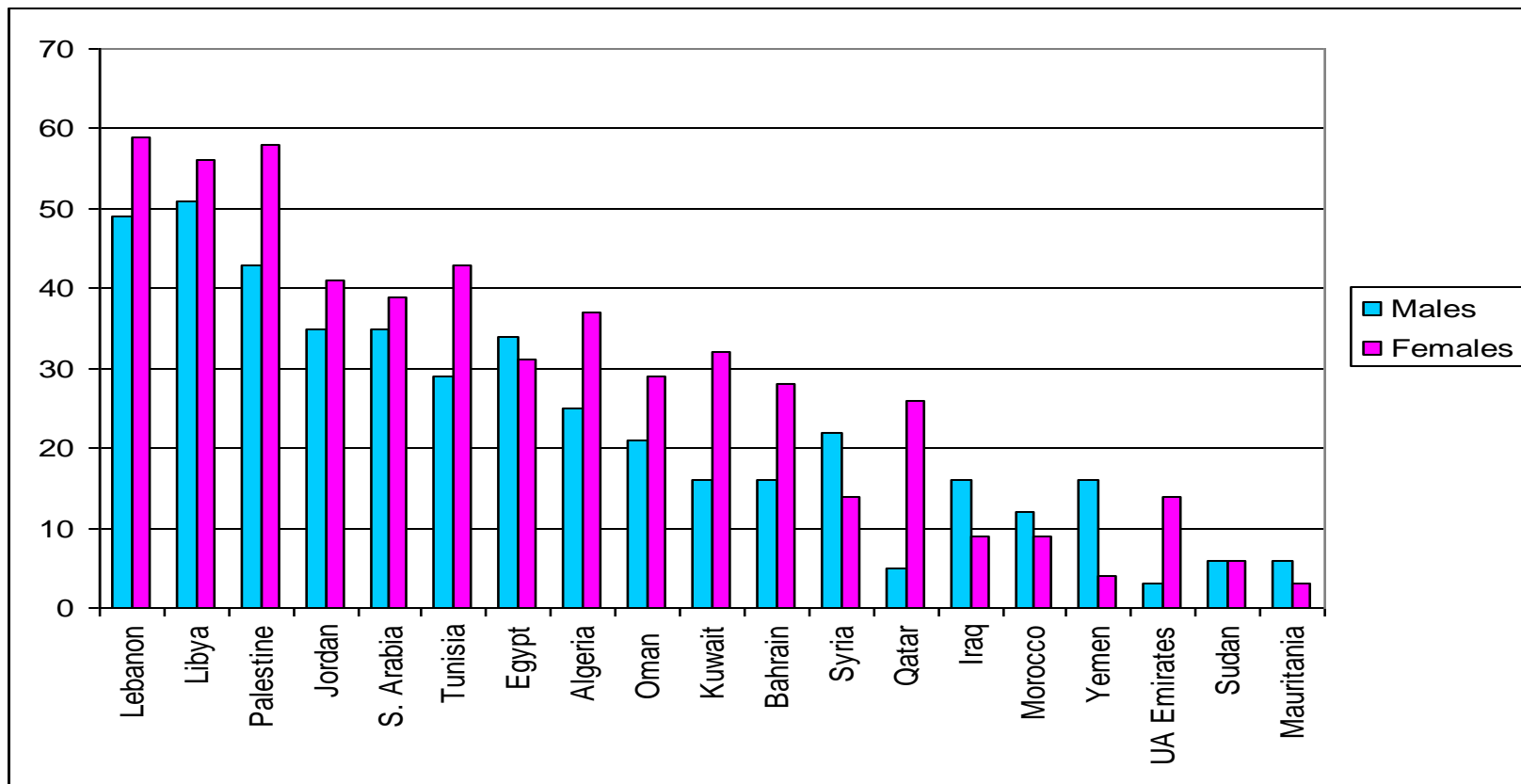
Gender roles

- Arab women (Iranians and Turks also), **burst onto the scene** during last events from Casablanca to Dera'a and more surprisingly Sana'a.
- The kind of ***purdah*** **approaching the end**:
- -result of **successful education and demographic transitions**
- -reshuffling Arab societies

Female conquest of the university

- **Access to the upper degrees of education** (chart 4).
- **Secondary education, net enrolment ratios** higher for girls than boys in most Arab countries: Algeria (68/65), Palestine (87/82), Kuwait (92/88).
- Even more impressive **penetration of universities**.
- Figures which could foreshadow penetration of labour force, **political and media sectors**.

Chart 4: Enrolment ratio at university level (18-24 years) by sex and country ranked by ratios (around 2010)



Cultural progress, mental destabilization?

- Learning to read and write, then access to university made individuals more conscious.
- -the **son can read and write and not his father**, who used to **hold -absolute- power** in societies before their transition,
- -the **sister becomes educated as much as her brother**,
- -**spouses become as educated** (and sometimes more) than her husband.
- -the **spread of birth control**, in the wake of literacy, **undermines traditional males domination**.

- **Universal education** might imply, at first, **destabilization due to challenge of authority in the family,**
- **illiterate father wields authority over educated children** could induce **explosive combination.**
- Time passing, with nuclear and **smaller families, interactions among its members becomes more equalitarian.**

THE ARAB YOUTH BULGE

- The «**youth bulge**»: expansion of the share of the 15-24 years. **Mechanical effect of demographic transition**, mortality decline, fertility stable or increasing, then declining. Reshaping of age-structure.
- **Increases size and share of the more “turbulent”** segments in the family and population: youth.
- For political scientists : Excess in young adult male population leads to social unrest, upheavals, terrorism.

Youth and violence

- Many **explanations** on the reason why youth, Arab or not, more inclined to violence than mature-aged persons.
- Family demography : in **larger size families**, where youngsters are in large numbers, violence tends to be higher.
- The ***lumpen youth class***, street idlers with nothing to do, due to high unemployment rate, unable to stay in their overcrowded homes,
- are tempted by riots, violence and radicalism.
- **Celibacy, delayed marriage**, creates sexual frustration among young males, which might be invested in violent action.
- -easy to jump to the conclusion that violence closely associated with youth, hence with population affected by youth bulge.

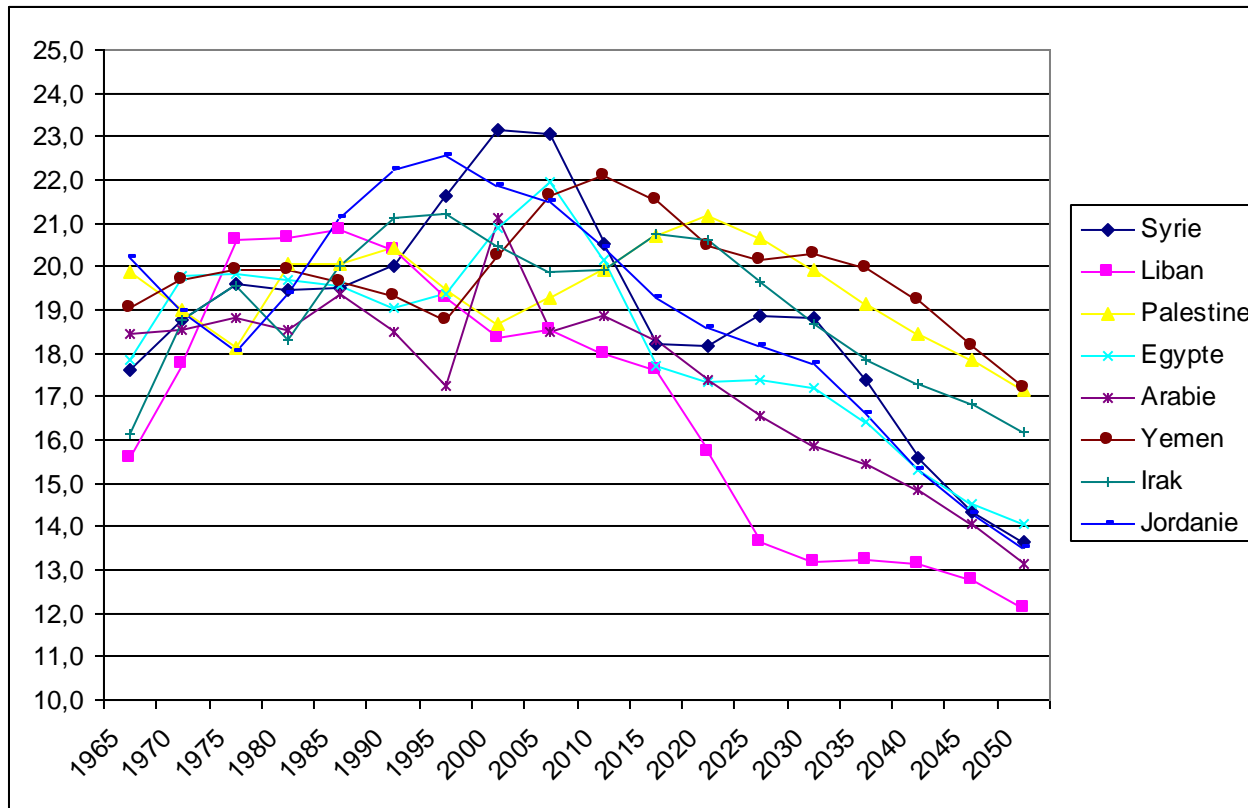
A transient phenomenon

- **Rapidly moving reality** as static and attributes this transient phenomenon to civilizational factors.
- Political scientists can't acknowledge the **diversity among Arab** societies. Sole key of explanation: **the common religion.**
- Yet charts 5 and 6 show that there are **differences** among Arab and non-Arab countries of the region.
- and the **youth bulge is a transient phase.**
- Hence, why not to **forecast peaceful societies, after the political disruption** and political radicalization?

Chart 5 : The youth bulge and its future in the Maghreb 1965-2050



Chart 6: The youth bulge and its future in the Middle East 1965-2050



The worst is behind

- **Four decades** only required to reach **convergence with the developed world**. In 2050, situation similar to developed regions: Europe, North America, Australia...
- Lebanon, Morocco, Algeria Turkey, Iran... more advanced.
- Youth bulge is **a historical phase**. Its peak **belongs to the past** in most of these countries.

- Exceptions are Palestine (2020) and Yemen (2010).
- Morocco 2000
- Algeria 2000
- Syria 2005
- Lebanon 1985
- Palestine 2020
- Egypt 2005
- S Arabia 2000
- Iran 2005
- Turkey 1995
- Yemen 2010
- **Average 2002,5**

Reasons for optimism

- Henceforth, **decrease of the pressure on family resources and of the tensions inside the family**
- **The domestic Arab labor markets**, were unable to cope with the booming young population.
- The **reshaping of the age structure** will accommodate an **expansion of the economic sphere**. **Labor productivity** will be the winner in this shift from quantity to quality.

- Reduced wealth disparities, a fairer distribution of knowledge, give fresh **impetus to the middle classes and favor pluralism.**
- Therefore, it is not much exaggerated to equate **demographic transition to democratic transition.**

3. THE FAMILY ROOTS OF DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

- **Exact timing** of Arab revolutions was largely unknown.
- Social scientists/ demographers can forecast on basis of such indices: literacy, urbanization, fertility, marriage, exogamy, youth bulge, unemployment, gender equity ... that political shifts may occur **but not when and how.**
- Easy to rationalize *a posteriori* but not to forecast *a priori*.

- **Comparative history** enables to understand that Arab countries are in the **midst of a universal process, where demographic transition that leads societies from literacy political changes.**
- **Process started in Europe ,no reasons to stop at the gates of the Arab world.**
- Concentration in just 4 decades, is yet **another example of the acceleration of history.**
- **Arabs adhered to demographic transition in all its phases and implications**
- Should be are **also mature for political democracy.**

- The **small-size family**, the pattern to which the Arab societies have adhered, **relations among spouses or between parents and children are becoming more egalitarian, less tense:** decrease of pressure on family resources.
- **Father no more to reign and impose discipline** in an **overcrowded household, cluttered with a dozen of children.**

.... Spill over at the macro level

- **Beneficial input societal and political spheres.**
- **What occurs at individual and family level inevitably spill over at societal level.**
- **Since society is but the projection from the small family level to the large macro-level.**
- **The questioning of authority never stops at the micro level.**
- **The simple man or woman who challenges the authority of his father, will soon contest the legitimacy of the ruler, the father of the Nation.**

- **less than frequent to look how individual and family transformations do affect politics.**
- **Link between demographic transition and the stage of democracy.**
- **in societies where family size is still of the ancient regime, the odds for autocrats or despots to rule are high.**
- **transition to small family size necessary – although not sufficient- condition to get out from authoritarianism.**

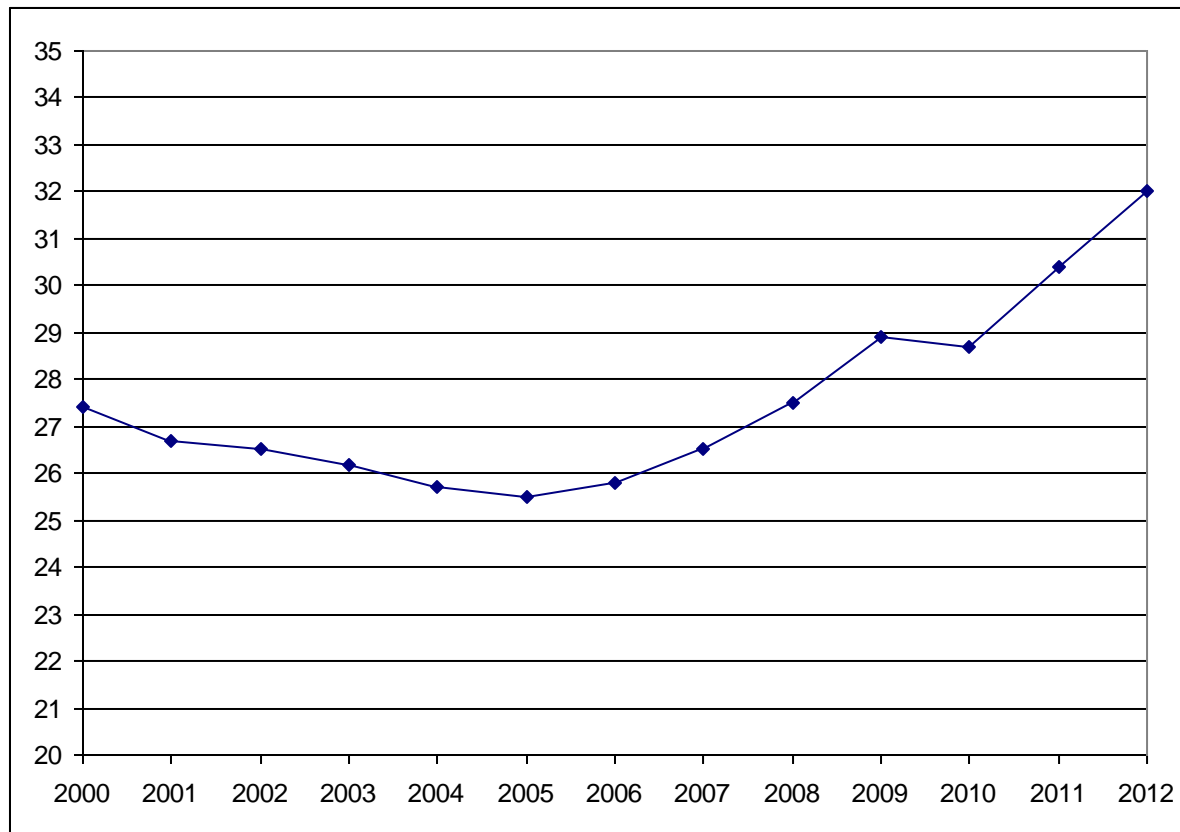
4. DISCUSSION

- Six years after 2007^[1] still optimistic message?
- Current fertility trends? Reversals: fertility increases after fertility decline?
- Oscillatory trends or behavioral changes of perceptions and attitudes?
- Thorough assessment :national data or international estimates,
- Not always agreement on figures which differ very often.
- ^[1] The year when *A Convergence of Civilizations...*, op.cit. was first published in French.

Fertility increases in Egypt

- **Egypt** largest Arab country, (85 million inh.). Fertility has decrease until 2005.
- But started to increase, CBR from 25.5 to 32 p.1000 in 2012, +25%. Total Fertility Rate 3.49, increased since 2005: 3.36.
- Real figure higher than international : Population Division's: 2.79, Population Reference Bureau : 3.0 and the International Data Base: 2.94.

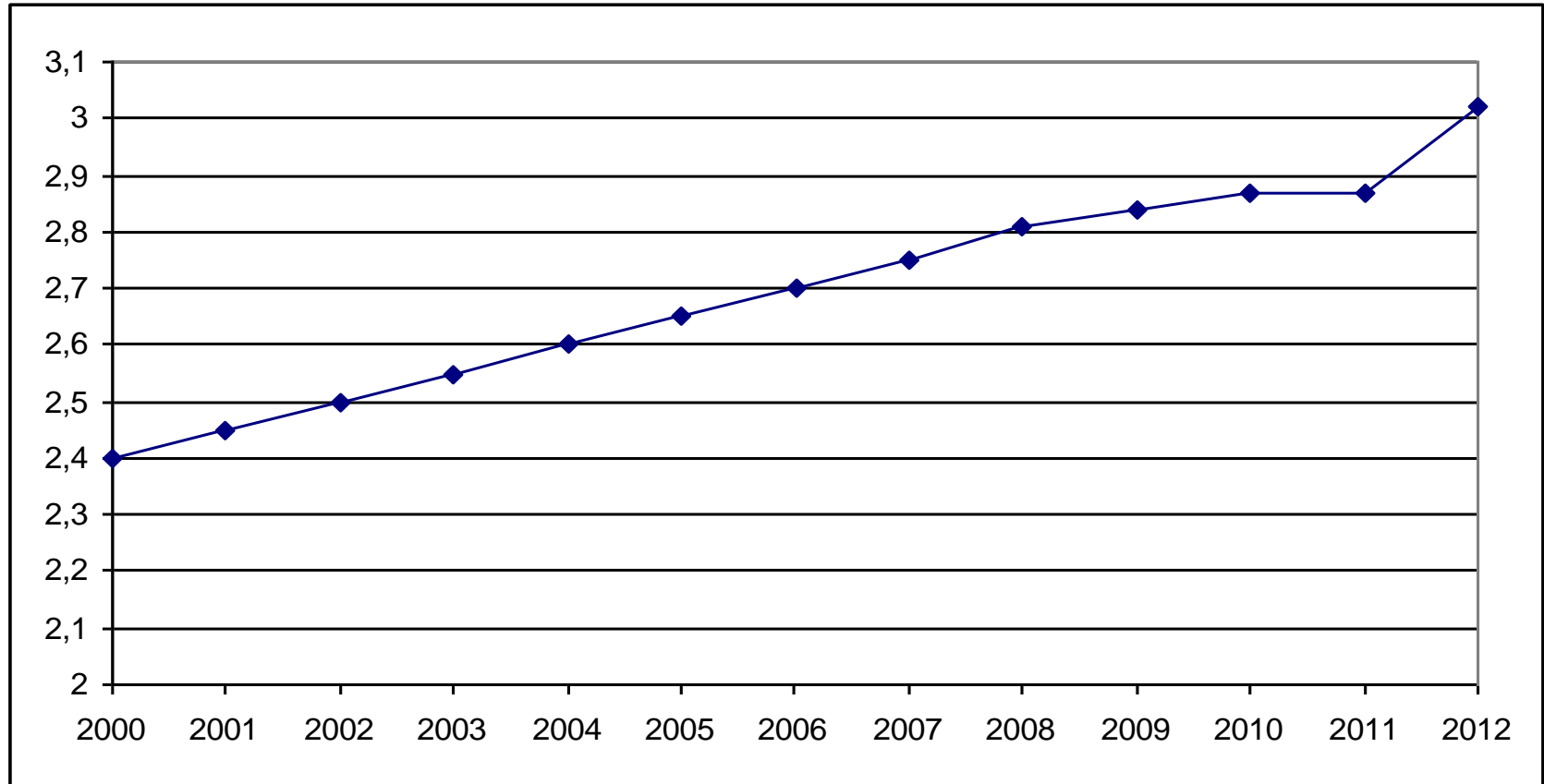
Chart 7: The recent increase in Egyptian crude birth-rate (p. thousand)



... and Algeria

- Second largest, 40 million inh., **Algeria**, fertility increasing from 2.40 in 2000 passing the 3 children mark in 2012: 3.02, thus a 26% increase.
- Higher than international estimates :
Population Division: 2.82, PRB : 3.0,
International Data Base one : 2.78.

Chart 8: The recent increase in Algerian Total Fertility Rate



But transition still on in Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Yemen

- In **Morocco**, persistence of sharp fertility decrease: 2.19 in 2010, from 2.43 in 2005. International estimates not convincing UN: 2.78 PRB: 2.70. IDB more realistic: 2.19.
- In **Saudi Arabia** (nationals) TFR: 3.3 in 2005 seems to have been confirmed at the same value in a 2007 survey. Population Division, and PRB estimations amalgamate nationals and foreigners (meaningless).
- In **Yemen**, **TFR: 4.15**, reasonable measure based on a representative survey (MICS3 in 2006).

Cases of stalling fertility: Syria, Tunisia, Jordan

- Contrariwise, **Syria** fertility stalling: 3.50 in 2005, 3.47 in 2009. both UN: 3.00 PRB: 3.1 and IDB: 2.85, estimates underestimate fertility.
- In **Tunisia**, national sources show increasing fertility, From 2.02 in 2005 to 2.15 in 2011, slightly higher than the UN estimate: 2.02 or IDB: 2.01 and close to the PRB one. In 2012 increase in birth rate from 18.8 to 19.9 p. thousand: hence fertility now: 2.27.
- In **Jordan**, fertility from 3.55 in 2005 to 3.85 in 2009. Yet, UN: 3.27 PRB: 3.5 and IDB: 3.36 estimates are lower.

Lebanon, Palestine and the Gulf

- In **Lebanon**, continued to decrease: 1.69 in 2005 to 1.5, according to UN and PRB estimates in 2012.
- In **Palestine**, Present level 4.17 shows fertility decline in all parts of Palestine: the West Bank, occupied East-Jerusalem and the Gaza strip.
- Same for the the national populations of the Gulf States: **United Arab Emirates**, national fertility stood at 3.69 in 2005. Drop in fertility continued. Same in **Oman** from 3.56 in 2005 to 2.67 in 2009, highest fertility decrease in the Arab countries. Same in **Kuwait**, where fertility rate among Kuwaiti nationals estimated at 4.14 in 2005, now 3.77. In **Qatar**, fertility stood at 4.44 in 2005 has continued to decrease to 3.39 in 2011. In **Bahrain**, finally, fertility among nationals: 3.10 in 2005 continued to decrease to 2.78 in 2009.

The sense of a reversal?

- For **4 countries**: Sudan, Iraq, Libya and Mauritania, **impossible to estimate** recent fertility trends.
- For **15 countries** large majority, **10 pursued their fertility transition**, in **5, fertility decline** stalled or reversed.
- **Majority continued demographic and family modernization process.** Among modernizers, all countries of Gulf area, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.
- **However, optimism must be tempered.** Countries where fertility transition stalling or reversed, very often “heavy weights”: Egypt, Algeria, Syria, not to mention Tunisia and Jordan. Hence, **only a minority among the Arabs: 42%**, were still experiencing **fertility transition**.

- Meaning that considerations on significance demographic/ family transition on modernization are obsolete?
- Confident **demographic transition meant more than just numbers.**
- Went much beyond, **signifying ultimately, democratic transition in the family, the society and the political sphere.**
- **Stalling/ reversal of demographic transition signals halt to modernization?** Persistence or the return of traditional families, rigid social structures and authoritarian regimes?

- **Counter-arguments** which suggest that this **demographic setback, if any, might not constitute reversal** trend towards modernization, freer families and consequently political regimes.
- -« **ratchet effect** », prevents flashback of a process after a certain stage is attained, mechanism that prevents a system to go back, and force it to go ahead. Halt to demographic transition not necessarily halt democratic transition, other factors take the relay.
- - Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries, **in spite of richness, of the structure of populations** (large expatriates population), advocating high fertility, transition not halted.
- -**Other demographic/ family factors : mortality, age at marriage, exogamous marriages, nuclearization, women's head household not reversed.** Important as it is **fertility is not the sole criteria of modernization.**

Reasons of reversals very complex

- Reasons behind the fertility increases or its stalling are complex and diverse.
- Superficial explanation attributes it to the “return of islam” not only at the political level (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco...)
- More importantly at family one: return to tradition, family values, humbling of women, to breeding (early marriage many off springs).
- Few points in common among this group of five countries, which have undergone recent fertility increases.

In Egypt...

- Egypt, increase erroneously put on account of 2011 Revolution. Behavioral shifts because “people are under pressure” or because “no one talk about the population problem like before”.
- Female’s employment. Fertility decrease might be ephemeral, if female education not supported by entry of women in the labor force with rewarding jobs. Could soon return to house wives: marry early and have more children.
- Egypt, female participation rate still low: 24%. Many are unemployed (officially 19%) or under-employed or not gainfully employed as family employees (agriculture 46% of the females).
- Leaves only a handful of women for whom the opportunity cost of childbearing significant.

Algeria, Syria, Tunisia, Jordan... comparable yet different cases.

- **Algeria**, women's marginalization in the labor market. Improvement security, living conditions after 2nd Algerian war, boosted marriages Marital fertility decreased but not sufficiently. Different combination of factors than Egypt, with females exclusion from the labor force in common.
- **Syria**, fertility stalling, mainly because of two speed demographic regime. One coastal region, the *Jabal el Arab* and the capital, Damascus, relatively privileged: social, economic and cultural, fertility dropped to replacement level, majorities could not benefit from economic progress or redistribution of wealth, which kept fertility at a very high level.
- In **Tunisia**, fertility increase is puzzling in this country which was the forerunner in the Arab world in family and population issues.
- In **Jordan**, plausible, peculiar population composition, Jordanians/ Palestinians, might play hidden persistence of high fertility.

Conclusion:has something went wrong

- Short generation series of revolutions, cultural: remarkable penetration of the female into primary, secondary and university.
- In its wake demographic revolution widespread use of contraception, decline of early marriage, individuation
- Following demographic and family changes, disruption of traditional family hierarchies,
- positive impact on the social and political sphere. Hence the cycle of the Arab uprisings since December 2010, which swept the best-rooted political hierarchies.

- Last stumbling block labor market (chart 10) resists to women, employment curves for female much below expectations.
- Chances of maintaining the durability of family and demographic transition if Arab women permanently excluded from labor market?
- Political repercussions of kind of exclusion of one out of two citizens?

Chart 10: Employment rate by sex (15 years and over) by large regions, 2012

