

Demography and Politics in the Arab World

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DEMOGRAPHY AND POLITICS IN THE ARAB WORLD

The demographic changes which emerged in France during the late 18th and the 19th centuries were termed "revolution" by A. Landry, who thus drew a parallel between these and the concomitant industrial and political changes. Classic economists such as D. Ricardo and K. Marx went further by demonstrating how Malthusian population theory plus the law of diminishing yields could amount to social explosion; with a demographic base, economy was at that time political. Since 1950, population inflation in the Third World, despite being 'toned down' into the term "transition", has come to offer new grounds for bringing demography and politics together. In 1989, the annual meeting of the Chaire Quételet was devoted to the "role of population growth in fomenting revolutions and major political crises", in historic Europe and other world regions today. Philippe FARGUES** delves deeper here, by taking into account not only population growth but also population size and structure, and relating these not only to crises but also to a broad array of political events and contexts throughout the vast contemporary Arab world.*

Three examples can illustrate from different angles the link between demography and politics. When, after being exiled in Tunis, the Arab League returned to its seat in Cairo, the numbers were eloquent enough to quell any objection: what better place for the voice of the Arab world than the centre of gravity of the populations for whom it speaks? Three times over, Israel kept the Arab armies at bay; but it cannot counter the Palestinian birth rate, which is slowly but surely tilting the population scales. From Cairo to Fès and Tunis to Algiers, the educated urban young, with no hope of recognition on the labour market, contest, in the name of religion, the power of their elders.

Although demography is a sometimes central component of politics and political argument, 'political demography' as an acknowledged science does not exist. At most, the term refers to the narrow technical field of 'population policies', the packages of measures designed to raise or lower fertility or to control migration flows. But there is no scientific discipline as such, investigating how population issues enter into power strategies or

* Chaire Quételet 1989, *Révolution et population. Aspects démographiques des grandes révolutions politiques*. Edited by Eric Vilquin, Academia, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1990.

** INED; CEDEJ, Cairo.

influence national policies, or providing theoretical reflection on how political institutions affect the reproductive behaviour of groups or individuals.

Yet demographers often branch out from the narrow confines of measuring populations and their reproduction, and turn toward the fields of biology, or economy and sociology. In the first case, they concentrate on the 'proximate' determinants of fertility behaviour, half a dozen or so individual characteristics which are at the near end of the explanation line⁽¹⁾. In the second case, they are more interested in 'contextual' determinants, which form the background against which the proximate determinants are observed. The descriptor is not the individual, but his/her position in society⁽²⁾. If political demography were to be situated in relation to these, it would be farther along the line, being concerned with what are known as 'remote-remote' determinants. The focus shifts to how the relations between sub-groups in a society, or between societies, affect individual demographic behaviour, and inversely, how the latter underlies political strategy.

Quantitative demography deals with population size, structure and dynamics. These categories provide a convenient approach to the subject discussed here.

I. – The value of population size

The weight of numbers and their availability

The seat of the Arab League was taken away from Egypt as punishment, because she had betrayed the sacred cause by siding with the Zionist enemy (1979). The negotiations designed to bring Egypt back to the fold were dragging out when Iraq invaded Kuwait (1990), thereby causing the most dangerous dissension since the creation of the Pan-Arab institution. Although never uttered, Egypt's superiority in numbers was then an incontestable argument which, probably alone, won over the members of the League and brought her immediate pardon for the past. It is true that the power of a state is not measured only by the number of its citizens, but also by their cohesion and by the means at its disposal. But all rulers know the authority conferred by population size in the international arena. An early populationist, Ibn Khaldûn wrote that "the grandeur of an empire, its expanse and permanence depend on the greater or smaller number of those who have founded it"⁽³⁾.

(1) The principal proximate determinants (or 'intermediate variables') used in biometric demography are: marital status, contraception and post-partum sterility for fertility studies, nutritional status, exposure to disease and medical and health practices for those on mortality.

(2) The variables commonly used in social and economic demography are those which reflect an individual's status in society: educational attainment, economic activity, income, etc.

(3) *Les textes sociologiques et économiques de la Mouqaddima*, translated by G.H. Bousquet, Marcel Rivière (ed.), Paris, 1965.

It is because it is not on a par with her ambition that Saudi Arabia has so obstinately hidden the size of her population. How could the Wahhabi Kingdom, which as guardian of the most holy places – and the richest subsoil – has a moral ascendancy over a billion Muslims in five continents, accept the reality of an autochthonous population which probably does not even reach the symbolic 10 million mark, and officially ranks 17th among the Muslim countries⁽⁴⁾? Above all, how could it own up to the fact that its national construction depends on a labour force consisting mainly of non-nationals? Saudi Arabia is not the only country to conceal her demographic weaknesses: this situation is shared by almost all the Gulf principalities (Table 1). The Sultan of Oman has discouraged all deliberation by decreeing that there would be a population of 2 million subjects up to the year 2000⁽⁵⁾. Qatar and the United Arab Emirates publish total numbers of residents, but not the elements which would show that non-nationals are the majority (76%). Bahrain provides a little more information, but Kuwait is the only country to be statistically transparent⁽⁶⁾, just as it was the only one to experiment with a parliament. We can remember how, during the Israel-Arab war in 1973, oil became a weapon used by the Arabs to put pressure on Israel's allies. Decided unilaterally by the producers, the soar in crude oil prices not only propelled some forgotten 'little states' onto centre stage, but also turned the Gulf region into the hub of a vast migration network stretching to the Muslim Far East. The Arabian steppes suddenly regained a geo-strategic dimension they had lost in the year 661 (39 of the *hijrah* era), when Damas stole from Medina its preeminence in the Muslim Empire.

The oil monarchies of the Peninsula are pro-natalist. With Libya, they form the last bastion of Arab resistance to family planning programmes⁽⁷⁾. This is often explained by the vast manpower requirements of countries which have understood that oil revenues will not last for ever and must be converted quickly into working capital, or of emirs who have had plants and airports built just to spend their money, as much as to invest it⁽⁸⁾. Whether the policies of these princes are interpreted as preparation for the post-oil period or as mere prestige-fanning, it is a principle of economics that is put forward: these states are pro-natalist to reduce their dependence on imported labour. But it takes 20 to 25 years to turn a newborn child into a worker, whereas new building sites need manpower immediately. What's more, the appetite for labour will not always be so voracious: more hands were needed during the short-lived oil-boom (1974-85) to construct

(4) In 1990, the population of Saudi Arabia, aliens (number unknown) included, amounted officially to 14.1 million. This purely political estimate, which is supported by no serious field observations, is taken up in all UN publications. The results of the only population census taken in this country (in 1974) have never been published in full, in case they revealed the humiliating truth.

(5) Information communicated confidentially.

(6) As well as the census data, all population statistics are published by nationality.

(7) Family planning in the Arab countries is described well by Muhammad Faour in: «Fertility and family planning in the Arab countries», *Studies in Family Planning*, vol. 20, no. 5, 254-263, New York, 1989.

(8) On this, a remarkable analysis by Michel Chatelus is still very pertinent today: see «Le monde arabe vingt ans après», *Maghreb-Machrek*, no. 101, Paris, 1983.

TABLE 1. – POPULATION CENSUSES: FREQUENCY AND TRANSPARENCE

<i>A. Countries with a large non-national community</i>			
	Percentage non-national	published in:	Last census giving nationality
Saudi Arabia	39.4 ^(a)	1974*	none
Bahrain	49.2 ^(a)	1981	1981
United Arab Emirates	65.6 ^(a)	1985	1980
Iraq	5.6 ^(a)	1987	1977
Kuwait	59.8 ^(a)	1985	1985
Lebanon	20.0 ^(b)	1932	1932
Libya	–	1973	1973
Oman	29.9 ^(a)	none	none
Qatar	76.2 ^(a)	1986*	none
<i>B. Countries with a large non-Muslim community (Christian)</i>			
	Percentage Christian	published in:	Last census giving religion
Egypt	5.9	1986	1986
Iraq	3.1	1987	1965
Jordan	4.2	1979	1979
Lebanon	43.0 ^(b)	1932	1932
Syria	7.9	1981	1960
<i>C. Countries with a large non-Arab community</i>			
	Percentage non-Arab	published in:	Last census giving ethnic group
Algeria	18.9	1987	1966
Iraq	22.0 ^(b)	1987	1957
Morocco	35.4	1981	1960
Mauritania	38.0	1987	1977**
Sudan	60.7	1983	1956
<i>D. Countries with no sizeable non-national, religious or ethnic minority</i>			
			Last census
Tunisia			1984
Yemen			North: 1986 South: 1988
* Has remained confidential.			
** Data collected but not published.			
– No recent estimate available.			
^(a) Estimate at mid-1988, from <i>Demographic and related socio-economic data sheets</i> , no. 6, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Baghdad, 1989.			
^(b) Author's own estimate.			

roadworks, ports or petrochemical plants than will be necessary soon to run them, since, in view of their small national populations, all the princes have taken high-technology options. 'Reason of state' seems a more convincing argument. Although it takes as long to make a soldier as a worker, once an army is built – autochthonous from troops to staff – the chances of safeguarding independence will be greater. After all, how can one expect

non-citizens to defend rights to which they are not entitled? Kuwait learnt this to her cost in the summer of 1990. This is the military dimension of a political explanation which is no doubt global.

Oil wealth has not only given small tribal groups the means of surviving in a world of nations, while at the same time exposing them to covetous looks from their powerful neighbours. It has also afforded a reprieve for their traditional state and family structures. By taking in foreign workers for the hardest jobs, strictly controlling their residence permits and threatening them with expulsion in the event of labour conflicts, the oil-rich states have been able to import modernity without any of the accompanying social disorders. This type of immigration has produced dual societies: on the one hand, citizens living off the national wealth, and on the other, non-nationals producing it. The tribal order – ‘sultanic’, as Max Weber would say⁽⁹⁾ – which previously governed the political relations within local populations, was to rest on greater consensus between the prince and his subjects, simply because these had become ‘assisted’. The ‘black gold’ thus oiled the wheels of autochthonous society by taking away the citizens’ need to produce. Also, by giving them more money so they could have large families with mothers staying at home, it has, in a way, funded the preservation of patriarchal society and delayed the onset of the demographic transition. With GNPs among the highest in the world and pre-transitional fertility levels, the oil-rich Arab countries are not, in fact, the exception one might think to the theory⁽¹⁰⁾ that links fertility decline to economic development. Diverging from the classic pattern, development based on oil revenues demobilizes the work force and, in particular, does away with the need to employ women. The subsidies a family receives from the state become the husband’s income, and augment his hold over his wife⁽¹¹⁾. When Algeria was euphorically enjoying its own oil boom, President Boumedienne’s pro-natalism was no doubt not totally independent of these comfortable revenues. Despite the differences, his policy was also basically motivated by national grandeur. Proclaiming that “development is our pill”⁽¹²⁾, putting all Malthusianists under the banner of imperialism – since by advocating birth control they were trying to reduce the number of their enemies – Algeria became the leader of the pro-natalist Third World. By taking this stand, she came on a footing with the other country which was then preaching non-intervention in demographic matters: China⁽¹³⁾, the largest country in the world in terms of population size.

⁽⁹⁾ Max Weber, *Economie et Société*, Tome I, Paris, Plon, 1971, 237-238.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Riad Tabbarah analyses the atypical nature of the demographic transition in the Middle East in «Human resources development and its population dimension in the Arab World», *Population Bulletin of the ESCWA*, no. 32, Baghdad, 1988, 3-30.

⁽¹¹⁾ For William P. Butz and Michael P. Ward, the gap between men’s and women’s wages is a factor of fertility decline. See: «Will US fertility remain low? A new economic interpretation», *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 5, no. 4, 1979.

⁽¹²⁾ Statement made at the first World Population Conference, Bucharest, 1974.

⁽¹³⁾ We know now with what ease China advocated unrestrained natality in the Third World while applying a strict one-child policy at home.

*The size of communities
and their rivalries*

For communities, even more than for nations, population size has political import. In a Machrek where Sunni Arabs bask in the knowledge of their unquestionable numerical superiority, some religious or linguistic minorities may worry about their numbers, while others feel relatively reassured about the future. In this field, however, statistics are generally much more opaque. This gives rise to all sorts of exaggerations which are difficult to put right. In the Ottoman 'censuses' (registration operations which, for the Arab provinces, were conducted between 1881 and 1913), religion was recorded almost openly in all the administrative divisions. The authorities were not apparently concerned with distorting the relative weight of the three monotheisms – the Empire was by vocation federative – but did deny the diversity of Islam, thereby already conferring political value on numbers. Christians were recorded with all the subtleties of their many rites, but Muslims formed the ideal bloc they had not been, in reality, since the great *fitnah*⁽¹⁴⁾. There was no mention of Sunnis, Shi'is, Druze or other heretics: in those census tables⁽¹⁵⁾, Islam was united.

When, out of the remains of the Empire, emerged nations which needed to be given consciousness of their unity, statistics were invested with a more precise ideological mission: to homogenize these populations⁽¹⁶⁾. That explains why some countries, no doubt the most fragile, preferred to conceal their religious or linguistic diversity and stopped keeping count of it. But in a context of pluralism and equality proclaimed by citizens of all denominations, it is democracy itself – or the population's aspiration for democracy – that brings demography into the political limelight. To distribute power proportionally among sub-groups, it is necessary to know the size of these groups.

With several thousand years of national unity behind her, Egypt could afford to be open: all the censuses, from the first one conducted in 1882 to the latest in 1986, as well as vital statistics, provide the religious structure of the population. The only information ever discarded was the distinction between Copts and other Christians when, after the Revolution of 1952, many of the Christians whose ancestors had come from Syria in the 17th to 19th centuries left for Lebanon. Taking over from Palestinian statistics, Jordan and Israel have, in the same way, continued the series of data by religion. In Syria and Iraq, on the other hand, the Baasist regime

(14) The great *discord*, which in 656 divided the prophet's successors into followers of Mu'āwiyā (later known as 'Sunnis') and partisans of 'Ali ('Shi'is'), while a small group of indomitables ('Khārijites') refused the succession.

(15) In fact, these tables were never published by the Ottomans. Their contents remained unknown until Kemal Karpat's work: *Ottoman population, 1830-1914*, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

(16) In the Maghreb, it was the linguistic cleavage between Arabs and Berbers that disappeared after Independence: the censuses of 1960 in Morocco and 1966 in Algeria were the first conducted by the new States and the last to record mother tongue. At that time, the Berber-speaking population represented 18.9% of Algerians and 35.4% of Moroccans (Muslims and Jews combined).

put a stop to this distinction in the name of secularism: their censuses of 1960 and 1965 respectively were the last to record religion.

Lebanon is obviously an extreme case. The religious division is of such central importance there that all censuses, even without any specific mention of religion⁽¹⁷⁾, have been banned since the census of 1932, on the basis of which parliamentary seats were distributed until 1991⁽¹⁸⁾. It is precisely because demography had been so acutely political that it lost its rights. Lebanon's economic and social infrastructure were consequently established without much knowledge of the population on which they were built. This is no doubt one of the reasons for their regional imbalance. The Shi'i-populated south was expanding in the dark and was not receiving its proper share of development.

There is no better example of the politics of numbers than the war which broke out in this country in 1975. This was much more than a mere question of rivalry between religious communities, which did not all – or not always – stand together, but sometimes tore at one another as violently as they had at their enemies. Yet how can one ignore the stakes involved and the power struggle which, consciously or not, formed a backcloth to this war? The Maronites fought, among other reasons, to keep a position that had been legitimated (or offered to them) by a population census. For them to maintain a right to this position in the name of the same principle of proportional democracy, the country would have had to turn a blind eye to 43 years of differential population growth. The Sunnis, after the episode of the 'battle of hotels' (1976) when some of their members entered the *mourabitoun* movement, stayed on the sidelines of the war. The massive backing of the non-Lebanese Arab Sunnis – not just the Palestinians – afforded them much more lasting stability than the illusory security of a militia. Pushed towards Beirut by population growth in the south and the pressure exerted by Israel, the Shi'a Muslims probably waited to form a relative majority before constituting a political and military organization. Having for a long time been hemmed in in terms of demography as well as religion, the Druze were too much of a minority to act alone. As in the past⁽¹⁹⁾, they needed outside support to be able to raise their voices: a century later, Great Britain, Israel and Syria in turn offered them a helping hand.

Whether by ignorance or defiance, the statistical smokescreen results in minorities, and in particular the Christians, overestimating their numbers. Following the second Gulf War (1990-91), renewed interest in the ethnic and religious diversity of Iraq led the Western press to put forward some

(17) A simple count of the residents in each administrative division would have been sufficient to estimate religious distribution indirectly; consequently, it was never authorized.

(18) The Taef agreement (1989), which came into application in 1991, introduced denominational parity in parliament.

(19) There are other examples in history of the role of population size in international relations. When Bonaparte landed in Egypt, still bearing revolutionary ideals, he chose the support of the Muslim majority, while the British on the contrary turned to the minorities, and entered into alliance with the Syrian communities of Cairo and Alexandria.

estimates. For the Kurds, they were a reasonable extrapolation of the 1957 census data, the last to contain a question on language. For Christians, however, they were generally based on the figures provided by the Chaldean Catholic Church and were sometimes no more than partisan fantasy. As though it was necessary to convince public opinion that a Sunni Arab power was laying down its law, certain media inflated the figures even further. It was said that Iraq had up to 15% of Christians, whereas the last data collected in the field, in 1965, led to a figure of 3%, which was in keeping with the history of the Ottoman, British, then Iraqi censuses⁽²⁰⁾. The falsification is generally not deliberate. The updating of figures is a delicate task, which supposes knowledge of population movement (births, deaths, migration) by religious group. Only Egypt has published such data, with the exception of those on migration, which are impossible to measure with any accuracy. In the other countries, it is all the more risky to attempt extrapolation as the last census data are remote in time. The rapid population growth in the Machrek increases the margin of error. It is consequently difficult for the non-specialist to contest these partisan estimates.

However, even when recent data exist and cross-checks have shown them to be reliable, the figures are contested simply because they are endorsed by the authorities. The Copts in Egypt (2.751 million⁽²¹⁾ according to the 1986 census) are thus frequently rumoured to be 8 million, or sometimes even 10⁽²²⁾. This is not the place to develop arguments we have presented elsewhere⁽²³⁾ in favour of the Egyptian census data. But we can say that we have observed a constant: the national minorities overestimate their numbers, as though they feel the need to come as close as possible to the majority in order to gain recognition. As a result, they also overestimate their real strength, as the Greeks and Armenians did before they were forced to leave Turkey after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and, more recently, the Maronites in Lebanon⁽²⁴⁾.

II. – The ambivalence of differential growth

When Israel negotiated the immigration of a million Soviet Jews (in 1991, before the dissolution of the USSR), it was in the hope of re-defusing the Palestinian 'population bomb'. Since the creation of Israel, the Jewish

⁽²⁰⁾ The Ottoman censuses of 1881-93 gave 2.16% of Christians for the sum of the Vilayets of Baghdad, Mossoul and Basra; the Iraqi censuses of 1947 and 1957 gave 3.24% and 3.09% respectively.

⁽²¹⁾ All Christians (Copts plus other Christians).

⁽²²⁾ 7 to 8 million in 1986 for Christian Cannuyer, *Les Coptes*, Brepols, Brussels, 1990, p. 173. The same figure was given by Laurent and Annie Chabry for 1976: *Politique et minorités au Proche-Orient*, Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1984, p. 297.

⁽²³⁾ Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, *Chrétiens et Juifs dans l'Islam arabe et turc*, Paris, Fayard, 1992.

⁽²⁴⁾ The Maronites often justify their institutional pre-eminence by the demographic weight of their emigration which, added to their numbers at home, would no doubt ensure a comfortable majority. But they apparently underestimate the integration mechanisms at work in the countries of the *diaspora*: after several generations, ancestral ties tend to have weakened.

pace of natural increase has always lagged behind that of the Arabs. But until the early 1980s, they managed to hold their share of the total population as it was in 1949 (87%, Occupied Territories excluded) by their immigration policy. The 'law of return' brought in new Jewish citizens each year, while political violence, then fortune-seeking in the Gulf, fuelled a Palestinian *diaspora* (Table 2). The balance was lost when these two migration flows dried up. On the one hand, the economic crisis in Israel, together with the military setbacks in Lebanon (1982-84), and on the other, the oil counter-shock in the Gulf countries (starting in 1984-85), tarnished the image of these two Eldorados. The powers of attraction of the former for Jews throughout the world and of the latter for Palestinians no longer worked. The balance of migration, which had been strongly positive for Jews and strongly negative for Palestinians, seemed a thing of the past, and the contrasting trends of natural increase operated unrestrained⁽²⁵⁾.

TABLE 2. – THE COMPONENTS OF POPULATION GROWTH IN ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, 1967 TO 1989

Period	Jews			Arabs					
	Natural	Migration	Total	Israel			West Bank & Gaza		
				Natural	Migration	Total	Natural	Migration	Total
Annual rate (per 1,000)									
1967-71	1.64	+ 0.72	2.36	3.77	- 0.03	3.74	2.19	- 1.85	0.33
1972-76	1.66	+ 0.78	2.44	3.86	+ 0.16	4.02	3.19	- 0.97	2.23
1977-81	1.48	+ 0.37	1.85	3.36	+ 0.02	3.38	3.39	- 1.51	1.89
1982-86	1.41	+ 0.10	1.51	3.65	+ 0.05	3.70	3.57	- 0.65	2.92
1987-89	1.30	+ 0.13	1.43	2.95	+ 0.05	3.00	3.83*	- 0.36*	3.47*
Population size (in thousands)									
1967-88	1 075.0	+ 295.0	1 370.0	453.6	+ 7.3	461.3	924.6	- 288.5	636.1
* 1987-1988									
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, <i>Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1990</i> , no 4, Jerusalem, 1991.									

It is when such differentials emerge that demography becomes political. Societies always consist of segments which reproduce at different speeds. But when these segments are potentially rival communities, which

⁽²⁵⁾ In 1980, for the first time in Israel's history, Jewish immigration did not make up for emigration. The balance remained negative until 1988. Since 1989, and particularly since 1990, entries of Fallachas and, even more, of Soviet Jews have produced a recovery.

Period	Departures	Citizens returning	Immigrants
1980-84	- 77 819	+ 8 096	+ 65 797
1985-89	- 99 691	+ 8 604	+ 59 143
Source: <i>Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1990</i> , op.cit.			

have no forms of exchange (inter-marriage, mobility), then disparities in population growth become a source of imbalance.

Transition and greater gaps

Inequalities of this nature are nothing new in the Arab East. What is new is the size of the gap between the two communities. Recent constitutions have shown that in Ottoman times, that is, long before the demographic transition, the pace of population change was more rapid for Christians than for Muslims. Between the censuses of 1570-90⁽²⁶⁾ and 1881-93⁽²⁷⁾, for the Vilayets of Alep, Tripoli (which became Vilayet of Beirut in the 19th century) and Damas combined, the mean annual rate of population growth was 4.9 per 1,000 for Christians and 0.6 for Muslims⁽²⁸⁾. It was first a sociological difference that gave the former such an advantage. Being more often urban dwellers, they were better protected against the famines which regularly devastated the countryside, but often spared the towns, which were less dependent on local production because of trade with regions further afield. It was epidemics that devastated the towns. In the literature, there are many descriptions of the different ways Muslims and Christians faced this danger. Muslims continued to live their community life, while Christians fled the towns when they could, or if not isolated their homes and cut off all contact with the outside world⁽²⁹⁾. This sociological advantage of the Christians was enhanced by the political institutions. Obligated to pay capitation (*Jizya*) in exchange for a 'protection' that meant they could not become soldiers, the *Dhimmi*⁽³⁰⁾ were shielded from the risks of war. In the Arab provinces of the Empire, which stayed on the sidelines of the major military campaigns until the 19th century, the war losses were not substantial enough to have much impact on Muslim population growth. But the long separations must regularly have curbed their natality⁽³¹⁾.

At the time, however, people were not aware that there were two different speeds of population growth. Both were too slow and too irregular to be perceptible during a lifetime: they were on a geological time scale. Imagine a village peopled in the year 0 by an equal number of Christians and Muslims, forming a closed population. With the Ottoman growth rates

⁽²⁶⁾ Census results published by Ömer Lûtfi Barkan, «Research on the Ottoman fiscal surveys», in M.A. Cooks, *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, Oxford U.P., London, 1970, pp. 163-171.

⁽²⁷⁾ Kemal Karpat, *op. cit.* in fn. 15.

⁽²⁸⁾ These two sets of census data, three centuries apart, were not directly comparable. We adjusted the geographical divisions as much as possible, but could not adjust the census errors. The difference between the communities is doubtless more reliable in terms of relative than absolute values.

⁽²⁹⁾ See, for instance: Daniel Panzac, *Quarantaines et Lazarets. L'Europe et la peste d'Orient*, Edisud, Aix-en-Provence, 1986; Dominique Chevallier, «Non-Muslim Communities in Arab Cities», in B. Braude and B. Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, Holmes and Meier, New York, 1982.

⁽³⁰⁾ Name given to the 'Men of the Good Book': Christians and Jews protected by the Muslim state.

⁽³¹⁾ Other factors of differential fertility are not discussed here, being beyond the scope of this article: for instance, the relative instability of the traditional Muslim family, due to easy divorce.

of 4.9 and 0.6 per 1,000, it would take 161 years for the former to make up two thirds of the population. How could anyone have been aware of the problem, let alone alarmed by it?

The demographic transition alters the pattern, because it changes the scale. In the first stage of the transition, growth accelerates because death rates decline faster than birth rates. This increases the absolute reproduction gap. Suppose the growth rates in our example were 4.9 and 0.6 per 100 instead of per 1,000. Although the gap is the same in relative terms, it would take only 16.1 years for the Christian population to become twice that of Muslims. This is much less than a lifespan: looking back at his childhood, an adult would see that the world had changed. In present-day Machrek, the differentials are almost as large, with rates of natural increase ranging from 1% to 4%. Under these conditions, it would take 23 years for one group in the village to become twice as large as the other. The difference with Ottoman times is that the larger group is now the Muslims.

The demographic time scale is very long, the political one very short. The politician acts for results which will be visible at least in his lifetime, if not immediately. We have seen that the mortality decline has considerably shortened the demographic time span, putting it, for the first time, within reach of politics. However, all the different population groups have benefited from the mortality decline. Inequalities remain, but although they are sufficiently unjust to rouse protests, they are too slight to affect the reproduction gap⁽³²⁾. Mortality no longer has any true weight: it is natality that now tips the scales. The communities with the highest birth rates will become superior in number, if this is not already the case, and those with the lowest will be minorities.

A population's natality depends on family fertility levels. For the former to be high, so must the latter; objectives at the group level must be passed on to the individuals who compose it. These objectives then enter into competition with others. The Palestinians of all religions have shared a common fate. To defend their common interest, demography is incontestably the most effective weapon they have ever had at hand. This catches Israel out in the very spot where it holds itself up as an example: democracy. By driving the Palestinians to form a majority (which should be reached by the year 2010 in Israel and the Occupied Territories⁽³³⁾), it should one day demonstrate the vanity of democracy reserved for a minority.

Yet the Palestinians do not all use this weapon, on the contrary. Probably no other population in the world has ever shown such strong fertility

(32) During the early 1970s in Lebanon, the infant mortality rate was around 50% higher for Muslims than for Christians. A similar relative difference was found for Israeli Palestinians. At historic mortality levels, this would have had considerable impact on net reproduction. At today's very low levels of infant mortality (probably less than 30 per 1,000 in Lebanon, 15 per 1,000 for Arabs in Israel), the effect is infinitesimal.

(33) When we projected the Jewish and Arab populations of Israel, Gaza and West Bank combined, under UN mortality and fertility assumptions (Israel for Jews and Jordan for Arabs), we found that one million Soviet immigrants would only put this date back ten years (supposing zero return migration).

TABLE 3. – TOTAL FERTILITY RATES OF PALESTINIANS, BY RELIGION AND NATIONALITY

Period	Israeli Arabs			West Bank (92% Muslim)	Gaza (98% Muslim)
	Christian	Druze	Muslim		
1965-69*	4.26	7.30	9.22	7.63	7.74
1970-74	3.42	7.24	8.57	7.92	8.38
1975-79	3.13	6.91	7.25	7.96	9.01
1980-84	2.37	5.41	5.51	7.13	8.25
1985-89	2.49	4.19	4.70	7.13	8.54

* 1968-69 for West Bank and Gaza

Source: *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1990*, op. cit. For West Bank and Gaza, only crude birth rates are known: TFR was estimated by $CBR \times 5 \times 35$.

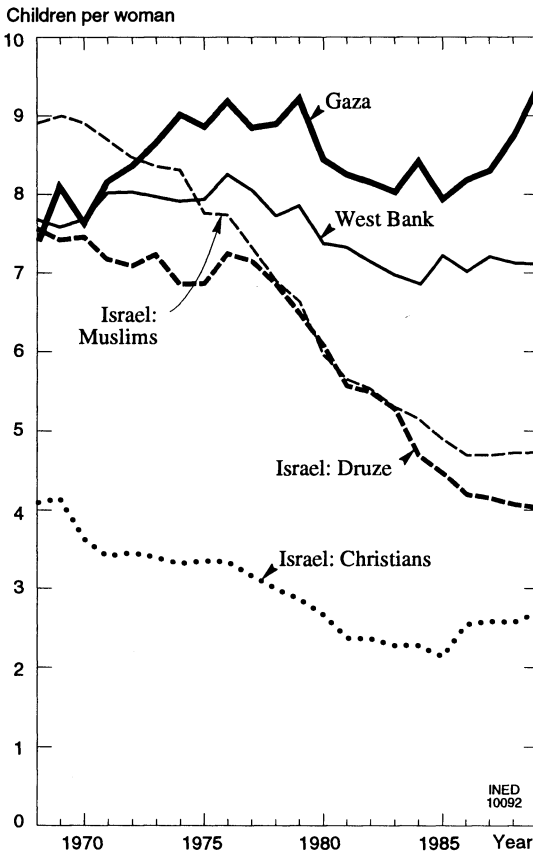


Figure 1. – Total fertility rates of Palestinians, 1968-89

Source: Based on *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1990*, op.cit.

contrast (Table 3): the Israeli Christians have 2.4 children per woman on average, fairly close to the European levels, while the population of Gaza – 98% Muslim – holds a geographic and historic record of more than 9 children, a level which has risen even further since the launching of the *intifada* (Figure 1). And this is despite the fact that Gaza is 100% urban and the population is educated: only the elderly are illiterate. Another cleavage is thus added to the traditional Muslim-Christian one: residence in Israel or in the Occupied Territories. It is true that religion and place of residence modulate social conditions, and when these are considered some of the demographic pieces of the jigsaw puzzle fit into place. Family income, educational status, particularly female, women's labour force participation are all fertility determinants which differ from Gaza and the West Bank to the Christian population of Israel. For instance, the fertility values follow more or less the reverse order of women's labour force participation rates⁽³⁴⁾: 23.3% of Christian women work, compared to 9.8% of Muslims in Israel, 16.8% in West Bank and 2.0% – no doubt another record – in Gaza. But the political institutions also play a role. By taking over the schooling expenses of families in the Occupied Territories, the UNRWA has separated childbearing from the cost of childrearing⁽³⁵⁾ and thus jammed one of the mainsprings of fertility decline. However, most of these factors operate in other societies without producing differentials of this nature. Apparently there is greater awareness here of demographic implications, and family strategies are adopted, which differ in spite of a same situation of political distress. The need to believe in a better future, and to use the family to that end, is shared by all, but the Christians bet on mobility for their children, which means having few, and the Muslims on the size of the family group.

Dissociating demography, economy and politics

These observations concerning the Palestinians lead us to consider a more general paradox in the demographics of communities. The choice of a small family often goes hand in hand with upward social mobility from one generation to the next, since educational investment can be concentrated on a few heirs instead of diluted among many. It is therefore a means of acquiring economic power. But at the same time, when this choice is generalized to a whole community, its relative demographic weight is reduced, and consequently the share of political power it could claim through its numbers. This situation can produce two results. First, it can lead to dissociation of the economic and political fields: the less prolific group will gain influence in the former and lose influence in the latter. This is the case of the Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic communities in Lebanon, which are less present in parliament than in the uni-

(34) Proportion economically active in the female population 15+.

(35) The micro-economic fertility theory postulates that a couple has children as long as the benefits (children starting work early, representing old age insurance) outweigh the cost (education, health care, upkeep), but stops when the cost exceeds the benefits.

versity or banking spheres. Second, it can result in a slow erosion of political legitimacy, by the gradual loss of proportional representation. This is more the case of the Maronites.

The association of economic dynamism and moderate population growth seems natural today. Yet it only dates from the beginning of the second stage of the demographic transition, that is, when fertility started to decline in the more educated families and was steady in the others: not until 1950-60 in the Arab world. Previously, the economically privileged groups tended to have the highest rates of natural increase. But the cause was the same: these groups were the first to enter into the demographic transition, beginning with the stage of mortality decline alone. As early as the 18th century, the Christians of the Levant, who were more open to Europe than the Muslims, drew from it both economic prosperity and demographic vitality. The one was nourished by the other, and they spread their wings in Lebanon and overseas, expanding in terms of population and commerce simultaneously⁽³⁶⁾.

The shift over time which means that demographic weight now evolves inversely with economic power also explains the opposite association. The 'losers' in development are those whose fertility remains high longest. But they thereby accumulate the demographic means to become, in the long run, political 'winners', assuming that representative democracy is respected or instituted. "History is a graveyard of aristocracies", wrote Pareto. By a mechanism which this time does not stage any of the moral changes linked to the prolonged exercise of power, the demographic transition thus organizes the circulation of community supremacies. Fragmentary as they may be, the most recent fertility data for Lebanon leave us pensive. In two rural regions with large Shi'i majorities, the South and the Bekaa, average completed fertility was found to be 7.93 and 6.90 children per married woman respectively in the early 1980s⁽³⁷⁾. During the same period, after 15 years of unbroken marriage, Christian women had given birth to only 3.08 children⁽³⁸⁾.

⁽³⁶⁾ Between the 14th and 19th centuries, the Maronites extended their territory first towards Jbail (Byblos), to the detriment of the local Shi'a populations, then in the Chouf inhabited by the Druze. Their population growth then supplied emigrants to America, who contributed to the prosperity of the community back home. See Dominique Chevallier, *La société du Mont-Liban à l'époque de la révolution industrielle en Europe*, Paris, Geuthner, 1971.

⁽³⁷⁾ *Family planning in rural Lebanon, 1983-84*, Lebanon Family Planning Association, Beirut, 1985.

⁽³⁸⁾ Figure for the whole of the Christian population. See: Robert Kasparian, *Enquête sur la famille chrétienne au Liban*, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur l'Orient Chrétien, Beirut, 1990.

III. – Islamism and the population pyramid

The social, moral and political crisis which has fuelled Islamic activism has more than one demographic facet. Rapidly rising education levels gave young people the hope of upward social and professional mobility. But economic disillusion and unemployment then dashed these hopes just as quickly. Finally, dense urbanization offered the political movements a favourable environment for reaching the masses and for underground organization; it opened up a new field – social action – that the States had not known how, or been unable, to cultivate. Islamism and rural-to-urban migration have consequently spread, in both time and space, in a surprisingly similar manner (Figure 2). Schooling, employment, urbanization... these three essential ingredients of modern Islamism were not enough, however. There are many Third World countries which have all three but do not witness the return of religion to the political scene. Another two ingredients were necessary: the backing of the oil-rich countries – that goes without saying – and the context of an exceptional generation conflict, with a vertical and horizontal transformation of the population pyramid.

The revival of Islam has gained ground among the educated young, the first generations to benefit from widespread instruction. In school, they learnt what their fathers could not teach them, because they had never been there. When the fathers were adolescents, during the last years of European domination, only an élite received primary instruction, particularly in the rural areas where they were born. These generations were mostly illiterate, but the construction of the new States supplied them with opportunities for jobs and responsibilities, which rapidly disappeared from the market. In learning how to read, the sons not only discovered their fathers' limits, but also acquired the knowledge that would free them from the age-old mediation of the Oulémas, the doctors of law, and give them access to the texts of Islam⁽³⁹⁾. Thus in the space of a few years, the new generations came to have the arguments necessary for contesting both patriarchal hierarchy and religious authority, while their fathers continued to hold the reins of the family and society. The turning point is roughly around the age of 40 or 50. We are now at the exact point in history when this age marks a border separating the new literate generations from their elders,

⁽³⁹⁾ Gilles Kepel, Introduction to *Intellectuels et militants de l'Islam contemporain*, Paris, Seuil, 1990, and *La revanche de Dieu. Chrétiens, juifs et musulmans à la reconquête du monde*, Paris, Seuil, 1991.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Hisham Sharabi notes that "over the last one hundred years, the patriarchal structures of Arab society, far from being displaced or truly modernized, have only been strengthened and maintained in deformed, 'modernized' forms. [...] Thus between rulers and ruled, between father and child, there exist only vertical relations: in both settings the paternal will is the absolute will, mediated in both the society and the family by a forced consensus based on ritual and coercion". *Neopatriarchy. A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, Oxford University Press, 1988.

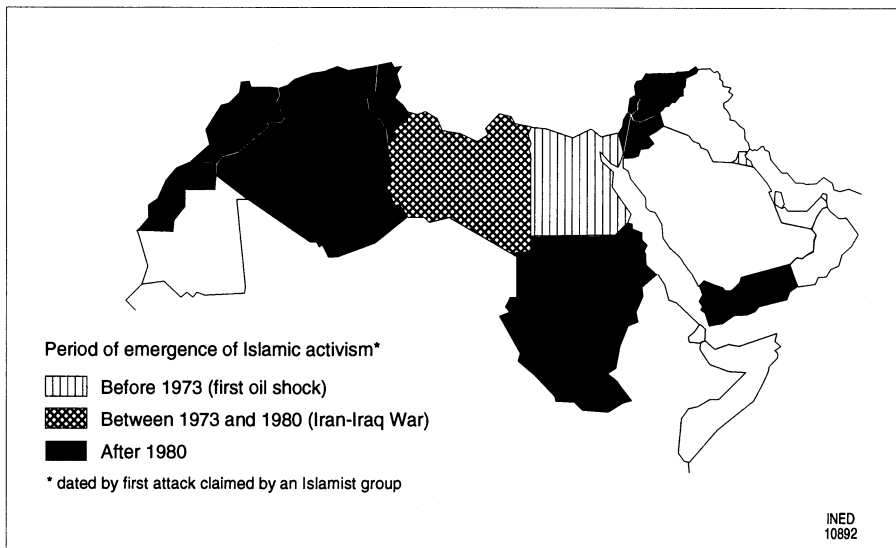
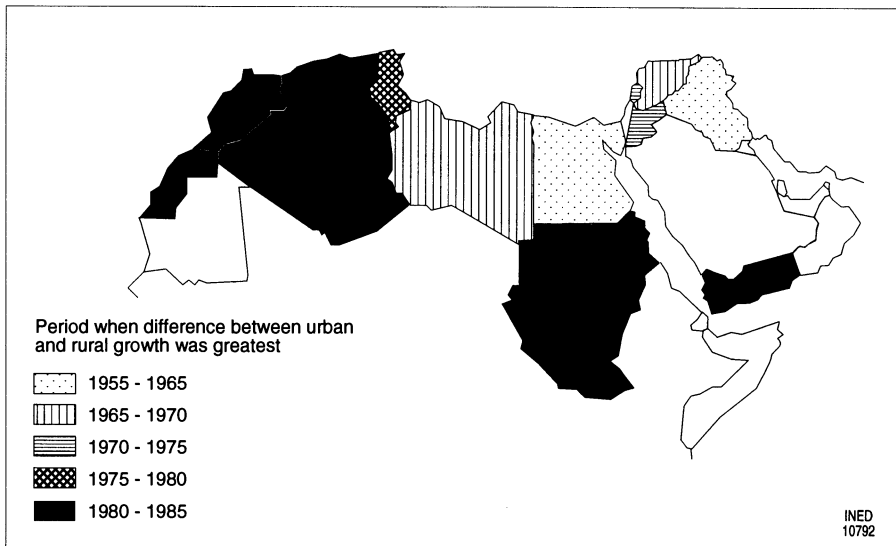


Figure 2. – Islamism and urban growth

Source: Based on (a) United Nations, *World Urbanization Prospects 1990*, New York, 1991 and (b) *Atlas mondial de l'Islam activiste*, 1991

TABLE 4. – AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER FAMILY IN ALGERIAN BIRTH COHORTS

	Cohort 1930	Cohort 1960	Cohort 1990
Ever born	7.2	8.2	4.8
Surviving at age 30*	3.9	5.9	4.3
* "South" model of mortality, levels 8 (1930), 14 (1960) and 21 (1990).			

the vast majority of whom received no instruction, and the rulers from the ruled, the sons from their fathers⁽⁴⁰⁾.

The demographic transition has had a dual effect. On the one hand, on the population pyramid: the population aged 20-30 has never had such weight among the over-20s, and no doubt never will again⁽⁴¹⁾. On the other hand, on family structure: the rapid mortality decline has considerably lengthened the co-existence of succeeding generations⁽⁴²⁾, as well as increased the number of brothers and sisters⁽⁴³⁾. In the past, when a man reached early adulthood, his father died and he succeeded him. There were few rival brothers because death had thinned their ranks. Today, not only is his father still alive⁽⁴⁴⁾, but the man is also in competition with his brothers (Table 4). In addition, the urban housing crisis means that many of these young adults, who are old enough to found a family but cannot afford to, continue to live under their father's roof, that is, under his thumb. In Algeria, the years following Independence were already hard ones for young men, who married early but did not set up home until late. Two decades of housing shortage and paternal resistance have generalized the solution of continuity between marriage and access to family power. It is true that marriage has been put back, but less than buying a home. This evolution has produced situations fraught with tension. In the past, the proportion of married men who were frustrated of their authority over the household decreased with age, in harmony with growing maturity; nowadays it peaks after the 30th birthday (Table 5).

Refuting the ideology of the fathers – arabism and socialism –, Islamism is in a way a collective sublimation of their impossible murder⁽⁴⁵⁾.

(41) The rising birth rates up to 1960 and declining infant and child mortality have slightly increased the proportion aged 20-30 compared to past levels. The fertility decline which started 10 to 20 years ago will shortly bring the proportion down again.

(42) These questions are summed up by Geoffrey McNicoll in *Adaptation of social systems to changing mortality regimes*, New York, The Population Council, 1984 (Center for Policy Studies, Working Paper no. 108).

(43) Norman Ryder has studied remarkably well the changes produced by an increased number of surviving children on the family life cycle and the generation contract, in: «Family structure and fertility», *United Nations Population Bulletin*, no. 15, New York, 1983, pp. 19-39.

(44) Supposing that fathers have their sons at age 35 on average, under the old mortality regime (40 years life expectancy at birth), the probability of reaching one's 35th birthday with a father still alive ($S_{70/35}$) was about 30% (United Nations general pattern of mortality); under the present regime (65 years life expectancy at birth), it is approaching 60%.

(45) In a free interpretation of history, Freud maintains that Islam is the only one of the three monotheisms which did not begin with the murder of its founder father. "Allah was much more grateful to his chosen people than Yahve had been to his. But this inner development of the new religion (Islam) soon came to a standstill, perhaps because it lacked the depth produced, in the case of the Jewish religion, by the murder of its founder." S. Freud, *L'homme Moïse et la religion monothéiste. Trois essais*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990.

TABLE 5. – PROPORTIONS OF ALGERIAN MEN EVER-MARRIED AND HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD, 1966 AND 1987

Age	Proportion heads of household	Proportion ever-married	Difference = Proportion of 'frustrated' men
1966			
20-24	22.2 %	45.6 %	23.4 %
25-29	58.8 %	80.5 %	21.7 %
30-34	78.4 %	91.6 %	13.2 %
35-39	85.3 %	95.0 %	9.7 %
1987			
20-24	5.3 %	10.8 %	5.5 %
25-29	27.6 %	50.4 %	22.8 %
30-34	58.8 %	82.8 %	24.0 %
35-39	79.2 %	93.7 %	14.5 %

Source : Population censuses, 1966 and 1987.

TABLE 6. – ENDOGAMY AND PRO-ISLAMIST VOTES IN TUNISIA

Governorate (%)	'Independent' votes on 2 April 1989 (% of total)	Consanguineous marriages in 1981, urban (% of total)
Jendouba	–	16.5
Siliana	–	15.5
Mahdia	–	17.6
Kairouan	5.2	26.2
Sidi Bouzid	7.0	33.9
Kasserine	8.7	16.1
Le Kef	10.2	11.7
Sfax	13.0	18.3
Nabeul	13.2	11.7
Beja	13.2	9.6
Medenine	16.9	22.6
Monastir	22.2	12.2
Gafsa	23.3	12.2
Bizerte	24.8	9.4
Tunis	27.6	7.8
Gabès	28.5	20.3
Sousse	29.0	9.6
Tunis sud	30.3	14.1

Source : The Tunisian press for votes, vital statistics for marriages.
– : no 'Independent' candidate.

If, in Algeria, the Madani venture is a family one⁽⁴⁶⁾, where father and son rub shoulders, this is something of an exception. Clothes give a better

⁽⁴⁶⁾ The son of 'Abbassi Madani, founder of the Islamic Salvation Front (which was outlawed in March 1992), is also a militant of this organization.

illustration of the kind of family conflict which is widely harboured by Islam. In North Africa and Egypt, young women – supposedly to honour tradition – wear a veil whose form was unknown barely ten years ago, before it was imported from Iran. When their mothers happen to wear one, it is the veil their own mothers and grandmothers wore before them. In Turkey, the contrast is more eloquent between the outgoing generation, who were impregnated with Kemalist secularism, and the Islamist relief. “Women wearing shorts symbolized the Western ideal of the 1920s. In the 1980s, we have women in turbans who burst into public places and claim the right to wear headscarves.”⁽⁴⁷⁾

In Tunisia, the general election held in April 1989 brought Islamist candidates to parliament for the first time. They were grouped under the label ‘Independent’ to get round the twice-over ban put on their party, first named the Tunisian Islamist Movement, then *Nahda*, “rebirth”. The geographic distribution of their election scores maps out the Islamic revival in this country. As one might expect, it is somewhat similar to those of urbanization and literacy. But more surprising is the extent to which it is the negative of a map representing a Muslim Arab custom which has existed from time immemorial: patrilineal endogamy, preferred cousin marriage between brothers’ children⁽⁴⁸⁾. The Islamists generally obtained their highest scores in the provinces which were least endogamous, and inversely⁽⁴⁹⁾. In other words, support for the return of a politicized Islam is greatest in those regions where the hold of traditional family values and solidarities is weakest. This may be because it is, like the rejection of consanguineous marriage, a symptom of anomie, or because the family of the faithful offers a reassuring substitute for the flesh-and-blood family which has become a source of conflict.

Conclusion

Power feeds on numbers, in nations and communities alike. The reverse was often true in the days when mortality was largely responsible for differences in population growth. The weakest groups had less access to the community’s wealth, which in turn limited their size. This no longer held when mortality declined in all groups, weak or strong, and fertility became the differentiating factor. Presently, it is the most deprived populations – religious groups or nations – which are growing most rapidly.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ The women in shorts were the first women athletes sent by Mustapha Kemal to international competitions; their photographs made front-page news. See: Nilüfer Göle, «Ingénieurs islamistes et étudiantes voilées en Turquie: entre le totalitarisme et l’individualisme», in *Intellectuels et militants de l’Islam contemporain*, *op. cit.* in fn. 39.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ These results and comments are taken from Françoise de Bel Air, *Approche anthropologique de l’endogamie dans les pays arabes. Le cas de la Tunisie*, DEA dissertation in Demography, EHESS, Paris, 1989.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Using linear regression, with a correlation coefficient of -0.54 , we obtain:
 Independent votes (%) = $28.0 - 0.44 \times$ consanguineous marriages (%)

This dissociation of power and numbers is a stage which will last as long as the transition towards uniformly low fertility levels. It will go hand in hand with a transformation of the population pyramid, that is, of the relative quantities of the different generations. Schooling has at the same time created a qualitative separation. We are at a fleeting moment in history when both the population share of young adults and the educational gap separating them from their parents are at a peak. The two are obviously linked, since more instruction is the key to lower fertility: the fact that there are so many young adults nowadays is due to the widespread illiteracy of their parents. In the patriarchal Arab societies, an exacerbated generation conflict has found a voice in Islamism.

Philippe FARGUES