

The Demographic Battle

In *Le rendez-vous des civilisations* (The meeting of civilisations) Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd emphasise that the demography of the Palestinians, Israeli Arabs or those residing in the occupied territories cannot be studied without reference to the Israeli Jews, because this is a region in which demography is a political instrument that leads to two major anomalies:

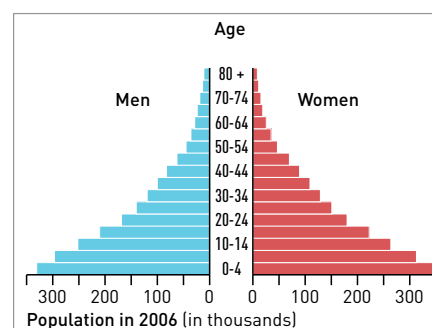
The Palestinians, initially one of the most highly educated peoples, find themselves involved in a demographic competition that has substantially diverted them from a normal trajectory. The fertility of Israeli Jewish women represents in the developed world another anomaly, nowhere else to be seen for a GDP per capita of 30,000 dollars. With 2.60 children per woman in 2005, these women appear much less Western than those of the various Lebanese communities, including the Shiites.¹

In *The Jewish State*, Théodore Herzl wrote that Jewish immigration to Palestine was likely to slow down eventually, and that, consequently, a continued colonisation would have to rely on the vigour of Jewish fertility. However, in order for Jews who immigrated from Europe to be able to have many children, the cost of raising a child had to be borne by the community within the framework of the kibbutzim at the beginning of Jewish settlement in Palestine, by the Yishuv during the British mandate, and then by the state of Israel after 1948. This policy culminated in the settlements, where the state invested billions of dollars in various types of aid for families. Since 2000 the birth rate of the Jewish population in the West Bank is higher than that of the Palestinians. In contrast, the Israeli Arabs have a still higher birth rate than that of the Israeli Jews; the Israeli Arab birth rate makes up 20 per cent of the Israeli population now against only 10 per cent in 1950, and that in spite of the vigour of the Jewish immigration since independence. The strong birth rate of the Israeli Arabs is considered an internal threat by Zionist leaders who divide this population for statistical reasons, into Christians, Druze, Bedouins, and Muslims, in order to reduce their political weight.

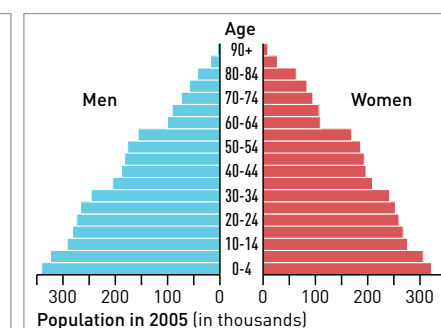
¹ Youssef Courbage and Todd Emmanuel (2007), *Le Rendez-vous des civilisations*, Paris, Seuil.

POPULATION PYRAMIDS FOR A DEMOGRAPHIC BATTLE

ARAB POPULATION IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES



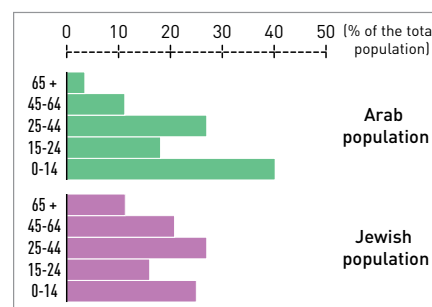
ISRAELI POPULATION (INCLUDING ISRAELI ARABS AND SETTLERS)



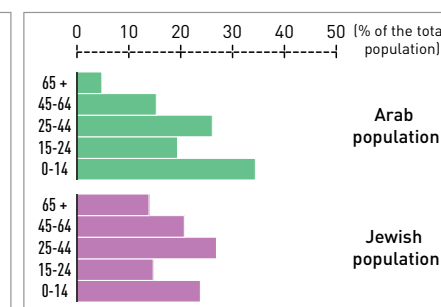
Sources: Statistical offices of the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel.

JEWS AND ARABS IN ISRAEL CLASSIFIED BY AGE

2005



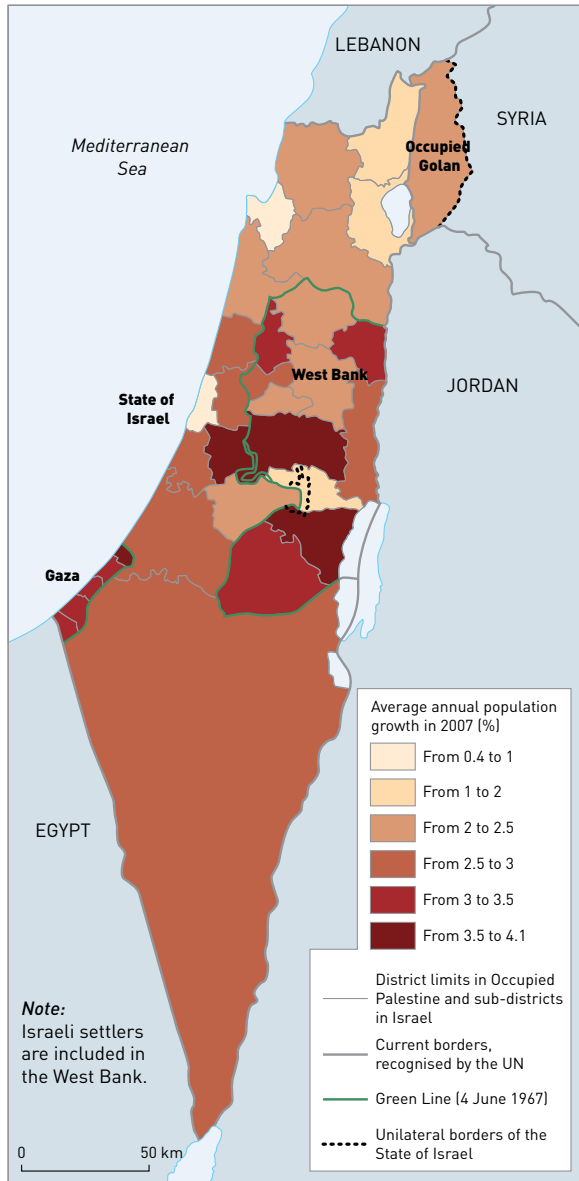
PROJECTION FOR 2020



Source: Statistical office of the State of Israel.

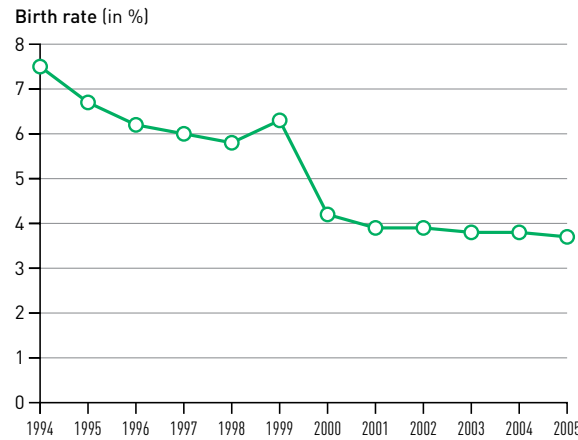
Palestinian society was mostly rural and peasant until 1948. The birth rate was therefore very high, one of the highest in the Arab world, because it benefited from the British healthcare system and from the awareness of the importance of a competing birth rate: it is a way to resist the rampant conquest of

POPULATION GROWTH 1997-2007



Sources: Statistical offices of the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel.

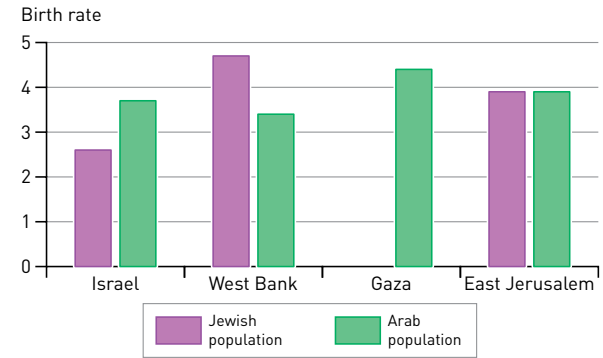
COLLAPSE OF THE PALESTINIAN BIRTH RATE



Source: Youssef Courbage.

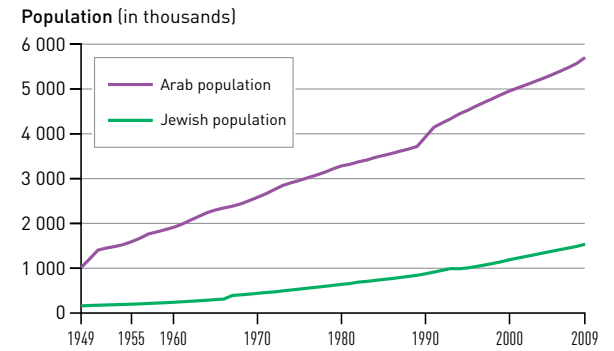
the territory through immigration and land appropriation. After the Nakba, the Israeli threat blocked the natural demographic development in the occupied territories (West Bank and Gaza) and even caused a rise in the birth rate, despite advances in education and urbanisation, two factors that anywhere else in the world lead to a drop of the birth rate. In 1990, in the middle of the first Intifada, the birth rate for Palestinian women in the occupied territories peaked at 7.57, making it the highest in the world. Palestinian women thus participated in the struggle to protect Arab territory by responding to Yasser Arafat's call to bear 12 children: 10 for the battle and 2 for the family. After holding at more than 6 children per woman during the 1990s, in the occupied territories the Palestinian birth rate plummeted in the early 2000s. The new Intifada did not bring about an increase in the birth rate; growing economic difficulties, linked to the closing-off of the

A FERTILITY BATTLE IN ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES



Source: Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd.

JEWISH AND ARAB POPULATION GROWTH IN ISRAEL



Source: Statistical office of the State of Israel.

occupied territories and the blocked peace process all weighed on the morale of families, who reduced their offspring in spite of the accelerated Jewish settlements.