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The evolution of
demography in the Americas



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Gérard-François DUMONT

Among all the continents, America has lived the most fantastic demographic adventure since the 18th century. In 1800, its population (27 million inhabitants), more than three times inferior to the one of Africa, represented only 2.8 % of the world population. In 1995, the proportion became 13.6 % and its population reached 774 millions.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC BIRTH OF THE AMERICAN CONTINENT

The 19th and the 20th century have hence seen the demographic birth of a continent, that changed the world ; it took place simultaneously in the two parts of the continent. North America had 6 millions of inhabitants in 1800. In 1995, their number is thought to be 293 millions. Their relative demographic weight has passed from 0.7 to 5.1 %. The demographic growth of Latin America (Central America, the Caribbean and South America) is less important but nevertheless bigger than the one of Europe - since it passed from 19 millions in 1800 (2.1 % of the world population) to 481 millions in 1995 (8.5 % of the world population).

Since demographic science makes sense only in the long run, it seems essential to understand the reasons that explain this evolution of a continent, reasons stemming from immigration, from the levels of fertility and from the process of demographic transition,⁽¹⁾ given the fact that to identify the respective effects of these three causes is far from obvious. The current situation compels to question ourselves over the demographic facts of today, as well as over the lessons we can draw from them for the future.

1 - The « demographic transition » scheme shows that the demographic evolution of different countries traverses, during an initial stage, a period of marked growth. The duration of this initial stage was particularly short in the developing countries, which benefited within the space of a few decades from the progress accumulated by the North for over a century. Then -the second stage- mortality no longer drops at the same rate and the birth rate begins to adapt itself to the new conditions of mortality. Dumont Gérard-François : *Démographie. Analyse des populations et démographie économique* ; Dunod, Paris, 1992.

Diversity of the migratory fluxes

The peopling of America proceeded first from immigration - or rather immigrations -, because there have been different influxes of immigrants at different times, coming from as many different countries. We should, for example, distinguish the first immigrants -Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, without neglecting the import of black slaves⁽²⁾ - from the following Irish, German and Italian influxes.

The symbol of the « Mayflower » bears no demographic weight. The English puritan « Pilgrim Fathers », who left Southampton on the 6th of September 1690 to found Plymouth in New England, were no more than fifty. Their demographic weight was then infinitesimal in a continent with a scattered population then estimated between 500,000 and 1,500,000 inhabitants ; but they were the first pioneers to settle in this country who, on purpose, learnt to cultivate corn. Their example will attract thousands, ten thousands and then millions of people.

Another example is the Irish migratory influx of 1846/1848 - the result of natural disasters and more precisely, of the potato disease at the origin of the great famine that led to a major demographic catastrophe : one million people died, another million emigrated, out of a population of some

2 - who, just before the American revolution represented 20 % of the population. *Histoire des Etat-Unis* ; Economica, Paris, 1980.

8,175,000 souls in 1841. This wave of one million Irishmen seems significant, but it is only the acute phase of a lasting tendency, involving considerable quantities, since there are few countries in the world that have faced so important an emigration. During the period 1845/1870, the estimated exodus is of 3 millions and reached 10 millions in about two centuries, from 1780 to 1970. Ireland has, therefore, suffered a demographic bleeding, particularly during the second half of the 19th century : the number of its inhabitants decreasing from the 8,170,000 mentioned above to 4,705,000 in 1891 - a 42 % fall - in spite of a rather high fertility rate.

Diversity of the dates of the migratory fluxes

In Latin America, the migratory influxes clearly came later than those of North America. Nevertheless, the political organisation was there previously. The treaty of Tordesillas, which led to part the world in two areas - a Spanish area to the west, a Portuguese area to the East - dated back to 1494. However, in 1500, explorer Pedro Alvares Cabral discovered Brazil, which let to Portugal to settle in South America. As early as 1535, Spain created a vice-royalty in Mexico, then in Peru in 1543. We had to expect the second half of the 19th century to record significant immigration movements. Argentina became a country of immigration only in the 1860s. In Brazil, this phenomenon developed only from the « Coffee Age » in the 1880s.

As for the Italian emigration to America, it became important from 1885, following a rather precise chronology. It was first Argentina which was more attractive with 22 % of the Italian emigrants in 1886. In 1889, the emigration reached 32 %. Those figures are related to the total emigration including other European countries which were privileged until 1886. In 1891, the Italian emigration towards Argentina fell to 8 %, then varied between 11 and 13 % during the following twenty years. Towards Brazil, emigration was more important during the decade 1890/1900 (between 7 and 36 % depending of the years), then it decreased between 2 and 4 % from 1901 to 1904. Emigration towards South America was then replaced by a migration towards the United States which grew from 16 % in 1886 to 43 % on the eve of the First World War.⁽³⁾

These various examples show clearly that today the peopling of America comes from migratory sources of very different geographical origins and dating. Then remains another difficulty concerning the causes of these migrations, which are incontestably diverse and intermingled.⁽⁴⁾

The political factor

The political factor is obvious and is not limited to the Mayflower example. Many minorities have looked to America for an answer to the oppression they were subjected to, or to their decision to

3 - Demarco Domenico : « L'émigration italienne de l'Unité à nos jours » in *Les migrations internationales* ; Editions du CNRS, Paris, 1980.

4 - Dumont Gérard-François : *Les migrations internationales. Les nouvelles logiques migratoires* ; Editions Sedes, Paris, 1995.

leave a territory on which ruled an unappreciated power. French emigrants (especially during the Terror period), Russians (after the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917), Poles (after partitions, then the Soviet Union) or Jews came under political factors.

However, one must not forget the emigration movements provoked by the poverty resulting from wrong policies in the countries of the migrants. For example, one of the migratory influxes from Great Britain to the USA resulted from the policy of the « enclosures ». By enclosing lands that were beforehand commons, by preventing the farmers from exploiting them for themselves and finding wood and game, the rich owners reduced them to starvation. From 1620 to 1642, 80,000 British farmers, men, women and children were led to desert their villages to attempt the adventure of settling in America.⁽⁵⁾

The economic factor

Yet, in those last examples, economic and political factors intermingle. The demographic birth of America comes from the economic hopes the continent aroused : wide spaces, virgin lands, an agricultural potential and even a lottery-of some sort as regards the attraction of gold mines, immortalised by numerous films, such as *The Gold Rush* by Chaplin. The main thing was the availability of

5 - Hill Christofer : *The Pelican economic history of Britain* ; tome 2 : *Reformation to industrial revolution* ; Penguin Books, Hamondsworth, UK, 1969.

lands, sometimes -it is true- taken away unscrupulously from their first occupants. Indeed, America has first been a continent of farmers. In particular, it has been the case of the United States, with their depending on Europe for a long time, especially on Great Britain, for their industrial needs. To supply San Francisco with water, it was easier to get the pipes sent from Pont-à-Mousson, France than from the East Coast of the federation.

On the other hand, the economic situation of the countries of destination is most important, considering the most obvious potentialities, cyclical variations, the legislation and the opportunities given to the migrants (such as the granting of lands for example).

The human factor

Its part should not be omitted. A potential emigrant is more tempted to materialise his project if he knows he will be welcomed by compatriots already in place in the country of destination. At the end of our 20th century, this type of migration is largely facilitated on the one hand by the new techniques of communication allowing easy and frequent exchanges between countries, and on the other hand, by cheap and fast transports.

The migratory transition

The demographic factor is an essential component as well. Indeed, the way the demographic transition and the industrial development have occurred in Europe brings an important element to the understanding of immigration in America. This is possible in Europe since most countries of this continent have statistical data for this period.

We know that the development of demographic transition leads to a significant increase of the natural growth rate, which will decrease during the second stage of the transition. Now, it appears that European emigration, and thus American immigration, often reach their maximum when the natural growth rate is situated at its higher levels or near them. In other words, America received a particularly important immigration from a country considered separately when this country recorded maximal difference between its birth rate and its death rate.⁽⁶⁾ For example, the rate of emigration of the population of the United Kingdom, of Ireland, of Germany and then of Norway and Sweden reached its highest peak in the 1880s, at a moment when their natural growth rate reached a peak too. Norway sent to the United States two thirds of the natural rise of its population and unfortunate Ireland more than the whole of it.⁽⁷⁾

6 - Thomas B. : *Migration and economic growth, a study of Great Britain and the Atlantic community* ; Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, 1954, second edition 1973.
7 - Hobsbawm E.J. : *The age of Capital* : Abacus, London, 1995.,

The magic triangle

Hence appears a kind of « magic triangle » making emigration easier with the encounter of economic shocks (rise of productivity, traditional firms not hiring anymore, disappearance of industrial integration leading to squeeze employment, unfavourable circumstances of the demographic revolution (a fall of the death rate leading to an increase of the natural growth) and of the new developments of transports, especially by sea. This last point is essential for during this period preceding the appearance of air travel, and particularly of mass air travelling, emigration rates reached a higher degree in maritime countries than in continental ones. Besides, ship building met very quickly the requirements arising - in number as well as in tonnage-of launched ships.⁽⁸⁾

The most attractive countries

The various causes of emigration will lead, between 1821 and 1933,⁽⁹⁾ to an important emigration flux, particularly towards the Americas. Indeed, among the eleven countries receiving during this period more than 500,000 immigrants, only 4 are not american : Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and Mauritius. The latter received 4,932,000 immigrants, that is to say a limited proportion (8.71 % of the total), whereas the 7 others, each in America,

8 - The tonnage of steamships afloat passes from 32,000 tons in 1831 to 3,293,072 in 1876 : it has hence increased of 100 % in forty years. In the same time, 310 kilometres of rails are built. Von Neumann Spallart : *Übersichten des Weltwirtschaft* : Stuttgart, 1880, mentioned by Hobsbawn, op. cit. The world tonnage reached 68,500,000 tons in 1939 and 136,000,000 tons in 1961.

9 - The choice in the dates results from the statistical data available.

welcomed 51,856,000 of them. These migrants were, besides, very unevenly spread out since the United States had taken the lion's share with 34,244,000 immigrants,⁽¹⁰⁾ that is 66 % of the total. Then came Argentina (6,405,000), Canada (5,906,000), Brazil (4,431,000), Cuba (875,000) and Uruguay (713,000).

If the influxes of immigration are related to the initial population, the grading is slightly different, since, according to estimations, come in the lead, Uruguay, whose immigrants would have represented eight times the initial population, Canada, 5.5 times more, Argentina, 5 times more, as well as the United States whose population was estimated at 10,701,000 inhabitants in 1821. Brazil and Cuba are in a little different situation. For, the population of the former was estimated at 4,028,000 inhabitants in 1821 and it welcomed 4,431,000 transoceanic migrants until 1933. The date of 1821 coincides with a major political event, for in 1822, the independence of Brazil was proclaimed - a fact, which was followed by an economic renewal and a will to open the country to foreigners, in order to people this vast territory and to supply with manpower the new economic culture above mentioned, the culture of coffee. The population of Cuba was estimated at 1,587,000 souls in 1901 ; immigration increased this figure of 54 % between 1908 and 1932.

10 - Chesnais Jean-Claude : *La transition démographique*, PUF, Paris, 1986.

Indirect effects

Immigration has contributed to the birth or the rebirth of America by its direct effects (population flux), as well as indirect effects. Statistics often give the impression that demographic growth is the sum of a natural balance (birth rate less death rate) and of a migratory balance (immigrants less emigrants) as if those phenomena were independent, as if the migratory fluxes were of no consequence. But in fact it is obvious that the migratory balance influences the natural balance in two ways at least : on the one hand, the immigrants bring their ability or their desire to procreate and, *ceteris paribus*, contribute hence to increase the birth rate. On the other hand, even if they increase the number of dead people, the result is often a diminishing of the death rate since they generally have a rather favourable age structure (the young are the ones who leave their country). Moreover, emigration has inevitably made a selection : it implies generally a better health than the average. Thus, when statistics mention the net part of immigration in the total growth of the population, this figure represents only part of it since it does not include the effect of immigration on the natural balance. In fine, it would be excessive to suggest that America would have been under-populated if it hadn't taken advantage of immigration. It can be admitted, indeed, that if its population had risen as the average of the populations of the world, it would have passed from 12 millions -estimation of

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1750⁽¹¹⁾ - to 86 millions in 1995, a figure quite obviously inferior to the estimated 774 millions.

This last figure is the fruit of immigration, determined by the different political, economic, demographic and spatial factors. It can't be understood, as we have seen, without considering the demographic transition of the countries of origin, and of European countries especially. However, it can't even be understood without taking into account the specific demographic transition of American countries.

11 - The figure concerning America's population in the previous centuries as been debated a lot. Houdaille Jacques : « *La population de l'Amérique* » ; *Population*, vol.41, n°3, mai-juin 1986.

THE EFFECTS OF DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION

The countries of America, just like the others, have faced a process of demographic transition,⁽¹²⁾ different in intensity and in times according to the cases. The process, as everybody knows, started up with the evolution of mortality which decreased more or less early and more or less rapidly depending on the dates of adoption and depending on the way better hygiene conditions and more developed sanitary techniques were spread.

The example of Mexico

Let us take the example of Mexico, which is, still in 1995, the second country in Latin America for the number of its population (an estimated 93.7 millions in 1995), after Brazil (157.8 millions), and the third country in America as a whole, the United States (263.2 millions) being the most peopled. We should first remember that Mexico has been a country of immigration, even if the entries of foreigners have never been there as important as in the US, and even if the demographic weight of the native population has always dominated.⁽¹³⁾ In the course of the 20th century, some demographic indicators demonstrate clearly the result of a demographic transition. First, and before the latter, that is to say in the 1930s, Mexico experienced erratic variations in its birth rate and in its mortality, both high-levelled, producing a natural balance slightly positive, nil or slightly negative according to circumstances.

12 - Dumont Gérard-François : *Le monde et les hommes. Les grandes évolutions démographiques* ; Editions Litec, Paris, 1995.

13 - Monnet Jérôme : *Le Mexique* ; Nathan, Paris, 1994.

Thus in the 1910s, during the fighting of the revolution, the birth rate seemed to decrease because of an important overmortality, especially among the generations old enough to procreate. In fact, the population decreased, ranging from 15,100,000 in 1910 to 14,800,000 in 1921. The decrease of the mortality, resulting from the diffusion of more efficient sanitary methods, only started in the 1930s. Since then mortality failed on a long lasting term under 30 ‰. It will go on in a continuous way for years on. The death rate of 1995 is one of the lowest in the world, with 5 ‰, a fall of 74 % in comparison with 1945. In the meantime, infant mortality declined within significant proportions, passing from 111 ‰ in 1945 to 34 ‰ in 1995. In other words, in 1945, among 100 new-born children, 11 died before they had completed their first year. There are less than four of them in 1995. Thanks to such progress, life expectancy at birth -which was of 37 years in 1930- reached 62 years in 1962 and 72 years in 1995. The average longevity hoped for new-born Mexican children had thus doubled in two generations. It was a novel and significant evolution, which automatically produced an increase of the population. But this rise proved to be much more important, since the birth rate remained high until the 1960s, whereas the death rate was already clearly decreasing. The natural growth - which had even been negative for some years- seemed to reach its peak in the 1960s, mortality having been divided by three.

Some demographic indicators about Mexico

Date	Population (millions)	Birth Rate (%)	Death Rate (%)	Natural Growth	Fecundity Index	Infant Mortality (‰)
1905	14,3	34	33,1	0,9	n.k.*	n.k.
1915	14,9	30	32	0	n.k.	n.k.
1925	15,2	33,1	26,5	6,6	n.k.	n.k.
1935	18,1	42,3	22,6	19,7	n.k.	n.k.
1945	22,7	44,9	19,5	25,4	n.k.	n.k.
1955	30,3	46,4	13,3	33,1	5,95	83,3
1965	41,5	44,1	9,8	34,3	6,20	64,5
1975	60	37,5	7,2	30,3	5,39	52,8
1985	79,7	32	6	26	4,7	53
1995	93,9	27	5	22	3,1	34

*n.k. = not know

Sources : APRD

The figures are estimated from Chesnais (op. cit.), from the *World Population Data Sheets* and from the INEGI (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística, de Geografía y de Informática, Mexico*). They are sometimes different from those mentioned by Maria Eugenia Cosío-Zavala, *Changement de fécondité au Mexique et politiques de population*; L'Harmattan, Paris, 1994. However, this book excludes the question of mortality, which is yet essential for the analysis of the changes in fecundity. This reason can't allow us to have a satisfactory approach of the Mexican demographic evolution.

Deceleration

In the 1960s, Mexico entered a phase of natural growth deceleration. The death rate being perpetuated, there followed a decrease in the fertility index and in the birth rate, but the former decreased much faster than the latter. In fact, from 1965 to 1995, within a generation, fertility fell exactly by half (from 6.2 to 3 children per woman). At the same time, the birth rate fell by 39 % (from 44.1 to 27 ‰) and the natural growth rate by 36 % (from 34.3 to 22 ‰).

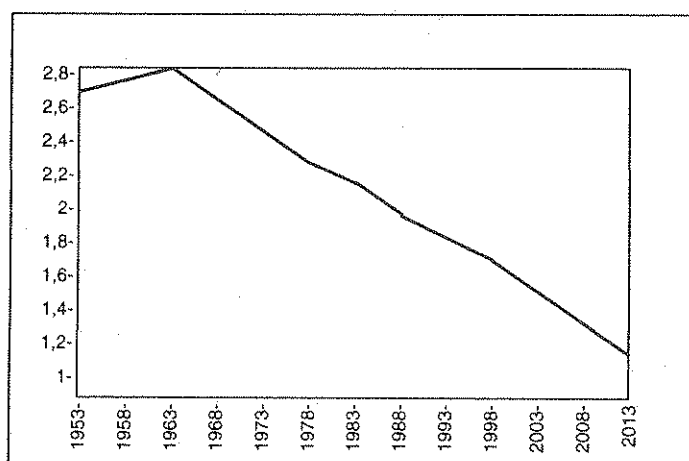
A phenomenon of momentum, so important in demography, has to be taken into account. This is the situation of a ship which keeps going on while the captain has given orders to stop the engines. The fertility rate has been divided by two, but it refers to more numerous generations old enough to procreate, and the number of births recorded decreased therefore less than fertility (births related to the population of women between 15 and 49 years of age). Nevertheless, the deceleration is clearly obvious. In a first phase, the growth rate had decreased, but the surplus of annual births on the decrease kept growing because the birth rate applied to a more numerous population while mortality was decreasing.

A second stage appeared in the 1980s with a drop of the annual birth surplus over the deaths. 1985 estimation gave 3,260 millions ; in 1965, 2,350 millions. Thus, progresses the logic of demographic transition, with the progressive evolution of the population towards a phase of stabilisation to a level taking into account the greater longevity of the inhabitants and the effects of the very rapid rhythm of the transition. In fact, we can consider that in Mexico, the transition that started in the 1930s could end around 2010 with a fecundity index equal to the simple replacement of generations rate.⁽¹⁴⁾ In that case, Mexico would have performed its demographic transition in three quarters of a century, that is to say much more rapidly than the European countries. However, a shorter transition generally

14 - That is 2.19 children per woman for the years 2010/2015. It corresponds to the common hypothesis of the *World population Prospects, the 1992 Revision* : United Nations, New York, 1993.

expresses itself through a more important difference between the levels of population reached at the end of it⁽¹⁵⁾ and those noticed at the beginning, that is to say 16.6 millions for Mexico. What is called « transitional multiplier » would thus be of 7.5, i.e. superior to the one of European countries but inferior to the one of countries with a late and intensive transition.

Latin America : natural growth (per cent) until 1990 then average hypothesis (each 5 years) estimated by the UNO



Source : APRD - Pierre Descroix : chiffres : World Population Projections

The example of Mexico shows that the demographic variations of the 20th century, as new as they are, are not incomprehensible phenomena leading inevitably to reactions of fear but that they result of variations observed in death rate and in longevity among a given population.

15 - In the present hypothesis, 215 millions inhabitants in 2015.

DEMOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY IN AMERICA

If, from now on, we consider the whole of the 39 countries of America, we are struck by their great diversity. Certainly, the range of the populations and territories is well-known, grading between the United States. (with 283.2 million inhabitants and 9,363,387 squarekilometres) and Saint Kitts and Nevis in the Caribbean (with 40,000 inhabitants and 54 squarekilometres). Likewise, the densities are greatly different : between, the Barbados for example, (609 inhabitants per squarekilometre), El Salvador (283 inhabitants per squarekilometre), and Argentina (13 inhabitants per squarekilometre) or Canada (3 inhabitants per squarekilometre).

Typology

Out of this diversity, we can draw an attempt at typology to situate the evolution of the countries of America at the end of the 20th century. Four types of countries can be distinguished : the ones that have ended their demographic transition, with a demographic system characterised by low mortality and low fertility rates ; the ones with a transition in a terminal stage ; the ones with a very advanced transition because mortality there has reached a low level, whereas fecundity heads clearly for a downward trend ; finally, the ones who experience a late demographic transition, their mortality having admittedly greatly decreased, but their important fertility lea-

ding to record relatively high growth rates.

The countries in which transition is over are characterised by a fertility generally lower than 2,2 children per woman, -hence equal or lower than the simple replacement of generations⁽¹⁶⁾ -, by a very low infant mortality always below 25 ‰, -most often even lower since it is, for example, of 7.0 in Canada and of 8.0 in the United States-, and by a natural growth rate equal or lower than 1.5 ‰ and even lower than 1 ‰. This first type concerns both countries of North America, no country of Central America or of South America, but 8 countries of The Caribbean (Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, The Barbados, Cuba, Guadeloupe, Martinique, The Dutch West Indies, Puerto Rico). In all these territories, another common characteristic is the ageing trend of the population, marked by the drop in the proportion of people under twenty and the rise of the elderly. The rhythm of ageing is very different depending on the demographic story proper to each country, but in certain areas, it could unbalance the pyramid-shaped diagram representing population by age-groups, and lead to prejudicial outcomes. The US. and Canada, whose ageing process is more advanced, certainly know a rhythm slowed down under the influence of immigrants with a higher fertility than the natives.

A second type of countries concerns the territories where demographic transition is ending. For

16 - Schooyans Michel : *Comprendre les évolutions démographiques* : Editions de l'APRD, Paris, 1995.

all of them, fertility has decreased down to a slightly higher level than the generations replacement, between 2.6 and 2.4 children per woman. The natural growth rate has clearly decreased and is generally below 20 ‰ in a downward phase. If it is still alive in Jamaica, it is because the death rate is very low (6 ‰), specially owing to a low infant mortality. This category thus gathers three countries in the Caribbean (Dominica, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis) and three in South America (Guyana, Chile and Uruguay).

Advanced transition or late transition

In the third place, we must consider the countries of advanced transition or very advanced transition. They have an annual natural growth rate which has passed under 2.2 ‰, except Venezuela owing to the structure by age and the low infant mortality (20.2 ‰). Eleven countries in America belong to this category, out of which two in Central America (Costa Rica and Mexico), four in The Caribbean (Dominican Republic, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago) and five in South America (Argentina, Brazil, Columbia, Surinam and Venezuela). Argentina could almost be viewed in its final phase considering its infant mortality level (23.6 ‰). Nevertheless, we must leave it in this group since it really belongs to the countries whose fertility has reached a level undoubtedly situated over the simple replacement of generations, but

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already lower than 3.5 children per woman, that is to say about half of the levels stated during the demographic system prior to the transition.

Demographic typology of the countries of America (1995)

geographic region number of inhabitants	ended transition	advanced or very advanced transition	ending transition	late transition
North America 293 millions	Canada US.			
Central America 126 millions		Costa Rica Mexico		Belize Guatemala Honduras Nicaragua El Salvador
The Caribbean 36 millions	Antigua y Barbuda Dutch West Indies The Bahamas Barbados - Cuba Guadeloupe Martinique Puerto Rico	Dominican Republic Saint Lucia Saint Vincent Trinidad y Tobago	Dominica Jamaica St Kitts and Nevis	Granada Haiti
South America 319 millions		Argentina Brazil Columbia Surinam Venezuela	Guyana Chile Uruguay	Bolivia Ecuador Paraguay Peru

Sources : APRD

Finally remain the countries whose late transition can often be explained by some development lag due to the inadequate choices made by certain political regimes. Eleven countries form this group, out of which 5 in Central America (Belize,

Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador), two in The Caribbean (Granada, Haiti) and four in South America (Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru). They have indeed recorded a diminution in their mortality rate, their fertility and their growth rate, but in 1995, those rates are still high enough, that is superior to 3.5 children per woman as for the synthetic fertility index and to 2.3‰ as for the natural growth rate. What's more - and this should be the first element to consider- these countries have yet significant progress to achieve as regards hygiene, since most often, their infant mortality remains rather high : for example, in 1995, it is assessed at 74‰ in Haiti, 71‰ in Bolivia, 60‰ in Peru and 50‰ in Ecuador.

Thus, the situation shows contrasts depending on the countries and it could even be greater than the above typology demonstrates if were taken into account the demographic data of infranational standard. Using in the singular the turn of phrase « the world population » is in fact a simplification, because in the world there are various, different populations : we should, thus, consider « the world populations » in the plural. Besides, we should speak of « the populations of America » and not of « the population of America ».

POPULATION, DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPECTIVE

Is the greater demographic dynamics of Latin America a handicap annihilating development ? This is by no means certain when considering the progress achieved thanks to the efforts of human ingenuity.

So, when you study the index of human development⁽¹⁷⁾ made up of life expectancy at birth, of education and income levels, most of the countries of Latin America appear well placed. For example, among the 125 developing countries that are studied, six out of the first ten are part of Latin America (Barbados, The Bahamas, Costa Rica, Belize, Argentina and Chile). Mexico ranks 19th and Brazil 34th. Latin America admittedly has still a long way to go to achieve development : 44 % of the countrymen and 10 % of the urban citizens do not have running water yet ; about 20 million boys and girls cannot have access to higher education ; in some Latin American metropolises, more than 100,000 children live in the street ; as a consequence of wars and civil unrest, the continent counts 150,000 refugees...

Progress has nevertheless been significant : life expectancy at birth is 90 % of the level recorded in the developed countries, the rate of added enrolments in high schools and in universities has increased more than eight times, passing from 4 to 31 million pupils between 1960 and 1991. The infant mortality rate has decreased of more than a half between 1960 and 1992, passing from

17 - *Rapport mondial sur le développement humain 1995* ; Economica, Paris, 1995.

105 to 45 deaths out of a thousand living beings.

What are the prospects ? Given the demographic logic, the total populations of America should keep on growing, but at a clearly lower rate than during the second half of the 20th century. Since 1990, the demographic development rate of the continent has already fallen to 19 ‰ (and even less given the imperfection of statistics). This means a decrease of 32 % in one generation compared to the rate of 27.8 ‰ for the period 1960/1965.

Prospects

In fact, during the first thirty years of the 21st century, and provided no structural changes, difficult to foresee, occur, demography in America should know three types of evolution according to the countries.

On the one hand, the evolution of the countries with a very slow growth, including North America and the countries whose transition seems in terminal phase such as Chile ; on the other hand, the evolution of the countries with a significant growth in spite of a clear downward trend. Besides we can wonder if the real figures are not underestimated when we observe the lowered computations proposed for different countries of Africa or for Mexico City.⁽¹⁸⁾ Several cen-

18 - Dumont Gérard-François : « Les enjeux démographiques du XXI^e siècle : vérités et légendes » ; *Politique internationale*, n° 72, été 1996. Two French authors, Claude Bataillon et Louis Parabière, have published in 1988 a book entitled *Mexico aujourd'hui : la plus grande ville du monde*. It is obvious that it is not exact anymore today and that Mexico (16,822 million inhabitants in 1990) takes place after Tokyo (28, 738 millions), New York-Philadelphia (23,901 millions), and Seoul (17,475 millions), according to the figures of Moriconi-Ebrard : *Geopolis*, Anthropos, Paris, 1994. However, the mistake giving to Mexico a world record remains common, as for example in *Le Monde* of the 24th of May 1996. On the contrary, when Cortès penetrated in Mexico in 1519, the « aztec » city, with 300 000 souls, was more peopled than no city in Europe. See Gruzinsky Serge : *Histoire de Mexico* ; Fayard, Paris, 1996.

suses have denied computer reckoning which were not considering so rapid drops in fertility. Concerning demographic matters, lots of people may have made an error similar to the one regularly made during the 1950s. At that time, the importance of the mortality fall was underestimated. Nowadays, the importance and the rapidity of the fertility decrease seem to be underrated. As for the last type, where the infant mortality or the fertility downward trend comes later or slower, the growth rate could stay rather high longer, as in Bolivia.

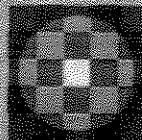
All these analyses show that demographic knowledge shall not be limited to the schematic approximations too often presented by the media. Any serious study about population matters leads to refute hasty conclusions and advertising slogans announcing statistical disasters ; but, on the other hand, one should take into account the results strict analysis allows to perceive. The demographic histories of countries fit in with logics depending on development policies, on the ability to mobilise human resources, on sanitary, economic and social progress and on cultural behaviours proper to each people.

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« The evolution of demography in the Americas »,
english translation, by Catherine Della Pietra and Michel
Marceau,
of « L'aventure démographique des Amériques », *Défense
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