DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AND CHALLENGES IN CASE OF
STATEHOOD IN PALESTINE, 2012-2048

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1. Introduction

There are two ways to analyze demographic trends and challenges in Palestine. The first is to examine Palestine as one would a “normal” country, and study its size, growth, and population structure. This is done to project in the future the impact of population growth on education, employment, aging etc. This is the classical way to proceed. But, considering the fact that Palestine is an occupied country and that its territory is divided, we have to take into account not only the demography of the occupied population but also that of the occupier. Hence, Palestinian and Israeli demography are deeply embedded. In the territory of «historical» Palestine, demography could not be detached from the Israeli project and Palestinian responses to that project.

- Enlarging the Jewish population-and concurrent efforts to diminish the Palestinian population are major strategic objectives of the Zionist project. This was true before the Nakba in 1948 and has been the case since. This project had always been demographically sensitive, being populationist, thus looking for the larger Jewish population on the land and pronatalist, seeking the highest birthrate. Initially, the project could only be based on immigration, due to the very slight number of native Palestinian Jews. But later on, when immigration brought sizable number of Jews to the shores of Palestine, the role of fertility in population growth became more effective. It is a well-known that ultra-orthodox and religious Jews have large numbers of children. Less known but maybe more significant is that although less intensive, a pro-natalist behavior comes across all segments of the society. By a mirror-effect, the Palestinians have also been engaged in a “war of cradles” or a “battle of numbers”, a behavior which showed on even before the creation of the state of Israel. Yet, by definition, benefiting from the sole asset of fertility (no possible immigration).

- As far as Statehood is concerned, it is obvious that the establishment of a single state in Palestine, or of two states depends a great deal on the population dynamics of the two populations.
2. “Populationism” and “Pro-natalism”

- For the Palestinians fertility for a long while had been an anomaly in the theory of demographic transition. Even before the creation of the Jewish State, fertility rates were abnormally high and definitely higher than those of the Arab countries. A reaction of self-defense, through increasing the number of births to confront Jewish immigration is therefore very plausible.

3. An atypical Jewish fertility...

- However, things have changed. Palestinian fertility is no more an anomaly to the paradigm of fertility transition. Now, it is the turn of the Jews in Israel to become the anomaly to this theory. Jews in Israel gather in their hands all the components of a low fertility: high GNP per capita (around 40 000 USD), no illiteracy, high intake ratio in secondary and university education, high urbanization. Yet, despite all of these so-called “inhibiting” factors to reproduction, Jewish fertility has not only stabilized at a high plateau but is even increasing, a most uncommon situation for relatively wealthy countries.

- With an increase from a high 2.6 in 1990 to 3.0 in 2010, Jewish fertility is likely to surpass Palestinian fertility in a matter of years: Hence the fertility rate of Palestinians in Israel is now at 3.3 children per woman and in the West Bank it is 3.8. Interestingly, Diaspora Jews have only 1.5 child on average, half the rate of Jewish families in Israel.

4. ...confronted to the Palestinian fertility decline

- Palestinian fertility, on the contrary, after ups and downs during the first intifada, is following an opposite pattern. During the seventies and particularly during the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, fertility was politically motivated and considered as an efficient weapon against Israeli occupation and colonization.

- However, Palestinian fertility rates have begun to shift since the Second Intifada. This has occurred under a new set of conditions, both economic and ideological. What has been the magnitude of this fall? Figures are sometimes contradictory, depending whether their source comes from the MOH estimates or from the PCBS: 3.4 according to the MOH, 4.5 according to the PCBS survey of 2006, 4.05 in the West Bank and 5.3 in Gaza. Although very significant this fertility decline didn’t stall: another survey in 2010 has shown that Palestinian fertility is no more than 4.2: 3.8 in the West Bank, 4.9 in Gaza.
5. One or two states, depending on demography?

- What is the meaning of these statistics? Demography is not neutral, it can represent a political threat. The highest threat to Palestinian statehood in the next future, is the competing demographic challenge of the Jewish population, particularly in the conflict zones: the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

One example illustrates this point to which we will return later on. Chart 1 shows the phenomenal growth of the numbers of Israeli settlers housed in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967: from 41,000 in 1977 to 560,000 in 2011, a 14 fold increase in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), the annual rate of growth of the Jewish settlers is 4% per annum, for the Palestinian it is only 2.6%.

6. The amazing increase of the settler population: low mortality...

If Jewish settlers in the West Bank enjoy a higher growth than the Palestinians, this is due to a set of four factors: a lower crude mortality rate than the Palestinians due to a higher life-expectancy (among the top in the world); fewer aged persons above 65 years, since settlements attract mainly young couples with or without children. Besides low mortality rate, settlements benefit from a high immigration rate from inside the Green Line, considered as “internal” migration by the Israelis, but “international” migration by the Palestinians and the world community. This Jewish immigration enables an enhancement of the standard of living for those immigrants.
Although immigration tends to dampen with time, it is still very vivid for the Jewish settlers. Recently, every year there were some 5,000 newcomers thanks to immigration alone, either from the other side of the Green Line or directly from abroad. Contrary to this, the Palestinians have been significantly emigrating abroad especially from the West Bank since 2000 as shown by the International Migration Survey taken in 2010 by PCBS. But immigration does not tell the whole story. The crux of the problem is the phenomenal fertility rate of the settlers compared to the Palestinians.

7. A “sub Saharan” fertility

The last Israel Central Bureau of Statistics yearbook of 2011 shows comparisons of fertility between Jews settlers and Palestinian “natives” in the West Bank.

Settler’s fertility has been rising over the 4 decades following the 1967 occupation. In 2010, it had reached (without Jerusalem, where fertility is even higher), 5.18 children per woman, thus increasing from an already high level of 5.06, in 2009, a 2.3% rise. Settler’s fertility rate dominates the Palestinian’s rate: 5.18 versus 3.8, thus more than one child per woman or 37% more.
8. Population “momentum”, and the low age at marriage

- Another subtle reason for the high rate of growth of the settler’s population, is the population momentum, i.e. the fact that they have a high number of youngsters and the ability for high number of youngsters to marry early and to reach reproductive ages very quickly. (Chart 2), a very young age-sex structure comparable to what is to be fund now in Sub Saharan Africa. Where age at first marriage, both females and males is also particularly low.

Chart 2: Age-sex structure of the Jewish population in the West Bank, 2010
9. Jerusalem, an even more complex issue

- Singling out Jerusalem for close study is easy since, the Israeli CBS is very sensitive to the demographic fate of the Holy City. It publishes detailed data that suggests that the “war of cradles” here is even more intense.

- The Palestinian population in East-Jerusalem had kept a high fertility for a relatively long period. Yet, this situation did not last forever. Now, Palestinians have still 3.84 children on average in 2010, but this is lower than previous years and less by 11%, the Jewish inhabitants of the Holy City: 4.26 (4.16, the previous year). Fertility disequilibrium is even more pronounced, considering East-Jerusalem alone, fertility of the quarter of a million settlers (the precise figure is open to discussion), 5.40 hence exceeds the Palestinian one 3.84, by 40%.

Chart 3: Jewish and Palestinians of 1948 fertility
10. The comparative situation of the Palestinians of 1948

- In the sixties of last century, with almost 9 children per woman (a worldwide record level), the Palestinians of 1948, those who are entitled to the Israel citizenship, contrary to those of annexed Jerusalem much exceeded the Jews, whose fertility was high but much lower: 3.4. With around 17% of the population of Israel now (in the 4 June 1967 borders, this proportion did not change much, meaning that that Palestinian fertility inside Israel was somehow contained, thanks to huge immigration streams.

- But now on, there is convergence of fertilities inside Israel which diminish the impact of a decreasing Jewish immigration. The increasing Jewish fertility, year after year -after a low of 2.6 it is now in the vicinities of 3 (2.97 for Jews by religion, 2.88 for “Jews and others (i.e. non Arab Christians, no religion, contrasts with the Palestinians of 1948 fertility, which was cut threefold reaching a low of 3.3 now, hence few decimal point above Jewish fertility.

11. A reversal in fertility situation

- Demographic trends, fuelled by fertility trends, the most effective component of population dynamics, shows (chart 4), proves the reversal of reproduction behavior, with the inversion in the West Bank and especially in East Jerusalem. It shows also that in Israel, the convergence between Jewish and Palestinian of 1948 fertility is a matter of few years.
• The remnants of high Palestinian fertility are to be found only in the Gaza strip only: 4.9 children per woman (but half what it used to be during first intifada).
12. Population perspectives and Statehood

- We present now different sets of population perspectives from now on until 2048, pointing out the issues they raise in terms of statehood for the Palestinians. (Table 1).

- Chart 5 presents the likely evolution of the total Palestinian population (West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza, Palestinians of 1948) compared to the Jewish population in historical Palestine. As of 2020, the number of Palestinians will be equal to the number of Jews: 6.9 millions.
Table 1: Population perspectives in historical Palestine, 2011-2048

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### Proportions (%)

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Annual rate of increase (p. 1000)
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• But, afterwards the Palestinians will increase more, namely thanks to population momentum. This is especially true given the higher fertility rate of the Gaza Strip, (4.9). This is higher than Palestinian fertility of the West Bank and of East-Jerusalem.

• On the basis of this chart, we may infer very simply that a one state on the whole of historical Palestine is inconceivable, for the Palestinians, naturally but also for the Israelis, whose occupation will create an inextricable demographic issue 9.2 million Jews (46%) dominating a majority of 11.8 million Palestinians.

Chart 5: The perspectives of the Palestinian and Jewish populations in historical Palestine
13. What then without Gaza?

• Since 2005, Gaza had been detached by the Israelis from the area of direct occupation. This was mainly done for demographic reasons: few thousand settlers could not easily live amidst 1.5 million Palestinians, according to the then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to his advisers. But their idea was certainly also to detach by all means and forever the Gaza strip from the West Bank, besides detaching East-Jerusalem from the West Bank.

• Hence, it makes some sense to look at the demographic perspectives of historical Palestine excluding Gaza. (Chart 6) The political rationale behind this, is while retaining for themselves almost the entire territory of historical Palestine, Israel will still benefit from a comfortable Jewish majority, even in 2048: 9.2 million Jews for a total of 6.7 million Palestinians living in the West Bank, in East-Jerusalem and in Israel proper.

Chart 6: Same perspectives, without Gaza
A one state, under a demographic Jewish majority becomes then conceivable. Besides, looking carefully at the trend of the two curves of this chart clearly show that after 2048, we see that the numerical advantage will remain for the Jews. Hence, a natural Israeli policy measure would be to do everything possible to detach Gaza from the Palestinian authority. Therefore for the Palestinian authority everything should be done to avoid Gaza drifting away. Failing to do this will pave the way for the creation of a One-state on almost all of historical Palestine.

14. The most serious issue: the demography of the settlers in the West Bank

Chart 7 present three variants of population growth of the settlers from 2011 until 2048, based on varying assumptions of fertility and immigration. Chart 8 gives the percentage of settlers in the total population of the West Bank, (i.e. Palestinians plus Israeli settlers). The growth of settlers in the West Bank is mainly due to those living in East Jerusalem, which accounts for a little bit less than half the total number of settlers: 200 000 or more out of 560 000.

Chart 7 : The explosion of the settlers in the West Bank
15. Jerusalem

- In East-Jerusalem, fertility differentials among Palestinians and settlers are now much higher than before and have recently increased in 2010. Fertility differential in favor of the Jews would be the most important asset to contain the Palestinian population in Jerusalem besides an “acceptable” threshold, usually considered to be below 30%. Yet, in the whole “reunified” city the proportion of Palestinians standing now at 37.6% in the city (296 000 Palestinians for a total of 788 000 inhabitants) exceeds the “alarm” zone.
16. To keep Palestinians below 30%

- Hence the proclaimed unofficial goal of the State and municipal authorities, is to limit the proportion of Palestinians to 30% of the total population. Some years ago in 2001, the Israeli demographer Sergio Della Pergola forecasted that the proportion of Palestinians would continue to increase to as high as 38-40%, to such an extent that:

  “A possible shift of the majority of Jerusalem’s population from the Jewish parts to the Arab and other parts”, would occur.

- Chart 9 presents the past growth of the two populations in Jerusalem. But these forecasts did not measure the spectacular reversal of fertility trends and were done...
before the increase in the building sector in the neighborhoods, which would attract an even greater number of settlers because of immigration. Since 1972, the Jewish population has been multiplied by 2.13 while the Palestinian one was multiplied by 3.5. This kind of differential growth would have undermined the Israelization of the Holy City.

17. Policy measures

✓ The proportion of Palestinians has been regularly increasing from 27%, reaching 30% (the threshold) in 1993 to 37% now. Thus the demographic policy:
✓ Increase Jewish immigration to the East-Jerusalem settlements and to the Old city
✓ Encourage Palestinian emigration outside the city through expulsions under the guise of administrative procedures
✓ Enlarge the perimeter of the city by unofficially integrating West Bank settlements: Maale Adoumim, Goush Etzion...
✓ And more importantly in the long term, encourage high Jewish fertility: 5.7 children per woman now (against 3.8 for Palestinians, an enormous gap).

18. How to counteract?

• What could be the possible policy measures for the Palestinians of Jerusalem to counteract the Israeli occupation of East-Jerusalem? Obviously, they are no more in position to play the “war of cradles” of the battle of numbers, which has definitely turned to the advantage of the Israelis. For the time being, it is difficult to imagine effective policy measures except the endless calls for the United Nations, the Arab States or the International community.

19. Other issues: Demographic shifts, political shifts

• Naturally, socio-economic and political developments impact population dynamics. Yet, demography might act also as an independent factor. One important aspect in the prospects of Palestinian population, is the demographic differentials trends between the West Bank, East-Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. From 2011 until 2048, the three population groups will increase, but the trend will be lower in the West Bank and East-Jerusalem than in the Gaza Strip. (Chart 10).
20. Much higher growth in Gaza

- In the West Bank, fertility is lower and Palestinian emigration has become significant. In East-Jerusalem, the same situation exists, although more alarming, where the occupying authorities put particular pressure on the Palestinians of Jerusalem to push them to emigrate.

- In Gaza, there is strong population pressure, namely in terms of population density. Yet, unless emigration from the Gaza Strip becomes significant (but to where?), the population increase will be phenomenal: even if the fertility rate is to fall to the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman in 2048, the population of Gaza, 1.7 million now, will cross the threshold of 4 million (3.8 million if fertility fell to 1.7 children, a “European” level of growth).
21. Differential voting patterns in Gaza

- During the last Palestinian elections, in 2006, there was a slight cleavage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Chart 11).
- In Gaza other parties got a marginal proportion of the vote: 8% versus 23% in the West Bank and East-Jerusalem.
- Hamas won almost the absolute majority in Gaza: 48.3% whereas in the West Bank, although the first in number of votes, it was quite far from the absolute majority: 39.5%

Chart 11: Voting patterns at the Palestinian elections in 2006
• Political attitudes and voting patterns are, of course, a transient phenomenon. We cannot assume that those voting patterns of 2006, will remain forever.

• Yet, for the coming years, the demographic shift from the West Bank to the Gaza strip, which will weight 48% in 2048 against 39% now, will be accompanied by a similar shift in the electoral body. Its political impact: more Hamas elected deputies, less PA ones, is very likely, although not certain, under mere demographic factors ".

Chart 12: The proportion of the Palestinian population living in Gaza, 2011-2048
22. The case of the settlers

It is well known that the Israeli settlers in the West Bank and East-Jerusalem vote for more extremist parties, to a greater extent than the population living beyond the Green Line. Here are the results at the last Knesset elections for the settlements:

- Likud: 28%
- Kadima: 9%
- Ysrael Beitenu: 8%
- Shas: 11%
- United Torah: 14%
- Ichid Leumi: 20%
- Labor: 2%, Meretz: 0.5%, Hadash and Balad: 0%.

Hence, the shift in population from the “Green Line” to the settlements, might translate mechanically into an increase of the voters for the right wing nationalists and religious parties. The number of settlers is likely to grow to such an extent to reach 1.7 million and over 18% of the Jewish population by 2048. The impact of this significant demographic shift on future elections results is likely to be disruptive.
23. Conclusion

• In 2011, recent demographic history presents one clear reality: the inversion of demographic trends. For Palestinians, demographic transition and fertility decrease has speeded. For the Israelis on the contrary, it is increasing, year by year without discontinuity.

• This is a unique model in the world, which should push us to think of effective modernization processes in this part of the world.

• Concerning policy measures, Israeli fertility beyond the Green Line and in the settlements has been encouraged by the demographic policy of the State to increase Jewish fertility. Billions of dollars have been spent for this purpose. Although, behind the scenes, this inversion of fertility trends might be one the most important phenomenon to be observed in historical Palestine, although not pertaining as such to the political sphere. Yet its’ obvious political implications are destructive to the Palestinian population, namely on the future institutions in the region and the likelihood of the implementation of a one or two state settlement.
24. REFERENCES

AFP, Interview of Dr. Faraoune, 19 December 1992.


