Population growth and demographic balance between Arabs and Jews in Israel and historic Palestine

Hussein Abu el Naml

Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, Lebanon

This paper examines the question of the respective percentage of Arab, Jewish, and ‘other’ populations in historic Palestine and Israel using Israeli statistics as correlated to historical events. Analysis of actual percentages demonstrates that birth rates of both Arabs and Jews from 1948 in Palestine/Israel have been in decline, and that for territory in the pre-1967 area, there is no demographic ‘danger’ of Arabs – both Christian and Muslim populations – outnumbering Israelis on the basis of natural population growth. An important factor is also Jewish immigration which has been factored into the overall growth rate. The official growth rate for the Arab population has been skewed due to the 1967 influx (in which populations from the West Bank began to be counted as resident in Jerusalem) as well as the annexation of the Golan Heights and several thousand fugitives from the disbanded South Lebanon Army entering in 2000; if such aberrations are taken into account, it can be shown that the natural growth rate among the Arab population is entirely average and family size is in general decline. On the other hand, if the population of Arabs living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is added to the total, it can be seen that the ratio of Arabs to Jews in all of historic Palestine increased from 8:10 to 9:10 and can be reasonably expected to create a situation where the total number of Arabs will surpass the number of Jews in the next ten years.

Keywords: Arab and Jewish population growth; historic Palestine; Israel; growth rate; percentages; Jerusalem

Introduction

This paper addresses the parameters of population growth and demographic balance between Arabs and Jews which determine ‘the Jewishness of Israel’, an issue perceived by some to be endangered by the growing numbers of Arabs at the expense of Jews inside Israeli territory, in particular, and in the land of historic Palestine, in general. Declining numbers of Jews on the one hand and rising numbers of Arabs on the other both play decisive roles on the process; some Palestinian, Arab and Islamic circles bet on these shifts to an extent that perhaps renders bedrooms the main battlefield in confronting the Zionist project. The question that poses itself in this context is: What is the extent of the truth in what is being said by the two sides? What is the severity of Israel’s demographic crisis, and has it reached the level of threatening its very Jewish identity?
The main task of this endeavour is to examine numerical givens so as to come to grips with the reality associated with population growth and demographic balance between Arabs and Jews in Israel and historic Palestine. Additionally, the paper will expound on the transformations that affected 1948 Arabs and tackle the question of whether or not their domestic demographic structure has been insulated or removed – qualitatively and quantitatively – from the major shifts that have taken place in the Jewish population from 1948 to the present. More importantly, it will examine the question of whether one is before two silent masses inside Israel – one Arab facing one Jewish – or if one is before two discrete entities that contain social/demographic differences of their own. Other questions being contemplated are as follows. Does the current and oft-anticipated demographic conflict between Arabs and Jews have quantitative or qualitative dimensions? Do the rules applied to the Palestinians of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the contingent influence they exert on demographic balance of Israel, also apply to 1948 Palestinians?

**Population growth**

**Population growth until the British Mandate**

The numbers of Jews in Palestine began to increase during the late Ottoman period: increasing from 24,000 in 1882 to 50,000 in 1900 and then to 85,000 in 1914. In addition to the course of natural growth, this rising figure is attributed to the Jewish immigration to Palestine, which amounted to 55,000–70,000 Jewish immigrants during 1882–1914, who arrived in two waves: the first from 1882 to 1903, in which 20,000–30,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine; and the second from 1904 to 1914, with a figure ranging from 35,000 to 40,000 Jews. The number of Jews in Palestine retreated from 85,000 in 1914 to 56,000 in 1916–1919 (Central Bureau of Statistics 1984, pp. 23, 139, Abu el Naml 2004, pp. 87–88).

When comparing the factual number of the population in 1919, i.e. 56,000, with the estimated figure, which is obtained from the actual figure combined with natural growth plus immigration, a huge deficit imparted by counter-immigration between 1882 and 1919 can be noticed. If one takes the natural growth in the indigenous population in 1882 and over 1882–1919 – which is fair enough to make this population increase twofold, it can be presumed that immigration and counter-immigration were equal to a degree that the number of Jews in 1919 did not exceed that of 1882 plus the natural growth that would have occurred during 1882–1919 (Central Bureau of Statistics 1984).

It is difficult to tell whether or not each individual immigrant to Palestine after 1882 may have moved out elsewhere or whether each Jewish inhabitant in Palestine from 1882 remained there. In fact, both possibilities are on the table on the basis that the numbers of Jewish immigrants to Palestine almost equalled those who left it, regardless of whether or not they were inhabitants of Palestine in 1882 or if they were among those who immigrated to it afterwards. The entire scenario changed after Palestine fell under the British occupation and – subsequently – Mandate; it was Great Britain that proposed the Balfour Declaration and sponsored, under the auspices of the League of Nations, the establishment of a Jewish national state by assisting the Zionist movement to this end. Indeed, Great Britain provided all means necessary to Judaise Palestine by facilitating the entrance of immigrants, legitimizing their presence, facilitating settlement and land transfer, and establishing Zionist institutions which eventually shaped the Jewish state within occupied Palestine.
Legalized expansion of the Jewish population during the British Mandate

The number of Jewish citizens in Palestine increased from 56,000 in 1919 to 649,600 on the eve of the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel on 15 May 1948. In this sense, the number of legal Jewish inhabitants increased 11.6-fold between 1919 and 1948. If one adds the number of illegal immigrants and inhabitants, which reached 30,500 Jews, the total population of Jews in Palestine on 15 May 1948 would have been 680,000. The total number of Jewish immigrants was 482,900, of which 452,000 were legal immigrants and 30,000 were illegal immigrants (Abu el Naml 2004, pp. 88–91, 115, Central Bureau of Statistics 1984, pp. 23, 139). Of the immigrants between 1919 and 14 May 1948, 10% were Eastern Jews and 90% were Western Jews. Of these, 90% of Eastern Jewry was from Asia, whereas 98% of Western Jewry was from Europe (Central Bureau of Statistics 1984); this confirms the assumption often held that the Western Jewish elite was that which paved the road for immigration and the ensuing establishment of the state.

The numbers of immigrants are distributed over the years 1919–1948 with an average of 17,000 per year. The peak waves of immigration took place during the rise of Nazism in Europe, which resulted in the influx of 197,235 Jews in the period 1932–1938, with an average of 28,000 every year. The average decreased during 1939–1945 to 12,000 and then increased again to 22,000 in the period 1946–1948 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 230). This indicates a fluctuation in the levels of immigration that is directly connected to the conditions in the country of origin or the country of arrival, Palestine. The survey showed that 74% of the immigrants, even if they are classified under broad and general categories, are primarily from seven countries, as follows: Poland (35.2%), Germany (10.9%), Russia (10.8%), Romania (8.5%), Czechoslovakia (3.4%), Yemen (3.2%), and Hungary (2.1%) (Abu el Naml 2004, p. 91). These figures shed light on the special status enjoyed by Polish, German and Russian Jews in Israel’s political and economic fields after 1948 and up to present times.

Directly before the Nakbah, the total population of Palestine was 2,042,600, of whom 1,393,000, or 68.2%, were Arabs, while the number of Jews was 649,600, or 31.8% (Abu el Naml 2004, p. 115). Finally, the number of Arabs was 214% of that of Jews in Palestine on 14 May 1948; however, despite this, the Nakbah occurred anyway. This entails a simple and decisive fact that the outcome of the historical and bloody conflict in Palestine did not rest on the demographic balance between Arabs and Jews, but rather it depends on the content of that balance and on the quality of human resources on both sides.

Jewish population growth from 15 May 1948 to the end of 2007

The first outcome of the Nakbah was the loss of demographic equilibrium between Arabs and Jews in the regions occupied by Zionists in 1948 and in which they established their nation under the name ‘Israel’, the population of which reached 805,900 by 15 May 1948 and of which 649,600, or 80.6%, were Jews and 156,000, or 19.4%, were the remaining Palestinians of the region occupied and subsequently named Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics 2003, pp. 2–11). Upon the declaration of its establishment of the state, Israel undertook to legitimize illegal Jewish settlers and opened the way for Jewish immigration to Palestine. Consequently, the numbers of Jews increased to 716,800 on 11 August 1948, and 758,700 by the end of 1948, that is, by a 16.8% increase during only six months. Numbers continued to increase at a rate of 33.6% in 1949 and 18.6% in 1950, during which the population doubled in comparison with that
of 15 May 1948. The year 1951 achieved a high rate of population growth with 16.7%; thereafter, rates began to drop and with considerable variations (Abu el Naml 2004, p. 115).

Israeli statistics divide the period extending from 15 May 1948 to the end of 2007 into seven intervals. These suggest that the average growth of the Jewish population is 3.6% per annum; however, they also demonstrate huge differences in secondary averages. For instance, the average annual growth rate during the period 15 May 1948 to 1960 was 9.2%; this average dropped to 3.0%, then 2.2% and finally to 1.5% during subsequent periods: the second from 1961 to 1971; the third from 1972 to 1982; and the fourth from 1983 to 1989, respectively. The average rate increased again during the fifth period, 1990–1995, to reach 3.4%, that is, twice the average rate of the fourth period. Then the average dropped again in the sixth period, 1996–2000, to 1.8%, and continued its decrease during the seventh period, 2001–2007, dropping to 1.4% (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 90).

These givens show great variations in average growth rates of the Jewish population during various periods of time; averages rise, then fall and then rise again, etc. Further subdivision of these intervals into years demonstrates even higher differences and curves of relative upturns and downturns, and this confirms that the diminishing rates of growth are not confined to later years only. The highest annual growth rate was in 1949 with 33.6%; this dropped to 2.3% in 1953, increased to 5.7% in 1957, and then dropped gradually and in a fluctuating manner to 1.6% in 1967.

In 1972, the growth rate increased to 3.4%, then gradually decreased to 1.1% in 1981 and 1983; in 1990 and 1991 the average growth rate leaped to 6.1% and 5.0%, respectively. It then dropped gradually to 1.7% and 1.6% for 2000 and 2007, respectively (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 90, Abu el Naml 2004, pp. 115–117). Such fluctuations in annual growth rates that ranged between 33.6% and 1.1% are attributed to the immigration factor that fluctuated within a linear graph similar to that of growth rate charts. In this sense, not only does immigration determine the growth rate of a given population, but also it explains the sizeable fluctuations mentioned above.

Jewish immigration contributed to 44.7% of the increase achieved in the population between 15 May 1948 and the end of 2007. This percentage is the result of varying figures obtained during various periods of time. For instance, Jewish immigration constituted 68.9% of the total growth in the period 15 May 1948 to 1960, then its contribution decreased to 45%, then to 25% and finally to 7.5% during subsequent periods: the second being 1961–1971; the third, 1972–1982; and the fourth, 1983–1989, respectively. The per cent contribution of Jewish immigration increased again during the fifth period, 1990–1995, which was associated mainly with wide-scale Soviet immigration, and reached 65%. The percentage contribution remained high in the sixth period, 1996–2000, and reached 39% only to drop to 11% during the seventh period, 2001–2007 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 90), due to declining immigration rates. As a consequence, immigration also brought about an increase in natural growth so that it became the main source of population growth.

**Arab population growth from 15 May 1948 to the end of 2007**

The main bulk of Jewish population growth relied on two dynamics: immigration and natural growth. Whereas the growth of 1948 Arabs was dependent solely on natural growth making it relatively more stable, upon the demographic collapse resulting
from the 1948 *Nakbah*, Arab growth rate showed an increase up to 4.4% in 1950 and a decrease to 3.1% in 1956. It increased to 5.5% in 1961, then gradually decreased to 4.4% in 1966, to leap abruptly to 25.6% in 1967, as a result of the annexation of Jerusalem to Israel. In the period 1970–1974, the average was around 4% until it dropped to 3.5% during 1975–1981. It increased again to 5% in 1982 (Abu el Naml 2004, pp. 115–116) due to the annexation of the Golan Heights to Israel.

Growth rate continued to decline to settle at 3% during 1983–1988; then it jumped abruptly in 1989–1995 and increased from 3.85% in 1989 to 5.78% in 1995, to fall abruptly again to 3.30% in 1996 (Abu el Naml 2004). In fact, Arab growth rate did not decrease in 1996 just as it did not increase during 1989–1995 in the first place, in comparison with the figures obtained in 1983–1988. What actually happened is that Israeli statistics included ‘non-Jewish’ immigrants from the USSR with the Arabs, resulting in this exaggerated figure. If the two groups were measured separately in 1995, Arab growth rate would have been seen as conforming to its natural course.

During the last decade, 1997–2007, Arab growth rate in Israel fluctuated along a descending curve; it increased from 3.3% in 1996 to 3.9% in 2000 due to the inclusion of those who fled to Israel from the South Lebanon Army (SLA) upon the liberation of the South along with 1948 Arabs. The growth rate dropped in 2001 to 3.3%, that is, the same rate obtained in 1996. During 2001–2007, the growth rate remained almost stable with 3.3%, 3.0%, 3.0%, 3.0%, 2.8%, 2.6% and 2.6%, respectively (Abu el Naml 2004, Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 86).

These figures demonstrate the continuous diminution in 1948 Arab growth rates, and this decrease has been accelerating during the last decade, so that it has not reached more than half (or slightly more) of the highest rate ever reached. Despite this significant decrease, however, Arab growth rate in 2007 remained at 186% of the Jewish growth rate. The average growth rate was confined only to natural growth; that is, the difference between the number of births and the number of deaths during the period extending from 15 May 1948 and the end of 2007, and this was slightly less than the average Jewish growth rate which encompasses both natural growth and net immigration.

**Transformation in family size**

To check the credibility of the aforementioned givens, one has to monitor their reflections on the size of a given family, which should definitely be in tandem with that of growth rate. The average size of a Jewish family decreased from 3.8 individuals in 1960 to 3.5 individuals in 1970; 3.41 individuals in 1980 (Central Bureau of Statistics 1986, p. 70) to 3.38 individuals in 1990; and 3.13 individuals in 2002 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2003, pp. 5–8), to 3.09 individuals in 2007 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 252). On the other hand, the average size of an Arab family increased from 5.6 individuals in 1960 to 6.0 individuals in 1970 and to 6.47 individuals in 1979, which is the highest level ever reached. Subsequently, it decreased to 6.32 individuals in 1980 (Central Bureau of Statistics 1986, p. 70) and 5.64 individuals in 1990. In 2002 it continued its decrease to 5.06 individuals (Central Bureau of Statistics 2003, pp. 5–8) and reached 4.86 individuals in 2007 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 252). Jewish family size dropped 81.3% from its highest peak, whereas Arab family size dropped 75.0% from its highest peak. This retreat on both sides should be understood in the context that the average size of an Arab family is still 157% of that of a Jewish family during 2007.1
Net outcome of the population growth between 15 May 1948 and the end of 2007

The total population of Israel by the end of 2007 reached 7,243,600 and was distributed as follows:

- 5,478,200, i.e. 75.6%, are Jews.
- 1,450,000, i.e. 20%, are Arab Palestinians.
- 315,400, i.e. 4.3%, are categorized as ‘others’ who are neither Jews nor Arabs but a third and newly introduced population precipitated by Jewish immigration from countries of the former USSR during the 1990s. The category ‘others’ was never cited by Israeli statistics until 1995 when 85,000 individuals were subsumed under this category, which includes non-Arab Christians and individuals whose Judaism is questioned or whose faith is indeterminate, etc.

By 15 May 1948, the population was 805,900, of which 649,600, i.e. 80.6%, were Jews and 156,000, i.e. 19.4%, were the remaining Palestinians of the region which was occupied and named as Israel later on. During the period extending from 15 May 1948 to the end of 2007, the total population of Israel doubled 9.0 times; the number of Jews increased 8.4 times; and the number of 1948 Arabs increased 9.3 times. The category ‘others’ increased 3.7 times during 1995–2007 at the time when Israeli official statistics put this category into circulation (Abu el Naml 2004, pp. 114–117, Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, pp. 85–86).

Impact of annexing populations of East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and remnants of the South Lebanon Army (SLA)

The data mentioned above will indicate that growth rate of Arabs is higher than that of Jews, which might explain the increase in the population of Arabs to constitute 20% of the total population in Israel, mainly due to the high natural Arab growth rate vis-à-vis the total dependence of the Jewish growth rate on immigration, added to it the factor of natural growth. In actuality, such presumption ignores the fact that the current number of 1948 Palestinians includes three additions:

- The population of East Jerusalem which was annexed to Israel in 1967, estimated to be around 269,900 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 92) in 2007.
- The population of the Golan Heights which was annexed to Israel in 1981, estimated to be around 20,100 in 2007 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 100).
- Lebanese individuals who fled to Israel upon the latter’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, who were estimated to be around 2500 in the year 2007 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 86).

The total number of these three additional categories reached 292,600 individuals; and if this figure is subtracted from the number given for 1948 Arabs, which is 1,450,000, the new figure obtained is 1,157,400. Therefore, if one relies on this yielded figure and the total population minus the total number of the added categories, then the ratio of 1948 Arabs will drop to 16.6% of the total population instead of 20%, which is the officially circulated figure and the one that resulted from the added populations after 1967. Logically, the new figure for 1948 Arabs will reduce the number of times their number has doubled during 1948–2007 to 7.4 times only, instead of the previous
figure obtained, which suggested an occurrence of 9.3 times – including the other three categories. These facts soundly discredit the myths surrounding these figures; moreover, they shed light on the actual growth rates of 1948 Arabs, which surpassed that of the Jewish population, relying primarily on immigration plus natural growth, i.e. the difference between the total numbers of deaths and births. Similarly, such a rise in Arab rates at the expense of Jewish rates should not be understood in the context that it is constant when, in fact, it has been experiencing continuous decline.

**Significant gaps between groups of Arabs and other Arabs**

It was explained above that there is a difference between Arab and Jewish growth rates, and they both experience almost equal decline as time goes by. However, the gap between the two remains. In this sense, the gap still exists. However, its content is different from one time to another. The average growth rate for Muslim Arabs reached 4.3%, whereas that of the Jewish population reached 3.6%. As for the period between 2001 and 2007, the average growth rate for Muslim Arabs declined to 3.2%, whereas the average growth rate for Jews dropped to 1.4%. In 2007, the average growth rate for Muslim Arabs was only 2.8%, while that of Jews was 1.6%; in the meantime, the average growth rate for Christian Arabs was only 1.3%, which is less than that of its Jewish counterpart. As for the Druze population, their average growth rate dropped from 4.4% during the 1950s and 1960s to 1.8% in 2007 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, pp. 91–93). From these figures, it is obvious that Arabs with all their various denominations were not unaffected by the radical population shifts that beset the Jewish population.

Generalizations may conceal important details; in fact, there are major differences and wide gaps not only between Arabs and Jews, but also within each of these groups. This was clearly evident from the average growth rate of Arabs in 2007, which appeared to be composed of three averages: 2.8%, 1.8%, and 1.3% for Muslims, Druze and Christians, respectively; and, furthermore, if one addresses the average growth rate for Muslims separately, it can be noticed that it is the yield of divergent figures: for instance, the average growth rate of Muslims in the south is 4.4% vis-à-vis 2.2% average growth rate for Muslims in the northern regions. It is evident that there are critical variations in growth rates in each single component group of Muslims, Jews, Christians and Druze (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008).

**Qualitative changes in the population**

Both Arab and Jewish populations experienced significant qualitative changes. Two significant examples will be cited here:

- The woman’s entry into the workforce since her contribution in this arena represents an interaction of many social factors, whether economic, cultural, political or academic, etc.
- Percentages of graduates with degrees in higher education in the population.

Women’s participation in the Jewish workforce reached 34% in 1974, and increased to 40% in 1984 to reach 48.7% in 2002 (Abu el Naml 2004, p. 534), and 49.6% in 2007 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, pp. 512–514). On the other hand, women’s participation in the Arab workforce increased from 11.7% in 1974 to 14.9%
in 1984, and reached 21.6% in 2002 (Abu el Naml 2004, p. 534) and 24.5% in 2007 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, pp. 512–514). This shows an increase in the participation of women in both sides. However, the rate of increase for the Arab women is more than that of the Jewish women during 1974–2007. That being said, however, the percentage of Arab women’s participation is only 49% of that of Jewish women in Israel during 2007.2

Postgraduates’ percentages have evolved as well. Figures pertaining to those who received sixteen years or more of schooling among people aged fourteen years and over3 were as follows: for the Jewish population, the percentage increased from 4.9% in 1970, to 10.2% in 1985 (Abu el Naml 2004, p. 538), to 22.7% in 2007 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, pp. 372–374). As for the Arabs in Israel, the percentage increased from 0.4% in 1970, to 2.5% in 1985 (Abu el Naml 2004, p. 538), to 9.1% in 2007 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, pp. 372–374). These data demonstrate the increase in the percentage of postgraduates for both Arabs and Jews; the rate of increase, however, in the Arab side is higher than that of its Jewish counterpart during 1970–2007. Despite this, the percentage of postgraduates among Arabs was only 40% of that of Jews in Israel by the end of 2007.4

Undoubtedly, 1948 Arabs have demonstrated significant improvements in the fields of women’s entry in workforce and higher education; however, they are still lagging behind Jewish rates in both of these two indices. It is important to analyse this gap in terms not only of quantity, but also of quality of work and education being provided. If one further analyses these deduced figures in terms of the nature of female and postgraduates’ work, and their scientific specialties, practical and theoretical, the gap will grow even wider.

**Demographic balance between Arab and Jews in Israel and historic Palestine**

The elements necessary to make comparisons with regard to Jewish–Palestinian demographics, which – as a concept – need to be defined in terms of geography rather than demography, were afforded above; moreover, it needs to be determined whether such is a qualitative or a quantitative comparison given the importance of quantity and quality in shaping the level of effectiveness for both conflicting sides. The first level that is going to be addressed is that of the reality and possibilities of the Jewish–Palestinian demographic balance within the borders officially recognized by Israel.

**Development of the percentage of Arabs in the population**

By the end of 1948, the Arabs constituted 17% of the population. This then began to decline – falling to 11% during 1951–1964. It increased to 12% during 1965–1966 and then to 14% during 1967–1969. It continued to increase during 1970–1975 to level off at 15%, and then 16% during 1976–1980. It increased even further to reach 17% during 1981–1984, 18% during 1985–1992, and 19% during 1993–1995; it decreased slightly to 18% during 1995–1999; however, it rose to 19% in 2000 and then to 20% in 2007. Meanwhile, the percentage of the Jewish population did not drop at the same pace at which the Arab population increased; in fact, the percentage of the Jewish population experienced a decline in the face of the growing category ‘others’ which has risen from 1% in 1995, to 3% in 2000, to level off eventually at 4.4% in 2007 (Abu el Naml 2004, pp. 115–117, Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 86).
Stated differently, the percentage of Jews dropped to 75.6% of the total population in 2007, i.e., 13.4 percentage points below the highest peak reached which was 89%; this decline took place during 1951–1964 (Abu el Naml 2004, Central Bureau of Statistics 2008). These 13.4 percentage points lost by the Jewish population are equivalent to an increase of 9 percentage points in favour of the Arab population and 4.4 percentage points in favour of ‘others’ category. From the net increase in the Palestinian population, 3.5 percentage points are attributed to the populations added to 1948 Arabs from East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and fugitives from the SLA after 1967. This demonstrates that the de facto increase in the population of 1948 Arabs is only 5.5%; Israel perceives such issues from a different perspective so as to conclude that there is an increase in the percentage of Arabs in Israel regardless of whatever reasons are in mind. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the category ‘others’ contributed in the process of shrinking the percentage of Jews to 75.6%.

Israel is fully aware that immigration was the factor that maintained the balance of such figures and it expects further disproportion that is directly connected to shrinking immigration rates. The retreat in Arab growth rates does not affect the equation as the retreat in Jewish growth rates is even higher. The significant role played by the high quality of the Jewish population in terms of their education and vocations when compared with that of Palestinians should also be emphasized. No matter how Israel seems relieved by the status quo which bespeaks clear Jewish domination in this field, it is haunted by the dynamics of time and by the fact that Arabs are bridging the qualitative gap between them and Jews as time passes. For example, in 2007, the percentage of Arab graduates was only 40% of that of Jews, meaning that they have a long way to go before achieving parity with Jews. This does not deny the fact that the Palestinians have made great leaps in their attempt to bridge this gap if one considers that the same percentage was only 8% of its Jewish counterpart in 1970.

Israeli estimates for the demographic balance between Arabs and Jews in Israel in the future

Israeli official statistics present three predictions with regard to the population of Israel: total, Jews, Arabs and ‘others’, for 2010, 2020 and 2030 and within three probabilities: high, moderate and low (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, pp. 159–162). The present paper will not delve into detailed figures of such studies as they may confuse the reader. However, the main conclusive results obtained and which clearly demonstrate any balance shifts in the main components of the population in Israel, especially that of the Jews, will be presented.

According to high estimates of growth, the percentage of the Jewish population is predicted to drop from 75.63% of the total population in 2007, to 75.11% in 2010, to 73.25% in 2020, and to 71.34% in 2030. According to moderate estimates of growth, the percentage of the Jewish population will drop from 75.63% of the total population in 2007, to 75.11% in 2010, to 73.58% in 2020, and to 72.17% in 2030. Whereas the low estimates of growth were as follows: 75.63% in 2007, 75.15% in 2010, 73.49% in 2020, and 72% in 2030 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008). In short, the percentage of Jews is declining according to all estimates: high, moderate and low and for 2010, 2020 and 2030.

Apparently, the best scenario for Israel is the second, which predicted that the percentage of Jews will fall to 72.17% of the total population in 2030; on the other hand, the worst scenario is the first, which predicted that the percentage will fall to
71.34%. In light of these givens, the percentage of Jews in 2030 will drop 3.43 percentage points minimally, 4.26 points maximally, or 3.60 points moderately.

Arabs constituted 20% of the population in 2007; their percentage is predicted to rise to 24.26% in 2030, 23.65% and 23.77% according to the three scenarios: the highest estimate, the moderate estimate and the lowest estimate, respectively. On this basis, the increase in Arab population in 2030 might be 4.26 percentage points maximally, 3.77 points minimally, and 3.65 moderately. The category ‘others’, on the other hand, revolved around 4.4% according to the three scenarios. In a nutshell, the worst-case scenario for Jews is that their percentage will drop by 4.26 percentage points, while the best scenario for Arabs is that their percentage will increase by 4.26 points within a period of 23 years between 2007 and 2030 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008).

The question that poses itself in light of these projected figures is: Does such an estimated increase, and within that time frame, really justify the buzz surrounding the ‘Jewishness’ of the state which is often stirred up by Israel? Up to 2007, the gap between the percentages of Arabs and Jews within the population is 55.6 percentage points, and in 2030 it is predicted to drop to 47 percentage points, and this is according to Israeli calculations. A simple mathematical analysis of the process will indicate that such a demographic process would require at least centuries in order for the Arab population to be equal to that of the Jews in Israel – on the assumption that the conditions that govern the growth rates of both populations persist. Apparently, or perhaps as usual, Israel elects not to look at the ‘bright side’ of the story but rather allows the darker scenario to haunt it.

**Demographic balance between Arabs and Jews in historic Palestine in 2007**

Under the previous subheading, the demographic balance between Arab and Jews within the 1948 boundaries of Israel added to it the populations of East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and remnants of the SLA was addressed. As mentioned above, and according to 2007 census, the population of Israel is 7,243,600 persons distributed as follows:

- 5,478,200 or 75.6% are Jews.
- 1,450,000 or 20% are Arab Palestinians.
- 315,400 or 4.3% are categorized as ‘others’ (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 86).

In the same year, 2007, the population of the West Bank, including that of Jerusalem, was 2,350,583. As for the Gaza Strip, the population was estimated to be 1,416,543. If one adds to them the population of 1948 Arabs, which is 1,450,000 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 86), one will have a total of 5,217,126. From this resultant figure one has to subtract the population of East Jerusalem amounting to 269,900 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008, p. 92), which is calculated twice, once with the population of 1948 Arabs obtained by Israeli statistics, and once with the population of the West Bank (including Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip obtained by Palestinian statistics. Upon doing so, the overall population of Arabs living in historic Palestine is estimated to be 4,947,226 in 2007, whereas the overall population of Jews living in historic Palestine is 5,478,200. To put it differently, up to 2007 for every 100 Jews there are 90 Arabs living in historic Palestine.
For comparative purposes, the total population in 1997 is detailed as follows:

- The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with a population of 1,873,476.
- The Gaza Strip with a population of 1,022,207.

Thus, the total number for both populations is 2,895,683.

The total number of 1948 Arabs in 1997, save Jerusalem, was 870,000. Consequently, the total number of Arabs was 3,765,700, that is, for every 100 Jews there were 80 Arabs on the basis that the population of Jews was – then – 4,701,600. Evidently, within a decade, the population of Arabs in historic Palestine has risen 10% in comparison with that of the Jews, from a ratio of 80 Arabs for every 100 Jews in 1997 to a ratio of 90 Arabs for every 100 Jews in 2007 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008). One might not exaggerate by saying that it may just a matter of a single decade for both populations to become equal in number; afterwards the population of Arabs will begin to outnumber that of Jews in historic Palestine.

Conclusion

The total population of Israel by the time of its establishment was 805,900, of whom 649,600 were Jews and 156,000 were Arabs. By the end of 2007, the total population of Israel reached 7,243,600 distributed as follows: 5,478,200 Jews, 450,000 Arab Palestinians, 315,400 categorized as ‘others’, precipitated by Jewish immigration from the countries of the former USSR during the 1990s. Between these two dates, the population has doubled nine times. The Jewish population has increased 8.4 times; 1948 Arabs have increased 7.4 times; and the population of ‘others’ has increased 3.7 times during 1995–2007. The highest growth rate recorded for Arabs was 5.5% in 1961, which dropped to 2.6% in 2007. Despite this decline, Arab growth rate remains at 163% of that of Jews in 2007.

The percentage of Arabs levelled off at 11% of the total population from 1951 to 1964. It increased gradually to 20% in 2007; the percentage of ‘others’ increased from 1% in 1995 to 4.4% in 2007. As for the percentage of Jews, it decreased to 75.6% in 2007, that is, by 13.4 percentage points less than its highest peak, which was 89%. This 13.4% decrease resulted in the rise of Arabs’ percentage by 9 points and that of ‘others’ by 4.4 points. The 3.5 percentage points of the increase in the Arab population resulted from the populations added to it after 1967, meaning that the actual increase in the population of 1948 Arabs is 5.5% only. Some studies estimate that the percentage of the Jewish population will drop to 72% while the population of Arabs will rise to 24% by 2030. The ratio between Arabs and Jews in the historic land of Palestine has risen from 8:10 in 1997 to 9:10 in 2007; one might not exaggerate by asserting that it is just a matter of one decade for both populations to become equal in number; afterwards the population of Arabs will start to outnumber that of the Jews.

Notes

1. Percentages and averages are deduced in light of the data gathered from 1986, 2003 and 2008 statistics.
2. Percentages are deduced in light of the data obtained from 2008 statistics.
3. Despite the statistical anomaly or ‘margin of error’ which this introduces, the survey assessed individuals who had no education (zero years) and were classed as illiterate as well as groups which had from between four and nine years as well as sixteen years of
education. So, while the factor of sixteen years of education cannot logically be applied to individuals who are fourteen years of age, this was the cut-off age for the sample.

4. Percentages are deduced in light of the data obtained from 2008 statistics.


7. The exact figure for Arabs in Jerusalem according to Israeli statistics varies from that obtained by Palestinian statistics because the latter measures the entire area of Jerusalem, whereas Israeli statistics are confined to the part of Jerusalem that was annexed to Israel.

References


