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Demography and Conflicts in the Context of Israel/Palestine: Forecasts for the Future

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In the context of historical Palestine, the Palestinian and Jewish demography are deeply embedded (Goldsheider, 1991; Freidlander, 2002). The growth and structure of the populations are one of the most important tools for the control of the territory (Dahlan, 1989). Jewish immigration was and is still considered as the single most important mean for the conquest of the land (Courbage, 2005). Yet this is only a partial truth (Fargues, 2000). Fertility, especially when it is natural at its peak or still very high is also a very significant asset, which is likely to reverse internal equilibrium among the different forces shaping the two societies (Courbage & Todd, 2011; Ettinger, 2011). Hence, Jews and Palestinians have embarked since decades into a demographic competition (Faraoune, personal communication, December 19, 1992; Anson & Avinoam, 1996), with this extraordinary result, that in a matter of a century (1948-2048) this small piece of land will have undergone the highest population growth on earth, equivalent to sub Saharan Africa (Faitelson, 2008; Courbage & Fargues, 1997). It is likely output is not less important to define the future nature of historical Palestine: one or two states (Baskin, 2005; Courbage, 2008)? And if the two states solution is in effect, what kind of states would it be? After presenting the recent trends of Palestinian demography in the context of historical Palestine since the first intifada and the aftermath of the second intifada, this essay will focus on future developments, i.e. the likely population dynamics of the Palestinian territory from 2011 until 2048, and of its different components, namely fertility. Palestinian population growth during the next four decades will be compared to that of the future Israeli population and the policy components of this differential population growth will be evaluated both in the context of historical Palestine and in the context of the Jewish State in its 1948 borders (Jews and Palestinians of 1948). The most serious demographic challenges, (which are not those of an overall "equilibrium" between Palestinian and Jewish populations as very often claimed), are very precisely delineated in the ground. These are, first, the question of the peopling of the settlements (Be-Tselem, 2002). their population is likely to explode from 560,000 settlers now to 1.7 million in 2048, thanks to their extremely high fertility, low mortality, high immigration and "population momentum" (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Courbage, 2006). From 18% of the overall population of the West Bank they could reach 29% in 2048, a clear defiance to the possibility of statehood in Palestine. Besides, statehood in Palestine is also threatened by the fact that East-Jerusalem, the likely capital of the Palestinian state is also threatened by the expansionist demography of the Jewish settlers, both in the so-called "neighborhoods", those settlements close to Jerusalem but which are according to international law an integral part of the West Bank (annexed by Israel in 1967), and inside the Old city. In Jerusalem, besides Jewish immigration to the neighborhoods from the densely and poor areas of West Jerusalem, fertility trends have now been reversed to advantage of the Jews as compared to the Palestinians in the Holy city (Della Pergola, 2001). This presentation will deal also with the population trends of the Palestinian population from

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now on until 2048 (Dalen & Petersen, 2004; Courbage, 1999). Under the impact of a higher fertility, and a population momentum clearly to its benefit, the population of Gaza (all Palestinians) could approach the Palestinian population of the West Bank: 4.0 in Gaza, 4.3 in the WB (Clarens, 2011). Yet, the slight majority in the West Bank comes from the Palestinians in Jerusalem, whose political status is still vague. A larger share of the Palestinian population living in the Gaza strip rather than in the West bank is probably not devoid of political implications. For the policy makers it is not easy to run against demographic trends, especially when they are largely guided and decided by the other State which shares the same land. Yet, it is of utmost importance to be fully aware of the likely evolution of the demographic landscape in Palestine and to prepare the demographic but mostly non-demographic policy measures to counterbalance their effects.

Keywords: demographies, structure of the populations, Palestine

Introduction

There are several ways to analyze the demography in historical Palestine or more precisely for Israel and for the Palestinian territories. If one considers them as "normal" countries, he then would focus on their population size, natural growth, migration, age-sex structure… Carrying on, he would forecast their population in the future and study its impact on education, employment, health and every economic and social sector. But Israel and Palestine are not what people could qualify as "normal" countries. Their borders are not defined, their populations still fluctuate. Besides, a huge number of Palestinians live permanently outside the borders, and, the Israeli diaspora itself is ever-growing.

Israel and Palestine are nested countries, by their common and conflict-ridden history and their common geography. Their political present and future is deeply dependant. It would be most trivial then to detach Israeli from Palestinian demographics, also deeply embedded.

For "historical" Palestine (*Eretz Israel*) there has always been an Israeli project and a Palestinian counter-project, where population growth and dynamics have been essential ingredients. In the Zionist project the increase of the Jewish population and the concomitant reduction of the Palestinian one, were strategic objective, from the starting point of the Jewish settlement in Palestine at the end of the 19th century, before and after the 1948 conflict.

This demographic project was and is still "populationnist": increase of population and pro-natalistic: increase of fertility and births (Kanaaneh, 2002). For obvious reasons: the weakness of the initial native Jewish population, it had to depend almost solely on immigration. This is a well-known fact much advertised and studied. But more effective, although less publicized, is the component of fertility, the ability to breed children in large numbers.

From this viewpoint, the present Israel in 2014 is a story of multiple successes. Jewish fertility in Israel is very high (by Western and worldwide standards). It is high not only among the ultra-orthodox and religious Jews (a quarter of the population), but for all segments of the society. By mirror-effect, the Palestinians were themselves engaged in a "battle of numbers", or "war of cradles" even before the erection of the Israeli state in 1948. To protect themselves from Jewish immigration they had the sole asset of fertility since immigration of Palestinians from abroad was limited to very few return migrants.

The role of demography in shaping the future of the countries is a recurrent issue, on which we will not elaborate, since it has been extensively studied. Today, both in Palestine and in Israel the major political

questioning is whether there will be one single State or two States, and in such case what would be the shape of the Palestinian one. Population dynamics of the Jewish and Palestinian populations weights heavily on the decisions to take, mainly by the Israeli authorities. Hence the importance of population forecasts for the medium and long term. Figures presented here are the official ones, taken at face value, not mentioning the controversial issues such as the true size of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza (Zimmerman, Seid, & Wise, 2006; Zimmerman & Della Pergola, 2005) and endorsed by the United Nations (United Nations Population Division, 2013), the US Census Bureau (US Census Bureau, 2014) and of the size of the Israeli diaspora abroad (Chamie & Mirkin, 2011).

A Short Glimpse at The Past

For long while say from the start of the British mandate until the second intifada (1922-2000), Palestinian population growth and fertility rate was considered as an anomaly in the paradigm of demographic transition. In view of their high level of education and urbanization, in view also of their low income, Palestinians, should have had a lower fertility than what was observed. But, Israeli Jewish fertility is also an anomaly, since it had gathered all the inhibiting factors of fertility (education, urbanization, standard of living, openness and globalization. Yet, in spite of these factors, Jewish fertility has remained high and, which is more puzzling, ever-increasing. The Total Fertility Rate which was enviable, 2.6 children per woman in 1990, increased to 3.04 in 2012, twice the rate of Western Europe. Note that for diaspora Jews this rate is only 1.5 (Della Pergola, 1983). Hence, the Jewish rate is likely to surpass Palestinian one, for sure for the Palestinians of 1948 (Geries, 1969) standing now at 3.32, and later on for the Palestinians of the West Bank and Jerusalem, whose fertility of 3.8, is rapidly decreasing. Palestinian and Jewish fertility are going against opposite trends. True the Palestinian fertility rose during the first *intifada*. It had been considered, by PLO authorities and by chairman Arafat himself as an efficient mean to counteract occupation and colonization (Time magazine, 1973). Recall Yasser Arafat declaration that the Palestinian womb is the most powerful weapon and that the Palestinian family should have 12 children, two for the couple and 10 for the "Cause". But, this situation didn't last long and Palestinian fertility did not resist the second *intifada* (Khawaja, Assaf, & Jarallah, 2009; Khawaja & Randall, 2006; Khawaja, 2003; Khawaja 2000). Figures differ slightly, depending on Ministry of Health estimates based on birth registration or on Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) based on censuses and surveys. Hence, although higher this figure of 3.8 is not that far from Jewish fertility. In Gaza, it is another story, with a TFR of 4.9, like the TFR of Yemen, the Arab country with the highest fertility rate. But even in Gaza fertility is receding: TFR was above eight, 20 years ago in 1987-1993.

Recent Trends

Nevertheless, demographic figures at the level of the two entities are too abstract. These figures become more concrete when they look more at "disputed" zones rather than at the country as a whole. Demographic competition indeed becomes very acute in conflict zones: West Bank, East-Jerusalem. Gaza, on its side is another issue since there is no more demographic competition since 2005 with the departure of the last Jewish settler.

Figure 1 shows the rise of the settler population (Levison, 2009), benefiting from the generosity of the State and international NGO's (Eldar, 2010; Sharron Environmental Protection Organization, 1999). From 41,000 in 1977 it approached 600,000 at the end of 2013, a multiplication by 15. In the West Bank (including

East Jerusalem), the rate of growth of the Jewish settlers is now 5% per annum, twice the Palestinian rate: 2.6%.The factors behind the spectacular increase of the Jewish settlers is: (1) their low mortality rate, due to a high life-expectancy and a small proportion of aged persons; (2) the high fertility, higher than Palestinian one; (3) their young age-sex structure (see Figure 2); and (4) their high immigration rate: 5,000 newcomers poured into the West Bank *per se*, in 2012, more if we consider East-Jerusalem. Immigrants came in, either from the other side of the Green Line (4.3 thousands), the rest directly from abroad. Contrariwise, Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are losing people by emigration as shown by the Palestinian MED-HIMS Survey of 2010 prepared by PCBS (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

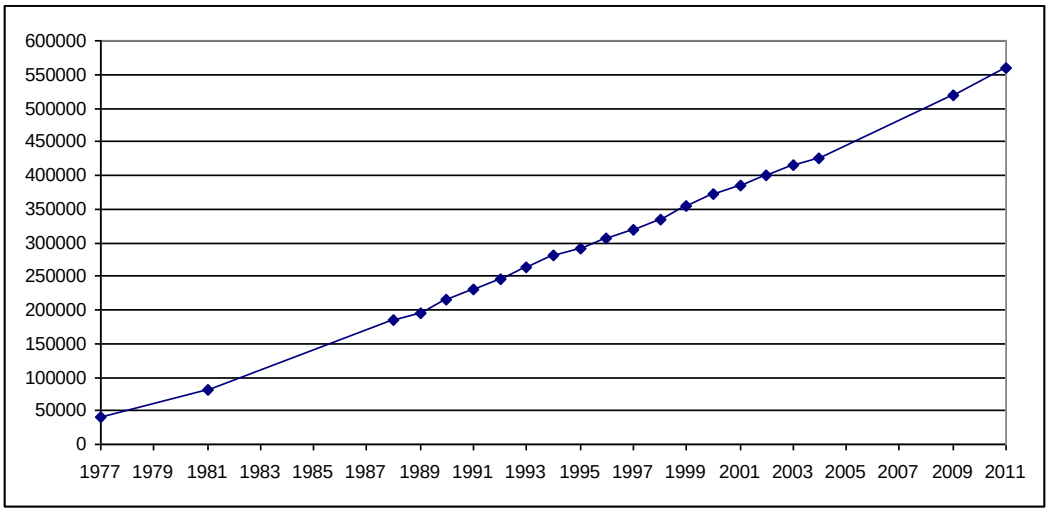


Figure 1. Jewish settlers in the West Bank (including East-Jerusalem), 1977-2011.

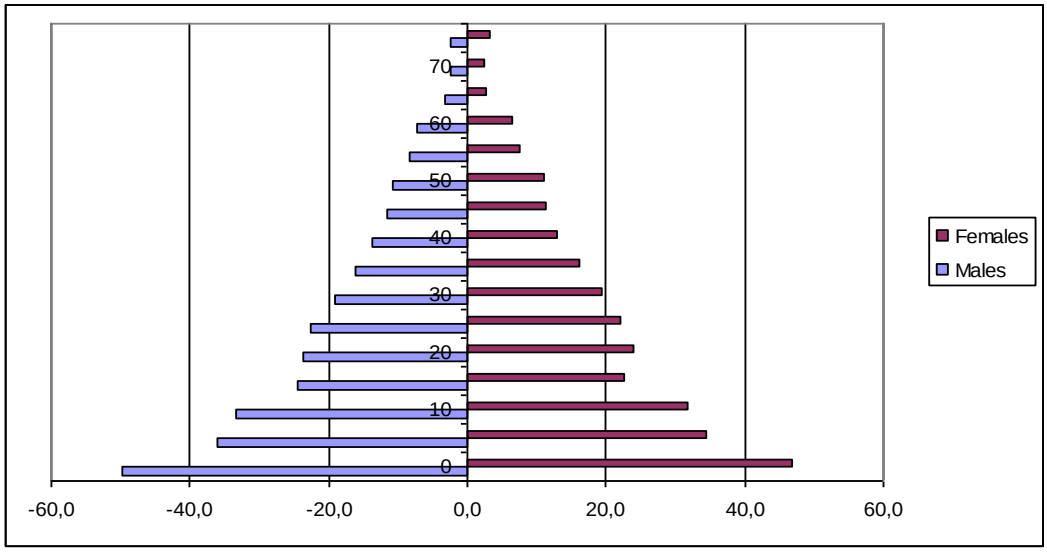


Figure 2. Age-sex structure of the Jewish population in the West Bank, 2010.

But immigration does not tell the whole story. Fertility rate of the settlers, is very high by its own and compared to Palestinian's fertility. The last Israel Central Bureau of Statistics yearbook of 2013 enables such comparisons of fertility between Jewish settlers and Palestinian in the "contested" West Bank. Settler's fertility

had been rising all over the four decades following the 1967 war. In 2012, it had reached (without East-Jerusalem), 5.05 children per woman, that is more than sub Saharan Africa rate 4.80. In comparison the Palestinians in the West Bank reaches hardly 3.80 children, less than by 1.3 children per woman compared to Jewish fertility. Such high fertility is due to the low ages at marriage of the settlers both for females and for males particularly low among settlers. Contraceptive rate also is low especially among religious Jews in the settlements. And, abortion is hardly practiced. Low separation of spouses (for instance because of emigration of the husband), does not play a significant inhibiting role for Jews (contrary to Palestinians).

In Jerusalem, the "war of cradles" is even more intense than in other parts of the West Bank. While for almost half a century, since the 1967 war East-Jerusalem Palestinians kept high fertility, in spite of the usual inhibiting factors: urbanization, level of education, tertiary type of economic activities… It came thus as a sort of insurance against political risks, more present here than elsewhere in the West Bank. Since the annexation of the Eastern part of Jerusalem, Palestinians became an integral part of the population of the "reunified city" but without the Israeli citizenship. As for fertility—the best tool in their hand-high levels didn't last forever; Jerusalemite Palestinians had 3.65 children per woman in 2012, thus less by 16%, than the Jews of the whole city which stood at an impressive 4.32 the same year. Interestingly, Jewish fertility in Jerusalem is increasing, it was 4.16 in 2009, thus a significant increase in three years. Considering annexed East-Jerusalem alone, fertility discrepancies are even more acute. For the quarter of million of settlers it reaches the incredibly high level of 5.50 children per woman exceeding Palestinian one by 50%.

Not so long ago in the sixties, Palestinian fertility in Israel was considered a demographic anomaly reaching the world record level of nine children per woman. Hence the 1948 Palestinians (17% of the population of Israel in the 4th June 1967 borders) had thrice more children than the Jews (see Figure 3 and Figure 4).

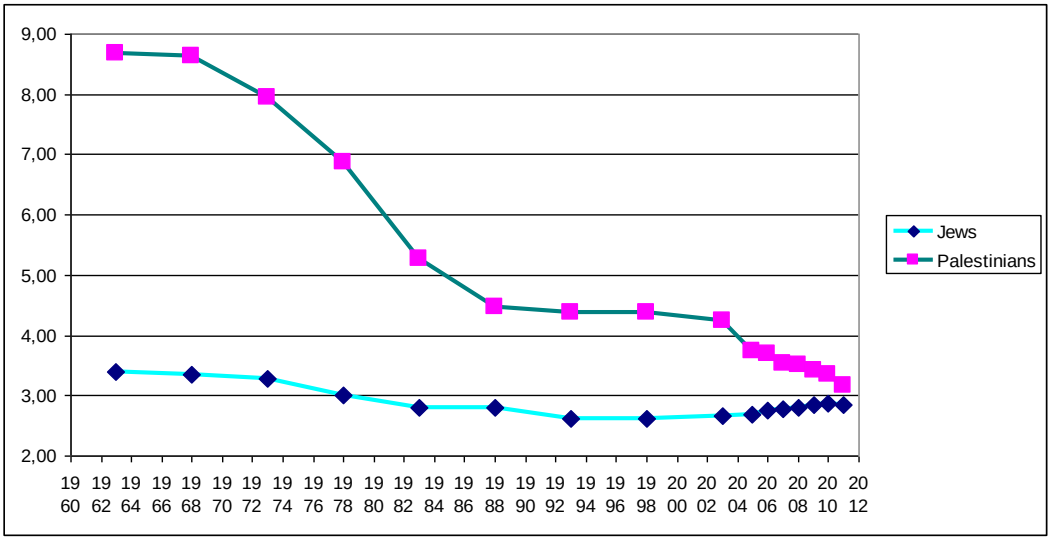


Figure 3. Jewish and Israeli's Palestinians fertility (1960-2011).

The demographic scene in Israel had been completely reshuffled. After a slight decline, Jewish fertility went on increasing. At its lowest it fell to 2.6 children—which by the way is much ahead of fertility replacement level of 2.1. Now it is in the vicinities of 3.04 (higher for Jews classified by religion, than for "sociological Jews" regrouping Jews and mainly non-Arab Christians plus those who didn't specify any

religion). Contrariwise, 1948 Palestinian's TFR was divided by three reaching 3.3 now, still few decimal points above Jewish fertility. But not for long and convergence of Jewish and 1948 Palestinian's fertility is a matter of years not of decades.

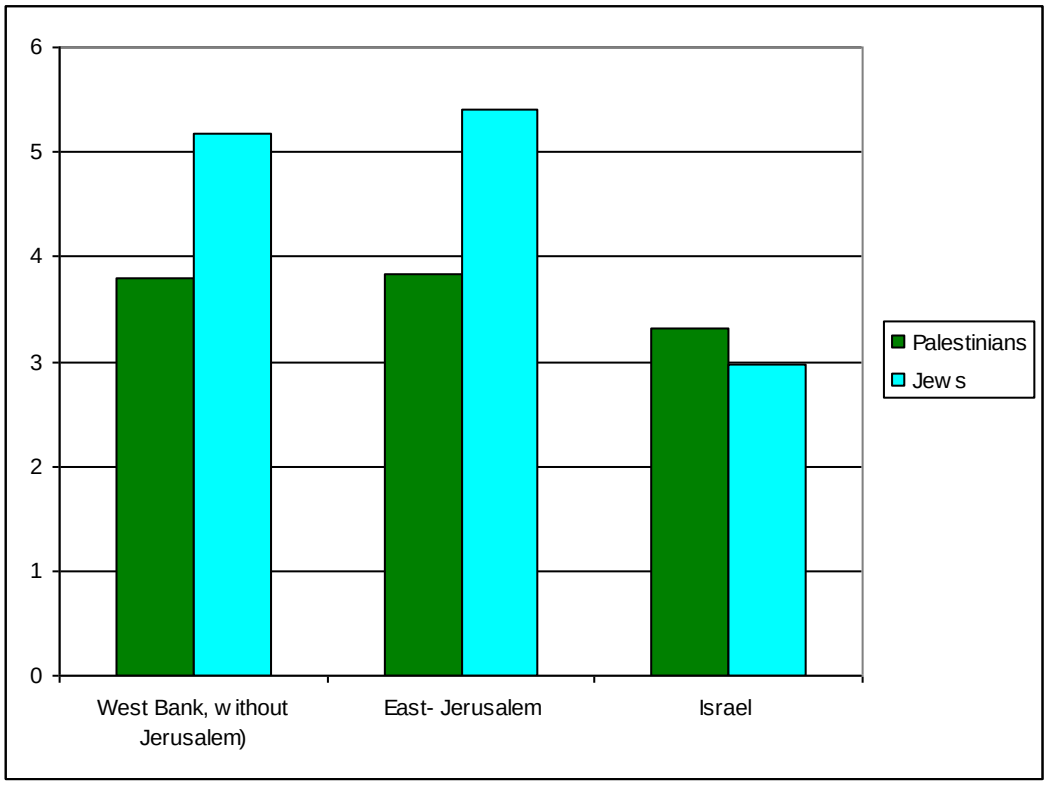


Figure 4. Recent fertility differences among Palestinians and Jews, around 2010.

Among Palestinians there are some remnants of high fertility (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2007), foremost among them is the Gaza strip with a high fertility of 4.9 but on decline since it is half what it was during the first *intifada* 1987-1993. Inside Israel, the Negev Palestinians (district of Beersheba) still keep a high fertility of 5.85 children per woman but their numbers are weak (220 thousands).

Population Forecasts for the Future (Until 2048)

In view of the fact that fertility is now playing the dominant role in population dynamics it is of utmost importance to see how its discrepancies will translate in terms of future population and impact on the questions of statehood in the ensemble Israel-Palestine (see Table 1). To this end, we have projected the different population groups until the symbolic year 2048 thus hundred years after the *naqba*. Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics choice is for a closer range, 2035 as time horizon.

For the Whole of Historical Palestine

Table 1 shows that in 2020 in the whole setting, the number of Palestinians will be equal to the number of Jews: 6.9 millions. (Although some claim that it has already happened as early as in 2012, not taking into account the diverging fertility trends. Figure 5 may help to prove—in case this proof is still required that a one-state on the whole of historical Palestine is inconceivable. Palestinians, naturally would, by all means,

never accept it. For Israelis themselves, occupation already creating an inextricable demographic issue will become even more serious in the future. How to imagine 9.2 million Jews (46%) dominating a majority of 11.8 million Palestinians in 2048? These are evidences for Palestinians and most Israelis alike. Yet a minority of Israeli claims the opposite view, that a one-state is feasible namely on demographic grounds.

Table 1

Evolution of the Palestinian Population (West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza, Palestinians of 1948) Compared to the Jewish Population in Historical Palestine

	Jews	Palestinians	West Bank	Jerusalem	Gaza	Palestinians of 1948
2011	6,155	5,503	2,285	284	1,658	1,276
2015	6,475	6,067	2,477	308	1,882	1,400
2020	6,872	6,772	2,720	338	2,186	1,528
2025	7,268	7,514	2,960	368	2,510	1,676
2030	7,666	8,273	3,192	396	2,849	1,836
2035	8,071	9,015	3,404	423	3,193	1,995
2040	8,497	9,717	3,594	447	3,531	2,145
2045	8,939	10,364	3,758	467	3,849	2,290
2048	9,212	10,724	3,843	477	4,025	2,379

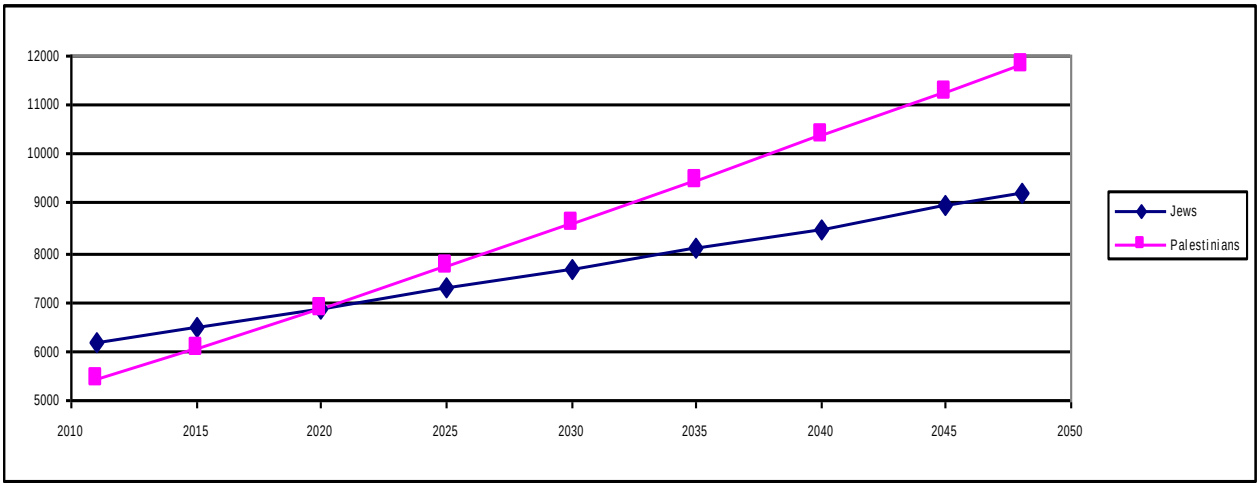


Figure 5. The perspectives of the Palestinian and Jewish populations in historical Palestine.

What Future Without Gaza?

What is the rationale behind this way of thinking? Since 2005, Gaza was detached from the area of direct Israeli occupation and settlement. This came mainly, for demographic reasons. It was considered by the then prime Minister Ariel Sharon that 8000 thousands settlers could not face forever 1.5 million Palestinians.

But the implication of the separation of the destiny of Gaza goes much beyond those mere figures. Hence what would be the demographic perspectives in Israel-Palestine if Gaza is detached (see Figure 6). While retaining almost the entire territory (minus 360 Km2), Israel will keep comfortable Jewish majority in 2048: 9.2 million Jews versus 6.7 million Palestinians in the West Bank including East-Jerusalem and in Israel. The political implications are clear. A one state, under a demographic Jewish majority although difficult to manage- becomes less unconceivable. Besides, the trend of the Jewish and Palestinian curves shows that after 2048, the numerical advantage will remain for the Jews. Of course, the status of the Palestinian minority is open to many

questions which are beyond the scope of this study because they imply extra-demographic variables. Is this another ethnical cleansing? Home rule for the Palestinians divided in a certain number of homelands/Bantustans?

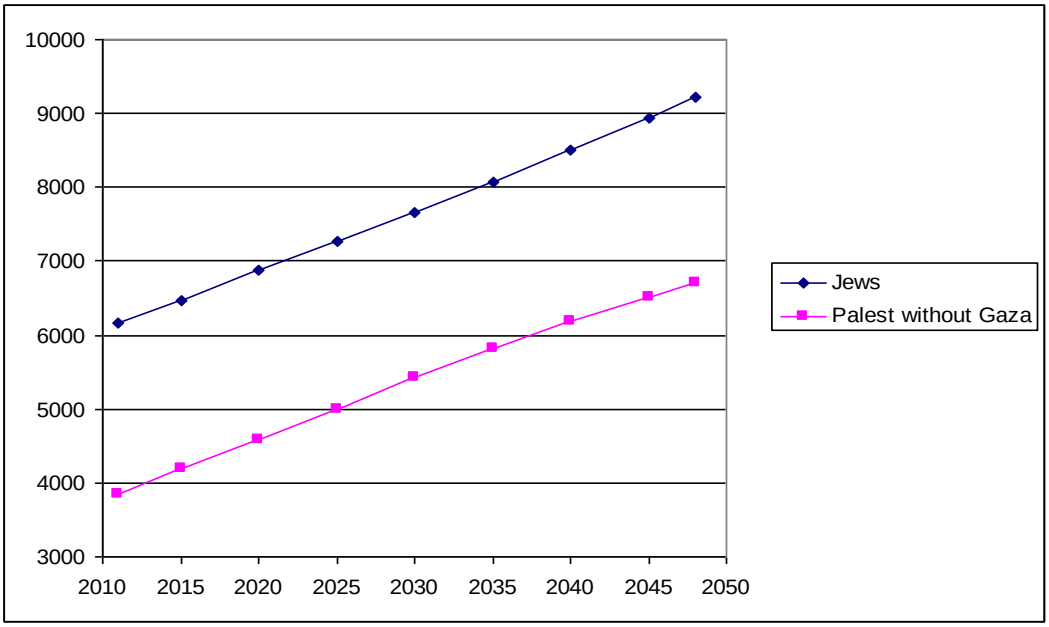


Figure 6. Same perspectives, without Gaza.

The Unexpected Rise of the Settler's Population in the West Bank and Jerusalem

Figure 7 shows three variants of population growth of settlers from 2011 until 2048, based on varying assumptions of fertility and immigration (and one life-expectancy scenario). Figure 8 gives the percentage of the settler population in the total population of the West Bank. It is almost impossible to imagine how much by virtue of differential fertility, the settlers will represent a significant share of the population of the West Bank.

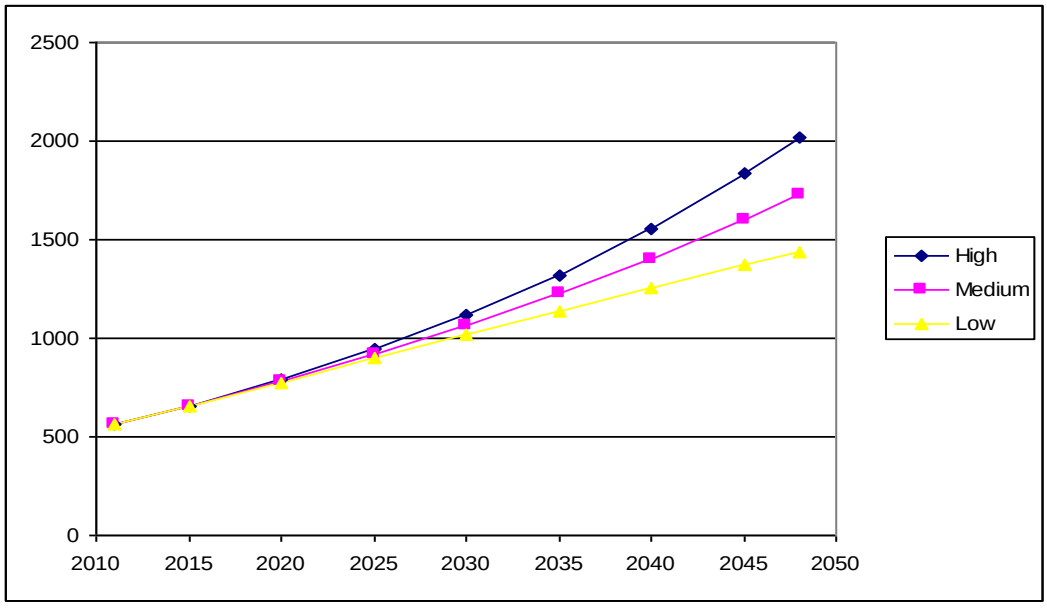


Figure 7. Projections of the settler's population to 2048.

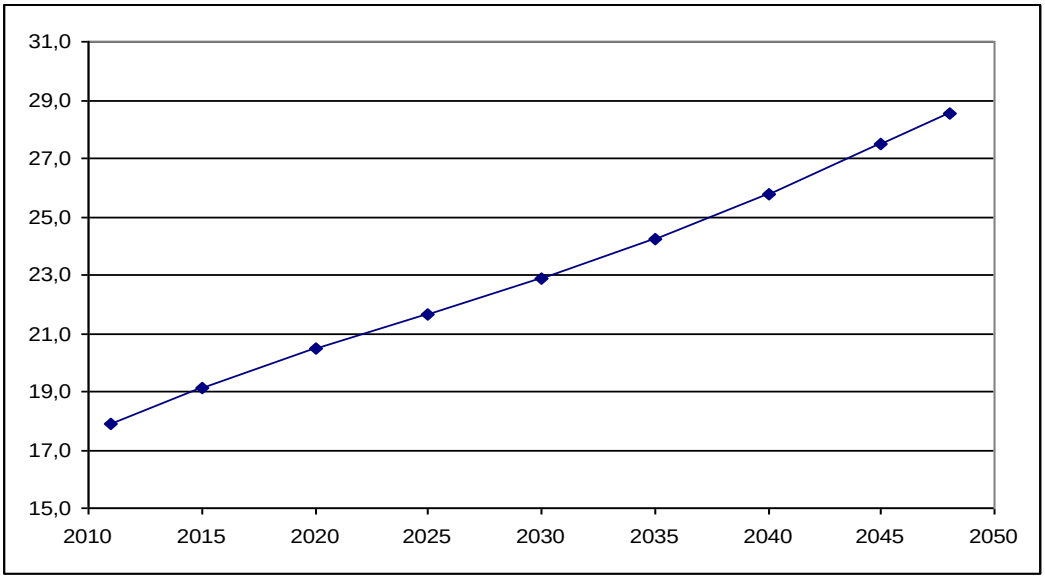


Figure 8. Percentage of Jewish settlers in the West Bank (including East-Jerusalem).

East Jerusalem settlers account for slightly less than half total number of settlers: 260 000 now. Jewish immigration to the Holy city was the preferred tool used to keep Palestinians in Jerusalem below an "acceptable" threshold of 30%. Today, in the whole "reunified" city the proportion of Palestinians is now higher. For the Israelis, a decade ago the prospects were gloomy. Hence the demographer Sergio Della Pergola forecasted increasing Palestinian percentages, 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", could occur. At that time, it was thought that high differential growth could have undermined the "Israelization" of the Holy City. But, recently two factors have changed the deal. Firstly, the increase in building in settlements, which attracted immigrant settlers, from Israel proper and directly from abroad and secondly, is unexpected reversal of fertility trends. Thus enlarging the fertility gap with the Palestinian's one. Hence the objective of only 30% Palestinians in Jerusalem could be reached soon.

Political Consequences of Demographic Shifts Among Palestinians and Israelis

It is well known that politics and social and economic trends impact on population dynamics. But the equation might be reversed. Demographic factors on their own might well impact on politics.

For the Palestinians, differentials fertility between West Bank and Gaza, with its specificities (Roy, 1995) might enlarge the divide which began with the *de facto* secession of Gaza, 2006. From now on, until 2048, population growth will be lower in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) than in Gaza (see Figure 10). In the West Bank, fertility is lower and out-migration highly significant. The same situation is even worse in East-Jerusalem, where one of the reasons for Palestinians harassment by the Israelis authorities and settlers is to push them to emigrate. On the contrary, emigration is very low from the Gaza strip. Therefore its population increase will be extremely high.

Even if Gaza's fertility fells to replacement level (2.1) in 2048, which might not be so utopic (Hass, 2008) the population of Gaza, 1.8 million now, will exceed four million in 2048. It will still be above 3.8 million if fertility fells to the present Lebanese or European level. In the most extreme case of constant fertility it will exceed five million.

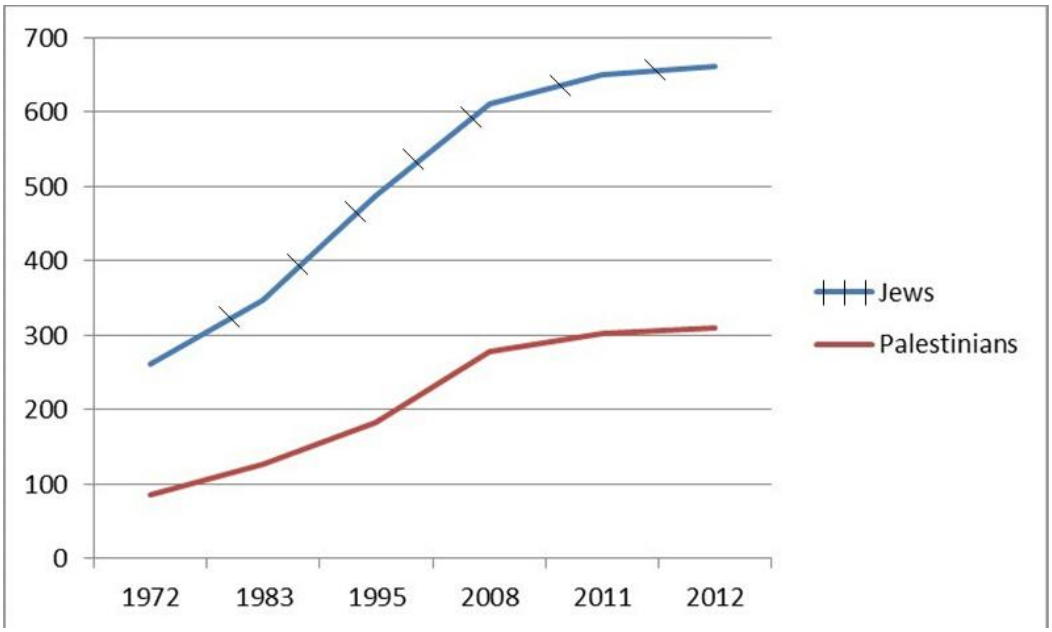


Figure 9. Past growth of the Palestinian and Jewish population in Jerusalem, 1972-2010.

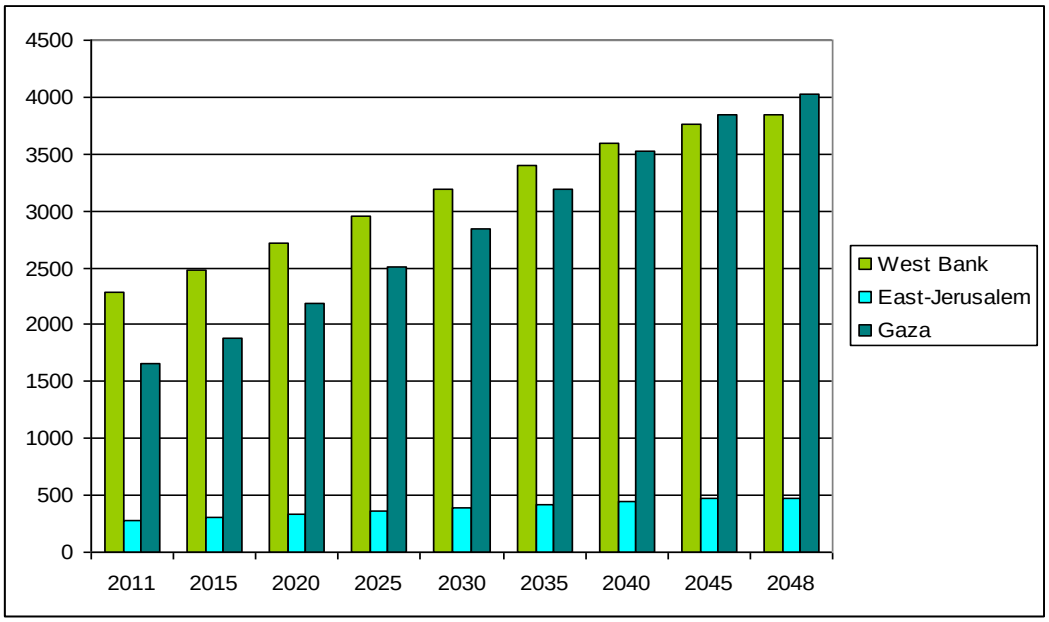


Figure 10. Palestinian population in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza, 2011-2048.

What may be the political impact of these differential fertility trends between Gaza and the West Bank? The last Palestinian elections, in 2006 have shown an important political divide between the two parts of the occupied Palestinian territory (see Figure 11). *Hamas* won almost the absolute majority in Gaza: 48.3%, whereas in the West Bank, it reached only 39.5%, far from the majority. Naturally, political attitudes and their translation into voting patterns are transient phenomena. One cannot assume that these patterns of voting would last forever. However, the demographic shifts of the population (and somehow the electoral body) from the West Bank to Gaza, whose share of the total population of the State of Palestine, 39% now will approach the absolute majority: 48% in 2048, may impact on future Palestinian elections results (see Figure 12).

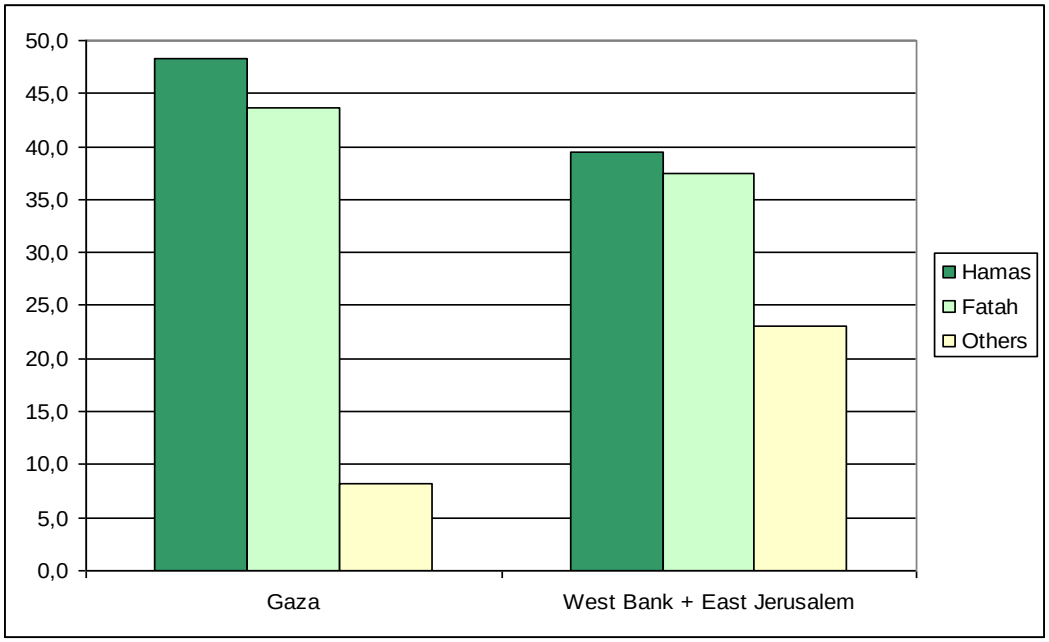


Figure 11. Voting patterns at the Palestinian elections in 2006.

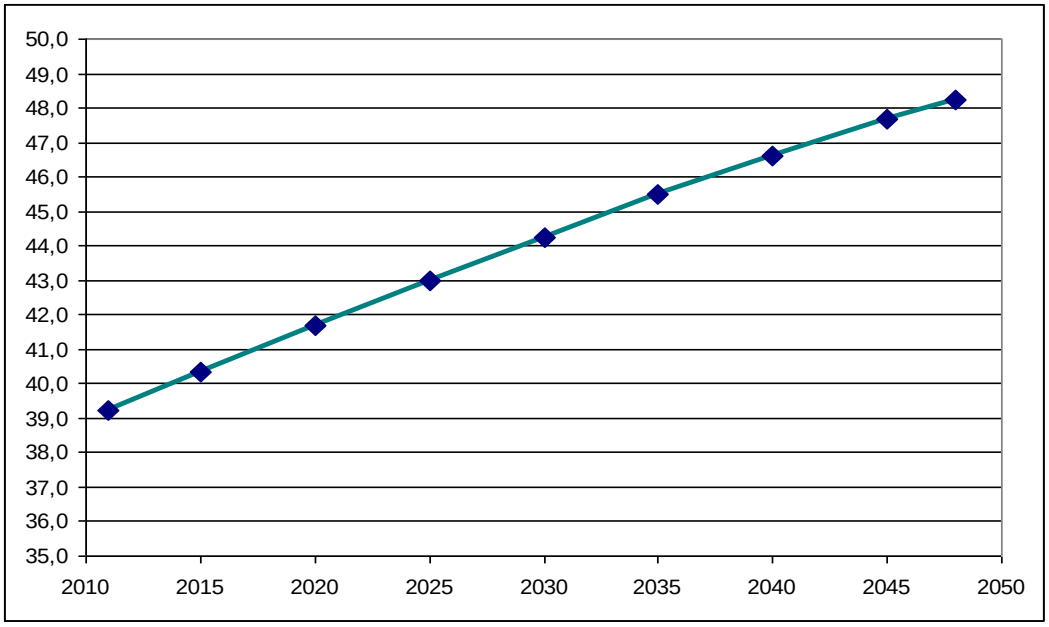


Figure 12. The proportion of the Palestinian population living in Gaza until 2048.

In Israel, at the Knesset elections of 2009, Israeli settlers voted overwhelmingly for the parties of the far right, the right and the religious parties; a trend which was amplified recently. At the 2013 elections at the Knesset, the far right party *Ha Bayit Ha Yehudi "the Jewish home"* of Naftali Benett won 12 seats and the largest number of votes, it came as the first party in the settlements (see Figure 13). Increase of voters for annexionnist parties: Bait Yehudi (28%), Likud/Beitenu (the party of Avigdor Lieberman (21%), the ultra-orthodox (28%), Otzma lel Israel (ex Kahane party) (7%), hence 84% in total. Hence, shift in population from «Green Line » to settlements, might translate mechanically into increase of voters for right wing,

nationalists and religious parties. Settler's population is likely to grow from 0.6 million now to 1.7 million, 18% of Jewish population in 2048, according to the "medium variant" of the population forecasts. The impact of this shift on future elections results is crystal clear (see Figure 14 and Figure 15).

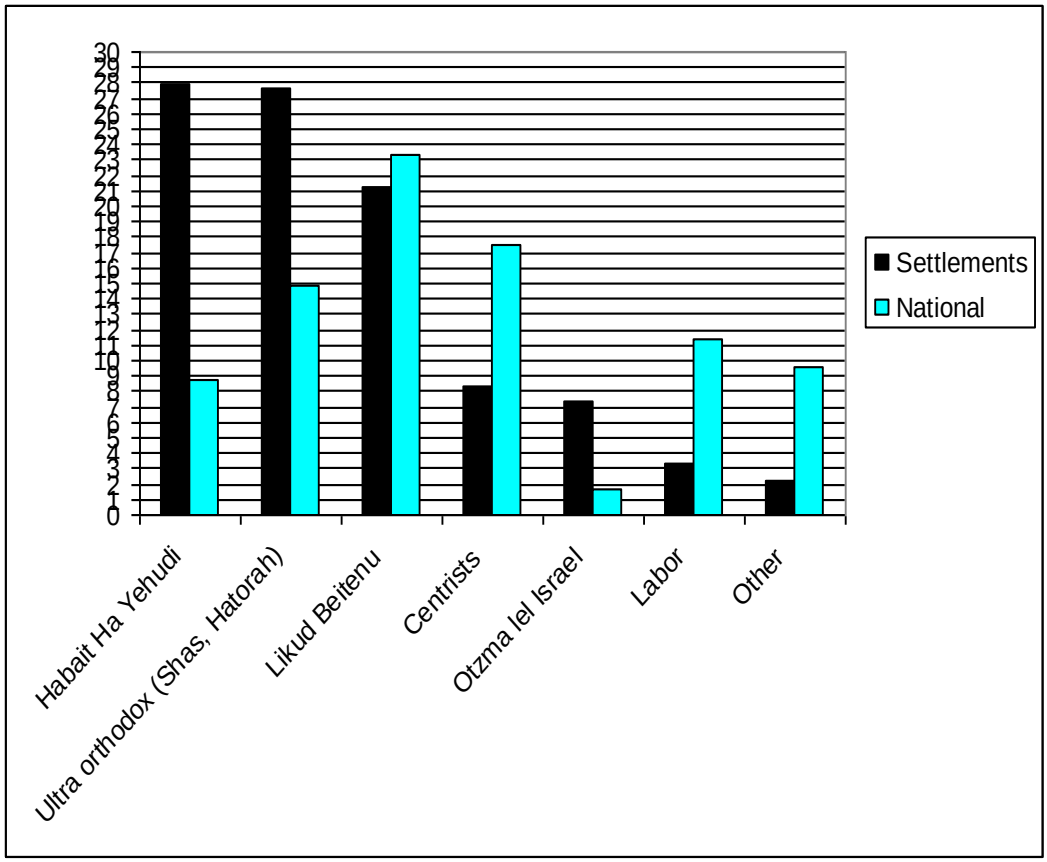


Figure 13. Voting patterns at the 2013 Knesset.

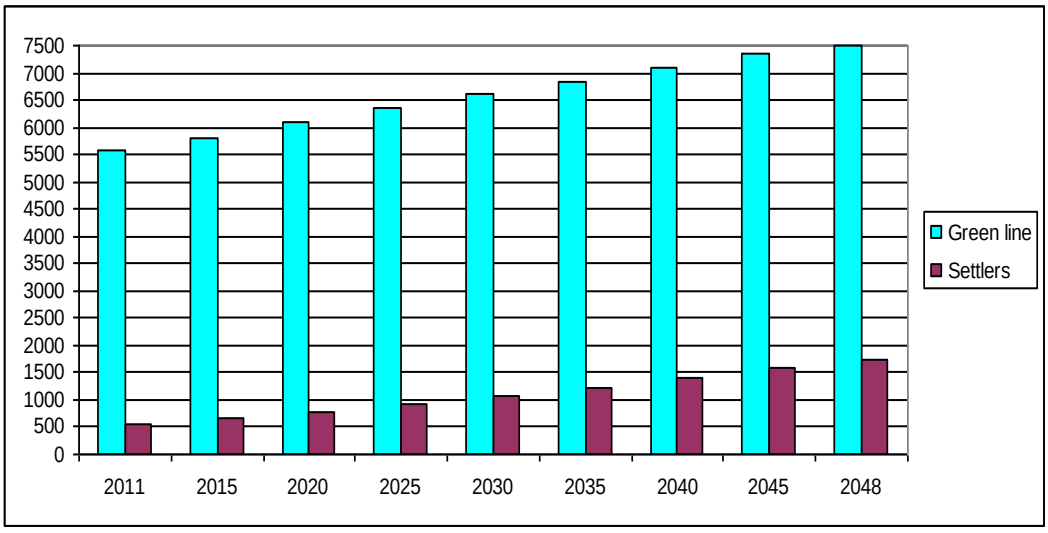


Figure 14. The population growth beyond the Green Line and in the settlements.

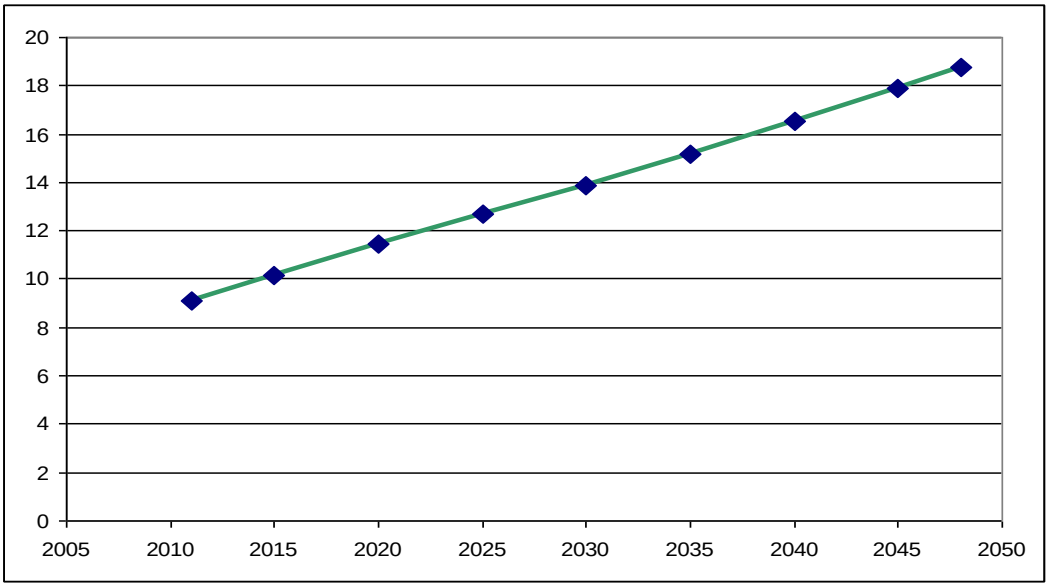


Figure 15. The proportion of the settlers population among the Jewish population.

Conclusion

The recent demographic history of Israel and Palestine is characterized by an inversion of demographic trends. For Palestinians, demographic transition and fertility decrease have speeded, against all odds. This trend became really significant as of the second intifada beginning of 2000. For Israeli Jews, on the contrary, fertility is now increasing, for the total population and mainly in the areas of frictions, the West Bank and Jerusalem.

This is a unique pattern hardly observed elsewhere in the world. The Jewish population in Israel which enjoys most aspects of modernity: standard of living, education, urbanization, globalization, seems to reject one of the most important indicator of modernity, the preference for a reduced number of children, the smaller family of two children. Traditionalism or familialism prevail over modernization when demography is concerned. Yet the high demand for children has been boosted by the State policy to increase Jewish fertility by direct and indirect measures. Billions of dollars have been spent to this end, hence rewarding the high demand for children by the Jewish population.

Contrariwise, Palestinian fertility is rapidly declining in the West Bank in Jerusalem, in Gaza and in Israel proper, as the result of a complex combination of modernization factors, individuation transition from family to individual values and the so-called “poverty-led transition” particularly severe since the 2nd *Intifada*.

Concerning policy measures, Israeli fertility within and beyond the Green Line in the settlements (Portugese, 1998; Rotem, 2011) 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 it is 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. While high fertility and population growth became an efficient weapon in the hand of Israeli authorities to fulfill their avowed or hidden goals, it is difficult to imagine how the Palestinians might be able to reverse their present declining population trends. Maybe not the least of the paradoxes is that

they have renounced to demography as a way to safeguard their land at a moment where their "population explosion" is still making the headlines of the news.

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