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Démographies des Migrations

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The Demographic Imperatives in Israeli Occupied Palestine: Colonial Strategies for Domination and Anti-Colonial Strategies of Resistance

Since the occupation of Palestinian land and the forced expulsion of Palestinians on May 15, 1948 (the day of the Nakba), the formation of an Israeli nation-state has been ingrained in colonial tactics aimed at eradicating Palestinian history and people from its ever-changing and expanding territorial borders. Moreover, Israeli statehood is determined by its possession and governance of territorial land, whereas its nationhood is defined by a non-Arab and ideally white-Jewish national identity living within its territorial jurisdiction. As such, the creation of an Israeli nation-state is an ongoing project defined by its “non-Palestinianness” and overall “non-Arabness.” In juxtaposition, the Palestinian demographic imperative is not to create a nation-state in the same manner but rather to preserve its indigenous and historical connection to its land following mass dispossession and British colonization predating Israel’s existence. Thus, mirroring the Palestinian demographic imperative to the Israeli one as a “war” or “guerre” between the two is superficially inaccurate to the historical rationale for their respective projects—Israel’s is exponentially more imposed and forced upon Palestinians than vice versa. However, to best respond to the question: *Faire venir, expulser, déplacer, faire naître et soigner en Palestine : des politiques de population au service du projet (anti)colonial?*, I examine Israel’s strategies to establish a national identity on Palestinian-possessed territory and why its fluctuating and, at times, contradictory tactics arise in light of Palestinian tactics of resistance. Most notably, through their strategies of population increase and migration.

I. Israeli Demographic Imperatives and the Creation of a Jewish Nation-State

“The Basic Law: Israel-The Nation State of the Jewish People:

- (a) The Land of Israel is the historical homeland of the Jewish People, in which the State of Israel was established. (b) The State of Israel is the nation state of the Jewish People in which it realizes its natural, cultural, religious and historical right to self-determination. (c) The realization of the right to national self determination in the State of Israel is exclusive to the Jewish People” (The Knesset, 2018).

The nationality law signed by the Knesset on July 19, 2018, does two things worth explicating: Firstly, it defines the modern Israeli state based on the existence of land with a historically Jewish identity; and secondly, it restricts the right to national self-determination within its territorial jurisdiction to those with ethnic and religious ties to Judaism. The reality of this law is to concretize Israel's right to exist in the region and establish a national belonging for all Jewish people under the Zionist ideology that to solve centuries of antisemitic violence against the Jewish diaspora, the Jewish population needs a territory of its own.¹ As a result, a hierarchy of citizenship and nationality rights is institutionalized based on history, ethnicity, religion, and culture. The Basic Law reflects Israel's "demographic anxiety" regarding how to preserve and grow a Jewish nation-state (Lustick, 2019, p. 148). This section examines how this anxiety has led to overlapping and, at times, incompatible demographic strategies to homogenize Israel's population.

a. Irredentism and Annexation: Faire Déplacer et Expulser

Irredentism is the extension of territory based on ethnic distinctions drawn among the population living within a state's geopolitical borders. It is commonly a geopolitical strategy for ethnically homogenous states to extend their territory to benefit the majority while disadvantaging the ethnic minority. However, in the case of Israel and Palestine, this strategy forced Israel to occupy an Arab-majority region, risking its goal of homogeneity for territorial gain. The origin of Israel's "demographic problem" dates back to the UN Partition Plan adopted in 1947 (see Map 2), which aimed to demarcate Palestinian borders by ethnicity and religion. At the time, the region was composed of two million residents—630,000 Jewish and 1,324,000 Arab (1,181,000 Muslim and 143,000 Christian) (Dumont, 2023, p. 11).

¹ Both Abusneineh and Lustick reference the work by founder of modern Zionism, Theodor Herzl in his work *Altneuland (Old-New Land)* (1902), as the "body blueprint" for Israel (Abusneineh 2021, p. 101).

period following the June War of 1967, Israel solved this conundrum by “relinquishing the ‘administered areas’—or at least the most densely inhabited regions within them”—while still holding on to conquered East Jerusalem and the Al-Quds region (Lustick, 2019, p. 142). Lustick outlines that this policy of non-inclusion, in which Israel, after annexing the territory of East Jerusalem and Al-Quds post-June War, declares “60,000 Arab inhabitants of al-Quds and its environs ‘permanent residents’ but not Israeli citizens, thereby softening the political consequences of adding to the demographic burden of the country’s non-Jewish minority” (Lustick, 2019, p. 143). This “soft annexation” strategy allowed Israel to “extend the boundaries of the Israeli municipality of Yerushalayim, rather than the boundaries of the State of Israel” (Lustick, 2019, p. 143). The following section will examine the extent to which this strategy manages Arab residents in Israel by classifying them as quasi-citizens with fewer rights and the racial hierarchy this formed.

b. Redlining and Apartheid: Faire Discriminer et Déliner

“Technically you don’t have redlining, technically you don’t have formal, Jim Crow–type segregation. In practice you do” - Rashid Khalidi

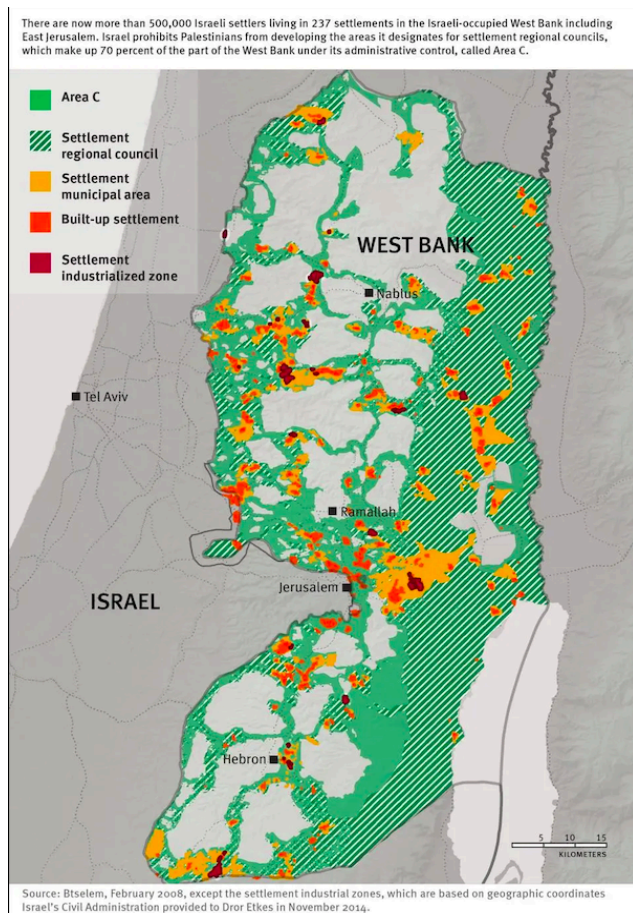
The above quote by Rashid Khalidi, Palestinian-American professor and author of *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, highlights the reality of Israel’s Zionist project on Palestinians as a blatant hierarchization of rights and access to resources based on racial and ethnic distinctions (Robinson, 2023). Article 2 of the United Nations’ Apartheid Convention defines Apartheid as: “inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them” (United Nations, 1973, Art. 2). In addition, the practice of Redlining emerged in the 1950s in the U.S. as a result of the combined forces of mass suburbanization and racial segregation, resulting in housing strategies designed to deny mortgages to Black Americans. Although Redlining practices were banned in the U.S. by the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the effects of these practices are ingrained in the income and racial breakdown of neighborhoods throughout the U.S., drawing parallels with the Israel-Palestinian demarcation of territories and the income disparity between these regions.

Described by Dumont as a “peau de léopard” (Dumont, 2023, p. 12), the use of the “de facto” annexation practices undergone in the 1977 Camp David autonomy processes permitted “a slow and unofficial incorporation of the territories that would not entail change in the political status of their Arab inhabitants” (Lustick, 2019, p. 143). As a result, these

clusters of settlements created neighborhoods for those living under Israeli civil law, opposed to the neighboring Palestinians living under Israeli military and humanitarian law (Human Rights Watch). I provide the definition of Redlining and Apartheid to bolster the argument that Israel's management of Palestinians, largely since the annexation of Palestinian Occupied Territories (OPTs) in 1967, has established racially discriminatory practices modeled after the Jim Crow era in the U.S. and Apartheid in South Africa. Referred to as “racial Palestinianization,” the structural barriers to access resources imposed on Palestinians are a result of the anti-Arab and anti-Black ideologies ingrained in Israel's founding principles (Tanous et al., 2023, p. 5). Thus, beyond the tactics of settlement, dispossession, and expulsion, Israel also delineates, hierarchizes, and discriminates against Palestinians to create its ideal nation-state.

The map below⁴ displays how illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank have used Israeli zoning laws for industrial expansion. The Human Rights Watch report “Occupation, Inc.” explains how the Israeli confiscation of land through the “leasing, lending, selling, and

renting operations of businesses like banks and real estate agencies help the illegal settlements in the West Bank to function as viable housing markets, enabling the government to transfer settlers there” (Human Rights Watch, 2016). I want to parallel this evidence with the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which defines Redlining as, “the discrimination by direct providers of housing, such as landlords and real estate... municipalities, banks or other lending institutions and homeowners insurance companies whose discriminatory practices make housing unavailable to persons because of: race or color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, or disability” (U.S. Department of Justice). The collective work by Tanous et al. describes how “today (2023), 93% of land in



⁴ Map 3: Original Source - *Btselem*, February 2008. Taken from article Human Rights Watch. *Occupation, Inc.: How Settlement Businesses Contribute to Israel's Violations*. 19 Jan. 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/01/19/occupation-inc/how-settlement-businesses-contribute-israels-violations>.

Israel is controlled by the state or quasi-state entities, with over 80% of land inaccessible for PCI to purchase or lease based on ‘national belonging’—i.e., their status as non-Jewish citizens in Israel” (Tanous et al., 2023, p. 8). Israel’s discriminatory practices of housing and industrial leasing are integral to their demographic imperative by rendering historically Palestinian territory uninhabitable for Palestinians through the push factors of: unequal housing access; destruction of the environment; and Israeli industrial expansion and takeover of Palestinian businesses.

II. The “Palestinian” Question: “Guerres de Peuplement” or Demographic Resistance?

The previous section attempts to outline the Zionist Settler Colonial project through the demographic and territorial manipulation of the Israeli nation-state and the consequential inequalities and structural violence against Palestinians. In the attempt to outline possible scenarios for geopolitical stability between Israel and Palestine, Dumont presents the existence of a “*guerre de peuplement*” through both the migration and birth-rate strategies from both Palestinian and Israeli populations (Dumont, 2023, p. 32). This section will examine these strategies to achieve demographic dominance in the area and argue that these strategies are not reflective of a proportional war but rather Palestinian survival and their anti-colonial resistance. Dumont’s use of the term “*guerre*” and his explication of possible solutions frames the two sides as adapting similar strategies of high birth rates and control over migration flows to instill demographic domination—“*guerre migratoire*” et “*guerre des naissances*” (Dumont, 2023, p. 32). However, where Dumont argues that the Palestinian use of population growth perpetuates the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we can reframe the Palestinians’ strategies of population growth as reactionary against Israel’s reproductive and immigration strategies to maintain racial and ethnic dominance in their occupied territories.

a. Guerre Migratoire: Faire Venir

i. Case of Israel: Law of Return

As mentioned in the previous section, Israel’s settler project depends on Israel’s 1950 “Law of Return,” which provides anyone with Jewish ancestry Israeli citizenship. This law has been invoked throughout Israel’s existence but is historically rooted in the Judaic notion of *Alyah* or “ascension,” which asserts the right for Jews in the Diaspora to return to the Holy Land of Israel (Dumont, 2023, p. 18). Where Dumont refers to the law as a religious form of repatriation and “*une politique volontariste d’accueil*” for the Jewish diaspora (Dumont,

2023, p. 18), the Law of Return is referenced by Lustick and Abusneineh as a state tool to incentivize migration into Israel—specifically for white-European Jews (Lustick, 2017; Abusneineh, 2021). Thus, to claim Israel’s is composed of “*d’immigrants et aux descendants de ces migrants*” (Dumont, 2023, p. 18), it is in reality a composition of “‘permanent majorities and minorities’ that are anything but natural” (Tanous et al. 2023, p. 4).

An example compares Israel’s recruitment and adoption of different sects of Russian Jews (despite 26 percent not being Jewish by orthodox standards) to the colonially rooted and saviorist attitudes Israel displayed toward Ethiopian Jews (Abusneineh, 2021, p. 104). In addition, despite the Israeli government paralleling Zionism to “pan-Africanism” and their shared decolonial history from Europe, Israel’s welcoming of Ethiopian Jews is merely reflective of the same rhetoric used by colonial European powers that juxtapose “the modern West versus the primitive East” (Abusneineh, 2021, p. 108). Thus, Israel’s strategy of immigration serves its colonial project by establishing a “white” and “New Jew” (European/Ashkenazi) majority in Israel (Abusneineh, 2021, p. 103). Therefore, the immigration or “settlements” of persons with Jewish ancestry does not entail equal treatment by the state of Israel nor equal status. Israel’s colonial history was dependent on the possession of Palestinian land, history, and people, and thus Israel’s demographic makeup relies on a racial hierarchy that prioritizes immigrants of white-European lineage over racialized Jews and even lower, non-Jewish Arabs.

ii. Case of Palestine: “Right to Return”

Following the Nakba and expulsion of Palestinians from their land, the UNRWA designated a particular status to Palestinian refugees concerning the generational inheritance of the “right to return” to their land (Dumont, 2023, p. 19). The exponential increase in Palestinian refugees, particularly in Gaza and the West Bank, and the inheritance component, proves an incentive for Palestinians to maintain a high birth rate, resulting in the population increasing ninefold since 1948 (Elkahlout, 2018, p. 215). The increasing population and fluctuating periods of conflict and “peace” in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (POTs) have resulted in large migration flows, not only of “refugees” fleeing conflict but also those seeking economic opportunities in Europe due to high unemployment and scarce resources in POTs and neighboring regions (Elkahlout 2018).

The instability in Gaza has only intensified in the past 20 years due to outbreaks of conflict between the Israeli Defense “Offensive” Forces (IDF) and Hamas, leading to the illegal siege of Gaza since 2006, and the added persistent Israeli bombardment on Gaza since October 2023. This blockade has deteriorated humanitarian conditions and resulted in severe

economic turmoil due to inadequate job opportunities and the lack of Palestinian industries (Elkahlout, 2018, p. 215). It is important to highlight that those migrating from Gaza are leaving for the combined effects of war, land possession, social and political inequality, and economic instability. Thus, when addressing refugees' "right to return", Palestinians are not leaving without hope of return but leaving with hope of surviving. From an interview with a Gazan woman who left Palestine for Turkey, Elkahlout quotes, "If I stayed in Gaza, I would die every day" (Elkahlout 2018, p. 217). Thus, migration as a demographic strategy is not equally weighted on both sides of the conflict due to the realities of migration into Israel/POTs. Immigration to Israel is concretized into law for those with Jewish ancestry and therefore largely protected, yet socially fabricated based on race, religion, and ethnicity. Meanwhile, migration or "return" to Palestine is not recognized by Israel and is therefore an unstable, costly, and precarious route for Palestinians between surviving Israeli occupation by leaving or fighting it by staying/returning.

b. Guerre des Naissances: Faire Naitre

i. Case of Palestine: Demographic Transition towards Liberation

It is important to recognize Palestinian migration strategy as a form of resistance by using their "right to return" to pressure the Israeli occupation. Gaza is categorized with a decreasing fertility rate (from 6.9 in 1997 to 3.35 in 2024), yet still significantly higher than the world average of 2.2 according to the United Nations World report (United Nations 2023). The high fertility rate in Gaza is cited as a "tool of resistance in a context of decades of occupation, conflict, and siege" (Elkahlout, 2018, p. 216). Moreover, the family unit in Gaza is emphasized as an important community-building strategy when the number of martyrs is high during times of conflict and the demand for Palestinian patriotism is necessary for continued resistance. This can be further examined through the Gazan population pyramid, in which 42.6 percent of Gazans are under the age of 14 (Elkahlout 2018, p. 216). Youth "bulges" in the population are often linked to increases in conflict due to early exposure to violence, increased hostility, exclusion from education, and the lack of financial opportunities due to already high unemployment rates and economic insecurity. In Gaza, these factors are charged with ongoing armed conflict, thus increasing the chances of a hyper-politically conscious and militarized youth (Elkahlout 2018).

Dumont places Palestine within a unique demographic transition phase, in which *"leurs conditions de mortalité mettent en évidence d'importantes avancées hygiéniques et sanitaires. En revanche, leur taux de natalité demeure particulièrement élevé"* (Dumont 2023, p. 21). I argue that this demographic schema is linked to the political situation Gazans

are placed under, in which high birth rates are not reflective of their “stage of development” but rather the preservation of a Palestinian community and population in occupied territories. Where Dumont links this anomaly of longer life spans and low death rates to the partial level of alimentation and health provided by international organisations,⁵ this argument is reductive and fails to situate the context of Palestinian health and wellbeing (lifespans) within the “historically and politically racialized settler colonial context” (Tanous et al. 2023, p. 12). In addition, Dumont links the high fertility of women to collective marriages organized by Hamas, ultimately diminishing Palestinian women’s agency over reproduction, which is “one of the few liberties which remains, and also contributes to the larger goal of increasing the Palestinian people” (Elkahlout, 2018, p. 216). Thus, it is important to see fertility rates not merely as a factor in demographic transitions but also as a form of political agency, as well as state control over women’s bodies.

ii. Case of Israel: Demographic Transition towards Domination

Dumont categorizes Israel in a post-transitional demographic phase marked by low mortality rates and high life expectancy at birth. However, similar to his analysis on Palestine, Israel is still marked by a higher fertility rate (2.9 infants per woman) compared to similar countries in this phase (Portugal, Greece, Italy, and Japan) (Dumont, 2023, p. 22). Dumont links this higher-than-normal rate to both the educational gap and belief differences between Orthodox and Secular Jewish groups within Israel, as well as the Malthusian messaging from the Israeli government in the fear of a declining Jewish population. The emphasis on maintaining a high birth rate is consistent with Israel’s demographic imperative, in which the first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, writes, “the increase of the Jewish birthrate is not an imperialistic need, but rather an essential component of the survival of the [Jewish] people... any woman who does not have four children, as much as it depends on her, is betraying the Jewish mission” (Abusneineh, 2021, p. 102). Thus, the use of “reproductive politics” is linked to the larger “Jewish mission” in maintaining geopolitical dominance in the region against a growing Arab population.

Abusneineh links the use of “reproductive politics” as intrinsically tied to the broader mission of Israel’s Zionist project. Where Dumont highlights the “positive” use of reproductive health initiatives in Israel to support in vitro pregnancies for Israeli-Jewish women, the same government admitted to administering Depo-Provera contraceptive shots to

⁵ Original Quote: “De tels niveaux, qui peuvent s’expliquer notamment par la volonté d’affirmer son droit sur le sol, sont en fait rendus possibles parce que les populations sont partiellement alimentées et soignées par des organisations internationales” (Dumont 2023, pg. 21).

Ethiopian immigrant women without their consent (Abusneineh, 2021, p. 98). The use of reproductive health medicine to increase the fertility rate for white Jewish women, while at the same time administering birth control and dissuading Ethiopian Jews from having children, reveals the manipulation of women's reproductive rights as a tool to be “‘fruitful and multiply’ for the Jewish state,” while eliminating the risk of a “‘demographic threat’ to the white, Jewish nation” (Abusneineh, 2021, p. 103). The Depo-Provera case further explicates the larger argument that the manipulation of women's bodies to serve the “Jewish mission” is racially and colonially charged to fabricate an ideal Israeli nation-state, regardless of the demographic threat posed by an Arab and Black majority forced either outside its territory or “beneath” its ideal population.

Conclusion

In conclusion, to reproduce, live, migrate, and die are not the same realities lived by both Palestinians and Israelis, nor the racial minorities who fall victim to the hierarchy instilled by the Israeli nation-state mission. In other words, the (anti)-colonial project of Palestine and the colonial project of Israel are not two sides of the same coin. This paper argues the what is essential when analyzing the statistics on population change is the context in which these changes are occurring. The articles referenced throughout this paper were all published before October 7th, 2023 (except for Gerald-François Dumont's, which was published the same month), marking the military attack on Israel by Hamas and the resulting year-and-a-half-long Israeli war and genocide in Gaza, which killed an estimated 47,000 Gazans—17,492 of whom were children—and 1,139 Israelis (“Israel-Hamas War...”). Despite a ceasefire being approved on January 19th of this year, the effects of this genocide and the total destruction of the Gaza Strip (with 92 percent of housing destroyed) will foreseeably impact the demographic strategies for Palestinian survival and resistance. The demographic strategies used by both groups to migrate, settle, reproduce, let die, or attempt to survive inevitably instill conflict. What I hoped to argue is that the disequilibrium between the quality of life in PTOs and Israel has become even more apparent in this past conflict and the genocide in Gaza. Israel and the Western world have revealed their strategies to “*faire venir, expulser, déplacer, faire naître et soigner*” in Palestine through destruction and genocide. Thus, the future of Palestinians' demographic imperative is rooted in the history of their past strategies of resistance and survival to recreate a foreseeable future- one that is ongoing.

Signes: 20597 (including in text-citations)

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Maps

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