

COUNTING HEADS: ISRAEL'S DEMOGRAPHIC IMPERATIVE

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Abstract

Israel is a country uniquely affected by demography, insofar as the state is bound by an explicitly Jewish nature. This balance has forced Israel to combat external demographic threats from before 1948 up until the present. The implementation of policies including the endorsement of “transfer”—a euphemism for the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948, the razing of Palestinian villages, discriminatory legislation and the creation of facts on the ground—are a logical extension of the Zionist ideology. The construction of the West Bank Barrier (WBB) is the current manifestation of Israeli demographic fears and the Zionist desire to further curb non-Jewish elements.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Israeli domestic policy has been directed in large part by demographic concerns and a fixation on the occupied Palestinian population growth. This preoccupation with issues of demography is not a recent phenomenon. Indeed, the state of Israel was born out of a desire to establish “a publicly and legally secured home in Palestine for the Jewish people”—the Zionist prime objective (Morris 1987: 1). However much the “land without a people for a people without a land” stoked the nationalist sentiments of post-war European Jewry, there *were* people living in Palestine, and in substantive numbers. Thus, from the very roots of Zionist thought, beginning with the “prophetic-

programmatic” writings of Moses Hess, Judah Alkalai, Zvi Hirsch Kalischer and Theodor Herzl, it was acknowledged that for a Jewish state to emerge in Palestine, the resident Arab population would have to become a minority or be removed altogether (Morris 1987: 4). This article examines the political importance of demography to Zionist ideology and the imperative to protect Israel’s Jewish nature. To do so, I will first review Israel’s necessary regulation of demography towards achieving Zionist goals by briefly summarizing the importance of transfer to Zionist political thought.¹ Armed with this knowledge, I then address Israel’s practice of establishing “facts on the ground,” the modern continuation of which is the *fait accompli* existence of the West Bank Barrier (WBB). Finally, by reviewing Israel’s constant evasion of seriously addressing the demographic question, I intend to draw a logical parallel between past actions designed to establish a Jewish majority and the physical reality of the WBB aimed at keeping it. Though Israel has consistently denied political motives, this article attempts to map the WBB’s *actual* political implications within a historical framework.²

¹ Those familiar with issues of Israel/Palestine are well acquainted with the top scholars in the field, not least of which include Benny Morris, Nur Masalha, Ilan Pappé among others. These scholars belong to what has since been called the “new historian” movement, instigated by the declassification of Israeli military archives in the 1980s, and their work has since helped to dispel a great deal of confusion and pseudo-academic posturing as to the events of 1948. Unless otherwise cited, all historical documentation in this article relies on the work of these historians and, to a lesser extent, my own time working in the Gaza Strip.

² This article does not discuss the implications of Hamas’ rise to power in 2006, the 2007 U.S.-backed coup attempt, the unfolding economic crisis in Gaza, or the ongoing Israeli siege of the territory. These are all critical aspects of the situation in the Palestinian

DEMOGRAPHY AND THE ZIONIST IMPERATIVE

To understand the importance of demography to mainstream Zionist worldview, we must review the four basic tenets of the cause.³ The first principle of pre-1948 Zionism was the desire to establish a “*territorial concentration* of the Jewish people in Palestine” (Gorny 1987: 2). This principle assumed a Jewish majority, for Zionism itself was at least partly born in response to the vulnerability of the European Jewry to anti-Semitism during the 20th century. Naturally, the second principle sought to create a Jewish majority in Palestine, without which “Zionism would [have forfeited] its meaning” by (once again) existing as a minority in a land governed by an alien power (Gorny 1987: 2). The third principle dealt with Jewish labor and the strongly nationalist fantasies of Jews tilling Jewish land; it was believed that the practice of employing exclusively Jewish labor would aid Zionist economic independence. The fourth principle, driven by fears of cultural assimilation during the Diaspora, sought to promote a rebirth of Hebrew culture, which was very effectively executed later on. The first of these causes is entirely dependent upon demography (i.e. a Jewish majority) and the third and fourth, though not dependent upon, are more feasible with such a majority. Thus, demography is the single unifying

territories, but are not (in my opinion), of immediate relevance to the Zionist demographic imperative.

³ It is beyond the scope of this paper to review the historical/political emergence of Zionism and I take it for granted that my readers are familiar with this topic. If not, there is an abundance of material on the matter including many of the sources I cite in this article.

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factor under which Zionism has flourished. It is for this reason that demographic issues have taken precedence above other Zionist goals, often limiting Israel's ability to universally guarantee citizens' rights as members of a liberal democracy.⁴

As the supreme goal of Zionism, the establishment of a Jewish majority in Palestine necessitated a solitary outcome: the erstwhile Arab majority needed to become a minority—as small a minority as possible. In this way, the notion of transfer was married to Zionist thought almost from its inception (Masalha, 1992; Morris 2004; Pappé 2006). Not merely a cause relegated to the far right Revisionists, transfer policies were endorsed by all echelons of the Zionist political sphere prior to 1948. As David Ben-Gurion wrote in a letter to his son, “We must expel [the] Arabs and take their places...to guarantee our own right to settle in those places...” (David Ben-Gurion cited in Teveth, 1985: 189). The demographic imperatives of Zionism *necessitated* the removal of Palestinian Arabs from the future Jewish state and any right-minded proponent of the cause could not have desired a lesser alternative. Any debate at all was reserved merely for the practicalities of implementation and the possibility of voluntary, as opposed to forcible, transfer of Palestine's Arab population (see Masalha, 1992;

⁴ For example, Israel has adopted many laws aimed at controlling demography, most notably the Law of Return and various marriage laws to restrict the rights of Israeli's married to non-Jews. Numerous studies have also found Israel's Arab population to be effectively marginalized with difficult access to public services, decent schools, and higher rates of criminal incarceration.

Pappe, 2006).⁵ According to Rabbi Meir, a member of the Yishuv National Council, “The basis of Zionism is that the land of Israel is ours and not the land of the Arabs, and not because they have large territories, and we have but little. We demand Palestine because it is our country” (Meir cited in Gorny, 1987: 86). More recently, Ariel Sharon stated, “...there is no Zionism, colonialization, or Jewish State without the eviction of the Arabs and the expropriation of their lands” (Al Jazeera, 2006). The question of demography is of central importance to Zionism and I submit that it is possible to trace this importance from the realization of Zionist goals and policy through the 20th century up to the construction of the WBB.

“TRANSFER” PRIOR TO 1948

In 1948, three-quarters of a million people suddenly became the Palestinian refugee problem, most having left their homes after a combination of psychological “whispering” campaigns and direct military assault by Jewish forces long before Israel’s declaration of independence and the subsequent invasion of Arab armies (Morris, 1987; Masalha, 1992; Pappé 2006). Despite decades of official denial on behalf of successive Israeli governments, it is no longer disputed that the 1948 refugees were largely a product of Israeli eviction by

⁵ Even Moshe Sharett (Shertok), a prominent member of the Yishuv at the time, and by all accounts the most sympathetic to Palestinian rights, expressed support for the *voluntary* transfer of Palestine’s Arab population to neighboring Transjordan. Indeed, the option of coexistence was never discussed as a serious option by any among the Zionist leadership.

conquest and that transfer policies were long endorsed by Israel's proto-Zionist founders (See Masalha, 1992 and Morris, 2002).

It is not clear precisely how these events were endorsed by policy and the debate over intentional or incidental Palestinian expulsion continues.⁶ The classic Zionist narrative argues that the result of 1948 was a "miraculous clearing of the land", which happened to be organized by the Palestinian leadership. Such an explanation would seem to absolve Israel of responsibility and "leave intact [Israel's] untarnished image as the haven of a much persecuted people, a body politic more just, moral and deserving of the West's sympathy and help than the surrounding sea of reactionary, semi-feudal, dictatorial Arab societies" (Morris, 1987: 1). While many Israelis may be willing to accept that transfer policies were widely endorsed in theory by the Yishuv, it is more difficult for them to imagine these beliefs translating into the 1948 exodus as a premeditated and intentional expulsion.⁷ This is precisely where Nur Masalha diverges from Benny Morris. Morris famously concluded, "the Palestine refugee problem was born of war and not by design" (Morris, 1987: 286), yet Masalha found the same evidence to suggest deliberate dispossession. Both historians work

⁶ Most of this debate is relegated to simple disputes over the number of Palestinian expelled by force as opposed to the number having fled the region as refugees. As we now know, "Plan Dalet", enforced by Jewish forces as early as late 1947, called for the total destruction of Palestinian villages and the expulsion of residents beyond the borders of the future state.

⁷ It is telling that the key figures in this ongoing debate are two of the very scholars I cite in this article: Benny Morris and Ilan Pappé.

from the same factual basis, but there are still disputes over the Yishuv's depth of practical commitment to removing hundreds of thousands of Arabs from Palestine. Whether premeditated or coincidental, most contemporary Zionists tend to agree that Israel benefited greatly from the sudden absence of Palestinian Arabs in 1948; indeed, the almost total realization of Zionism's demographic goals had ensured Israel's very existence.⁸

Before 1930, the Zionist leadership had kept its aspirations for transfer relatively quiet, due to the understandable alarm it roused in the Palestinian population. Despite the necessity of transfer to Zionist goals, it was virtually taboo for the leadership to discuss such plans publicly. The early 1930s witnessed a surge in Zionist confidence, however, as Jewish immigration increased from 17.8% to 29.5% (Khalidi, 1991: 86). Thus, plans advocating the transfer of Palestinian Arabs surfaced more frequently than before. Menahem Ussishkin, then-President of the Jewish National Fund, remarked at a meeting with the Jewish Agency Executive:

“What we can demand today is that all Transjordan be included within the Land of Israel ... on condition that Transjordan would either be made available for Jewish colonization or for the resettlement of those Arabs, whose lands [in Palestine] we would purchase ... I will fight for this. I will make sure that we will be the

⁸ Benny Morris for example, has argued that Israel would have been able to avoid much of the violence that has plagued its existence over the years if the Yishuv had managed to expel all of Palestine's Arab population in 1947/48.

landlords of this land ... because my country belongs to us and not to them...” (Ussishkin cited in Masalha, 1992: 51)

Ussishkin was not alone. Many members of the Zionist leadership assumed that if the Palestinian Arabs refused to relocate to Iraq, Transjordan would be the natural compromise so long as the possibility for Jewish settlement remained an option. The plan rested on the naïve assumption that Palestinian land-attachment was superficial and relocation to Transjordan would have been unobjectionable—a strange logic that was adopted principally as an apology for population transfer plans at the time.⁹ By stressing the belief that Palestinian Arabs looked upon Transjordan with equal favor as they did Palestine, the Yishuv was able to rationalize a (somewhat) morally defensible case for dispossession and expulsion. Certainly, transfer would have solved the “Arab problem”. As it became clear that only military force would compel the Palestinians to resettle in Iraq, most accepted Transjordan as the eventual destination for Arab transferees, though many still pushed for Iraq.¹⁰

In 1937, the partition of Palestine offered by the Royal Peel Commission would have effectively barred Jewish settlers from Transjordan and too much reflected the stark Arab majority in the

⁹ It should be noted that all references to transfer were decidedly euphemistic during this period.

¹⁰ Iraq as a transfer destination, though abandoned by the Mapai party and other mainstream Zionists, continued to be pushed by the far right and those who feared the unnecessary hindrance of future Jewish settlement in the region.

region. “Thus, the notion of transfer was a natural concomitant to the partition idea” (Masalha, 1992: 55). Also, though Arab nationalism was slow to emerge as a unified force, most Palestinians were *individually* loath to cede any of what they considered to be their land. Thus, when the Royal Peel Commission issued its proposal for a two-state partition, neither the Zionists *nor* the Palestinians could have unconditionally offered their support. Indeed, the recommendations, which ultimately offered the Yishuv about one-third of Palestine (including the most fertile regions) were rejected by the Palestinians and only intensified the ongoing Arab rebellion. The Yishuv accepted the Peel recommendations only after much hesitation—primarily because the commission endorsed compulsory transfer for the Arab population. Not all were pleased, however. Denouncing the Peel recommendations, Menahem Ussishkin declared, “We demand that our inheritance, Palestine, be returned to us and if there is no room for Arabs, they have the opportunity of going to Iraq” (Ussishkin, 1937: 3). It was clear that, despite the Yishuv's acceptance of partition, land negotiation—including Transjordan—would continue; Zionism required it.

By 1947, when the United Nations general assembly voted in favor of partition, the Zionists had been able to negotiate a Jewish state up to approximately half of Palestine. Jewish land-ownership surpassed 50% in only a handful of these regions however, so plans for Arab transfer had never fallen from popular approval. The subsequent “whispering” propaganda campaign and the direct military assault upon Palestinian

Arabs in 1948 has been excruciatingly well documented and I will avoid reviewing the chronology of various military operations. With the flight or expulsion of approximately 700,000 Palestinians, it is certain that Zionism's goals were fulfilled to an extent unimaginable by many at the time. Chaim Weizmann declared the Palestinian exodus to be "miraculous," and though such sensationalism was not entirely warranted,¹¹ it did set the groundwork for an eventual Jewish majority. After 1948, the new Israeli government encouraged mass immigration from across the globe and by 1951, there was a Jewish majority. In this period, Israel was confronted with even greater demographic challenges than before; the task was no longer *how* to create a Jewish majority, but *how to keep* it.

Keeping Israel Jewish

Creating Facts on the Ground

Before 1967, it was possible for Israel to simply avoid dealing with the refugee situation it had created. The West Bank and Gaza were separately administered by Jordan and Egypt, respectively, and the thousands of Palestinian refugees posed no immediate demographic threat to Israel. Israel was unwilling to cede any of the land it had seized during the 1948 war and accorded Palestinian refugees

¹¹ Weizmann had been one of the most rigorous promoters of Arab transfer immediately prior to 1948, canvassing support across Europe and the United States (See Masalha, 1992: 127).

indeterminate status until peace was secured with the surrounding Arab states. To ensure Israeli hegemony over newly captured land, Jewish settlements immediately began to spring up across the Negev. The idea was to discourage U.N. insistence of a return to the 1947 partition borders by creating *fait accompli* “facts on the ground.” Immediately following the Palestinian exodus, Ezra Danin, a member of the Yishuv’s Committee for Abandoned Arab Property stated, “if we do not seek to encourage the return of the Arabs ... then they must be confronted with *fait accomplis*” (Danin cited in Morris, 1987: 135). Such plans, according to Danin, included the destruction of Arab houses, the expedient resettling of Jews on the evacuated land and the expropriation of Arab property (Morris, 1987: 135). Though Danin resigned from the Committee for Abandoned Arab Property for his inability to curb Jewish looting, he formed a self-appointed “Transfer Committee” with Yosef Weitz, the director of the Jewish National Fund’s Land Department. Together they issued a short memorandum, intended for Ben-Gurion’s approval, entitled “Retroactive Transfer: A Scheme For the Solution of the Arab Question in the State of Israel” (Morris, 1990: 104). The scheme acknowledged that a post-war “Israel must be inhabited largely by Jews, so that there will be in it very few non-Jews” and that “the uprooting of the Arabs should be seen as the solution to the Arab question” (Morris, 1990: 104).

Although the temporary “Transfer Committee” was not permitted to operate officially as a branch of government, Ben-Gurion approved to

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the plan (Morris, 1990: 107). The Yishuv began to carry out systematic village destruction followed by prompt Jewish settlement—a strategy complimented by an intense propaganda campaign against Arab hopes of return. Indeed, Jewish forces destroyed hundreds of Arab villages between 1948-1949 and the Yishuv actively encouraged Jewish settlement, in most cases literally on top of Palestinian ruins. Such tactics proved extremely useful at discouraging Palestinian hopes for return. Because the retroactive transfer policies began in June 1948, after the majority of refugees had already fled or been expelled, the purely political motives were well known (Morris, 1990: 107). This realization sparked some minor opposition from the Israeli left, but Ben Gurion's complicity in the demolitions was not well known and the policies were passively accepted as the natural fulfilment of Zionist demographic goals. When village destruction eventually became politically untenable, Yosef Weitz turned to purchasing land from Arab tenants. Interestingly, he consulted with Moshe Shertok, expressing his concern that some of the money paid to Arab farmers might be used to finance the Arab war-effort. Shertok's response was clear, "The reasons for buying [Arab land] outweigh [the reasons against]" (Shertok cited in Morris, 1990: 123). Such a statement merely underscores the importance of demography as a higher priority even than Israel's immediate security concerns.

The Arabs remaining in Israel after 1948 (about 170,000 in 1950) were "regarded as potential fifth columnists" and were "subject to Israel's

perceived security requirements and the needs of its incoming settlers” (Smith, 2004: 220). Despite the unsure status of the refugees and notwithstanding the rights of Israeli Arabs, Israel began to classify much Arab land as “absentee”—a condition under which the Israeli government was able to seize property even if the owner had merely left town for a single day on or after November 29, 1947. This practice served to provide housing for the massive influx of immigrants Israel experienced during the late 1940s and further discouraged Arab hopes for return. Israel was also able to avoid confronting the demographic problem by offering several lukewarm peace proposals, with provisions known to be unacceptable to Arab leaders, but which afforded Israel a positive image. Such proposals were made at the behest of the international community, however, and none were seriously pursued. It was essential to maintain this “no-peace, no-war” relationship with Israel’s Arab neighbors as any serious peace deal would inevitably have required Israel to address the refugees’ status. Such a tentative, inherently temporary, situation remained in effect until the six-day war of 1967.

The Occupation Begins

Historians recognize the embarrassing Arab defeat of 1967 as an event of central importance for the region, leading to the codification of Palestinian national identity among other indirect implications. Perhaps of equal or greater importance for the region, the war’s aftermath ended

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with Israeli control of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The Israeli occupation began in full force and demography suddenly arrived at the forefront of Israeli politics. Indeed, the demography of the newly occupied territories was tantamount to a Zionist nightmare; for Israel to have simply absorbed the Palestinian Arab population as Israeli citizens would have effectively reversed the Jewish majority. Many were concerned about Yasser Arafat's description of a "biological time-bomb which threatens to blow up Israel from within ... [The Israelis] fear our children and the Palestinian women who give birth to another child every 10 months" (Arafat cited in Ben-Meir, 1993). Thus, when Israel immediately declared the 1949 armistice borders to be invalid and assumed control of the territories, Israeli citizenship was denied to West Bank residents (Smith, 2004: 293). Within weeks of the war, Israeli citizens began to settle in the West Bank, Gaza and even southern Syria "to 'create facts' to establish a Jewish presence that would become inalienable, thereby negating future calls for a compromise" (Smith, 2004: 295). This pattern of settlement has been repeated throughout Israeli history, a policy linked with the uncertain knowledge that Israel might one day have to relinquish control over some of the conquered land. The sheer longevity of the conflict has secured a significant foothold for the settlements, making withdrawal all the more difficult. Even when one considers the ramifications of Israel's 2005 unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip, most of the settlers uprooted there were simply offered land in the West Bank and financial compensation as

recompense. Moreover, late into U.S. President Bill Clinton began to refer to East Jerusalem as “disputed”—an almost complete reversal of previous U.S. discourse—after considering the now decades-old Israeli settlements around the city (Smith, 2004: 442). Even United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, addressing a crowd in East Jerusalem recently, angered Palestinians by expressing his joy at being in “Israel”.

Since 1967, Jewish settlements in the West Bank have cut to the very heart of Zionist thought, fulfilling both the demographic and Greater Israel principles. In direct contradiction of international law, the Israeli interior ministry officially recognizes and supports the settlements, granting settlers full Israeli rights, including military protection.¹² According to B’Tselem, “Israel forbids Palestinians to enter and use these lands [occupied by settlers], and uses the settlements to justify numerous violations of Palestinian rights, such as the right to housing, to gain a living, and freedom of movement” (B’Tselem, 2006a). Because of this, Israel’s policy of establishing “facts on the ground” has proven to be the most effective way to discourage the return of Palestinian refugees and to avoid addressing the final status of the occupied territories.¹³ Furthermore, Israel views all Palestinian

¹² As of January 2008, there were 122 Jewish settlements in the West Bank, an increase of more than 20 new settlements in the decade after the 1993 Oslo Accords. 48 of these settlements are on the Palestinian side of the WBB (Aronson, 2008: 168).

¹³ One should also note that settlement expansion often occurs at strategic moments during Israel-Palestinian negotiations. During the 2007 Annapolis Summit and in the months following, Israel announced the construction of hundreds of new settlement housing units.

residents of the West Bank as potential terrorists and has established a dual system of laws, which are applied according to ethnic and religious background. Because Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank are ineligible for Israeli citizenship, Israel has established a veritable “separation cum discrimination regime” replete with “Israeli-only” roads and other segregated public utilities (B’Tselem, 2006a). Such a hierarchical distinction between West Bank Palestinians and Israeli settlers has naturally served to benefit those of superior legal status, e.g. Palestinian attacks against settlers are harshly rebuked by the IDF, often resulting in military strikes and mass detentions. Conversely, it is normal for attacks against Palestinians to either be ignored or result in only light punishment for the perpetrators. Until February 2005, the IDF practiced a policy of collective punishment in demolishing Palestinian houses, despite the internal and international outcry. The IDF justified such destruction as punishment for houses built without a construction permit yet “Israeli officials enforce the rules in a discriminatory manner, strictly denying construction permits for Palestinian homes while allowing the construction of Israeli settlements to proceed” (United Nations, 2003: 158). I conjecture that the massive military, financial, and civic burden of the settlements has been measured against the ideology of Zionism, its expansionist principles, and the resulting demographic benefits of settlement. Similar to the purchasing of Arab land following the 1948 war, it seems demography supersedes security. The ongoing encouragement of settlement by the

Israeli government against international (including American¹⁴) protestation stresses this point. Since 1967, Israel has continued to create *fait accomplis* aimed at preventing withdrawal and avoiding demographic compromise.

THE INTIFADA

For two decades after 1967, Israel was able to maintain the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza without any major difficulties. By all accounts, economic growth in the territories was not seriously affected before Menachem Begin brought Likud to power in the late 1970s; thus, Palestinian life under occupation began without widespread discontent. Israel's policies toward the demographic problem changed after the Yom Kippur war in 1973. Still refusing to absorb the occupied Palestinian population as citizens, more emphasis was placed upon Israeli settlement in the occupied territories. Likud oversaw an explosion of Israeli settlement—800 individuals annually increased to over 6,000—and the settlements themselves began to be tactically established in close proximity to Arab villages.

In 1987, the ephemeral nature of this situation became clear as tensions boiled over and Israel witnessed the angry emergence of a Palestinian generation born and raised under Israeli dominance. The disastrous “break their bones” response to the stone-throwing tactics of the first

¹⁴ See the Roadmap to Peace and the stipulations regarding Israeli settlements in the West Bank (United States, 2003).

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Intifada brought about a need for Israel to maintain control militarily, while allowing a degree of Palestinian autonomy. In May 1989, Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir moved to grant “free and democratic elections” (Shamir cited in Smith, 2004: 412) to the Palestinian Arabs of the occupied territories. The plan was transparent in its intentions to maintain Israeli control of the occupied territories and was summarily rejected by the PLO. Likewise, conservative Israelis viewed the plan as an obvious precursor to a Palestinian state and also rejected it. The familiar themes of geography and demography continued to overshadow events until the peace process, beginning with the Madrid Talks, commenced (see Smith, 2004).

The diplomatic successes of the Madrid Talks (October 1991 – Summer 1993) were limited as the parties faced a stalemate in negotiations. Shamir’s plan, as he self-admittedly stated upon leaving office in 1992, “was to drag out the talks on Palestinian self-rule for 10 years while attempting to settle hundreds of thousands of Jews in the occupied territories” (Hoffman, 1992). In this way, the peace process began by serving three immediate needs for Israel: it stalled the Intifada, changed Israel’s international image from occupying power to peacemaker and “gave the appearance of accommodation while working to ensure Israeli retention of the territories” (Smith, 2004: 419).

When Yitzhak Rabin became Prime Minister in 1992, Israeli settlement of the West Bank continued, albeit less intensely, while much attention shifted to so-called “land for peace” deals. During the signing of the Oslo Accords, the principle of “land for peace” was resurrected which, although having been around for a while,¹⁵ became a practical option. However, the provisions in Oslo I enabled a system similar to Yitzhak Shamir’s 1989 proposal: Palestinian autonomy under Israeli control and without a final status in sight. The A and B Zones of Oslo II called for limited Palestinian autonomy, while the C Zone (comprising Israeli settlements, military installations and border areas) was reserved for total Israeli control until the eventual final status negotiations. This “enabled Israel ‘not to freeze building and natural growth’ in the settlements, meaning existing settlements could be expanded to absorb more land” (Smith, 2004: 450). Thus, the very structure of Oslo I and II was unstable. It is clear that Rabin was concerned primarily with Oslo’s prospects for ridding Israel of 90% of the West Bank’s Arab population, while only ceding 30% of the land. In this way, it seemed possible to diffuse the demographic “bomb” without having to pay much for it. Thus, Rabin’s land for peace was framed around demographic concerns and constitutes yet another example of demography eclipsing security.

An economic agreement was also signed as part of Oslo II—the Paris Protocol—which stipulated Israeli control of import taxes on goods

¹⁵ See UN Security Council Resolution 242

entering the Palestinian Authority's domain and brought the occupied territories under the domain of the New Israeli Shekel (NIS). Palestinian economic independence was not an outcome Israel could accept, as it would have "creat[ed] a binding precedent on the eve of the final status stage" by giving the "flavor of sovereignty" (B'Tselem, 2006b). Incidentally, the continued employment of Palestinian laborers in Israel was made conditional upon the Palestinian Authority's acceptance of the Paris Protocol.¹⁶ Yet, the Oslo negotiations came to a stalemate. In 1994, Rabin, who had anticipated such an outcome, remarked that Israel would "have to decide on separation as a philosophy" (Rabin cited in Makovsky, 2004: 52), implying a physical barrier. Before his 1995 assassination, Rabin oversaw the construction of the Gaza Strip Barrier. Any similar plans to physically separate the West Bank (if considered at all) were postponed until after Benjamin Netanyahu came to power, froze the peace process and solidified Israeli control of Zone C.

THE WBB

When the 2000 Summit at Camp David ended in failure and Palestinian frustration exploded into the second Intifada, Rabin's idea of separation was revived and quickly led to the WBB. By far the boldest (and most expensive) operation ever undertaken by Israel in its quest to create "facts on the ground," the barrier is the modern manifestation of

¹⁶ The economic integration of the West Bank has never been a source of major controversy, when compared to the political integration of West Bank individuals.

Zionism's demographic imperative. It has caused the direct displacement of thousands of Palestinian Arabs and led thousands more to abandon their lands. Those caught between the Green Line and the WBB have been stripped of their property, further preparing sections of the West Bank for Israeli settlement.¹⁷ The WBB has effectively annexed approximately 10% of the West Bank, including some of the most fertile areas and because the barrier has been built on the Palestinian side of the Green Line, it has caused untold hardship to thousands of Palestinian Arabs (Chomsky, 2006; Pappé, 2006). In some cases, the High Court of Israel has ordered some sections of the Barrier's path to be rebuilt in a less intrusive manner, but considering the finances Israel has spent in its effort to include as many Israeli settlements as possible on the Israeli side of the Green Line, it seems the Barrier is intended for long term use. Before his invasion of Lebanon during the summer of 2006, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert spoke often of his "convergence plan" to unilaterally draw Israel's permanent borders along the WBB, permanently annexing large portions of Palestine to Israel and confirming Palestinian fears from the beginning (Heller, 2006). Demography was the chief concern governing the WBB's construction, a suggestion more easily understood when understanding the importance of demography to Zionism.

¹⁷ It is interesting to consider the thousands of Palestinians caught along the seam-line between Israel and the WBB; there are no plans to absorb them as Israeli citizens despite the recent talk of drawing Israel's permanent borders along the WBB. The future legal status of these people is unclear.

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to convey the importance of demography to Zionist thought. As a nationalist ideology, Zionism has adopted inevitable paradoxes. For example, although Zionism required the removal of Palestine's native population to establish a Jewish majority, it needed to simultaneously forget such an unpleasant version of that history. Likewise, Israeli policies of village destruction, crop poisoning, and Jewish settlement on top of abandoned Arab villages were sugarcoated as "miraculous." Moreover, from 1967 until today, the presence of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories has served to undermine the possibility of withdrawal. The occupation and the lengthy, limited benefits of the peace talks have further suspended discussion of refugee status; the pattern of avoidance continues today with the WBB, though in more serious terms. The most extreme aspects of the occupation have culminated in a physical barrier separating two peoples. Though also a potential deterrent to Palestinian militancy, the long-term implications of the WBB have primarily served to protect and expand Israel's Jewish majority, fulfilling the principles of Zionism by maximizing Jewish control over as much of Palestine as possible.

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