# DEMOGRAPHICS, MINORITIES, MIGRATION AND NEW GEOPOLITICAL FACTORS IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

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## 1. Introduction

Considering the demographic structure of the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean several complementary patterns can be easily defined. The states that extend along the south are, as noted, characterised by a substantial concentration of youthful populations, with over 30% of the population under fifteen years of age. In the north instead the societies are distinguishable for the ageing process under way, with over 18% of the population above 65 years of age. Equally, in Europe annual birth rates are close to the substitution rate, while along the African-Asian coast the rate reaches 3.9% in some areas, as for example in the Gaza Strip[1].

Containment of this demographic spurt constitutes a priority for the area's various governments: Egypt, Iran and Turkey have begun programmes aimed at curbing births, supported by UN programmes[2]. Syria and Jordan have not expressly adopted such policies. But slowing growth is not always the goal of national population policies. Even in the high-growth Middle East two governments actually encourage large families, those of Saudi Arabia and Israel[3].

As is known, one of the principal declared objectives of Zionism is to make the Jewish people into a nation like many others. The impossibility of transforming, for well-known reasons, emergency policies into a routine has increased the weight of the demographic question such that often the geographic dimension of the conflict is pushed into the background, especially in the recurring debates amongst the Israeli people. The Israeli interest in the future size, composition and age structure of the population has increased in recent years due to the large number of immigrants – arriving primarily from the former USSR. This interest stems from the need for economic and social policies adapted to the needs of a quickly-growing and fast-changing population. Projections present potential developments in the size, composition and structure of Israel's population, based on developments in fertility, mortality and migration patterns.

The state of Israel has been defined as a Western country that at the same time presents characteristics typical of a developing society[4]. One of these aspects is of course demography, which remains more similar to those countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean, even excluding the birth rates of the Orthodox communities. The demographic question remains one of the more difficult aspects of defining a scenario of peaceful co-existence between Israel, a future Palestinian entity, and other Arab governments. A framework summarising the entire problem can be drawn up with just a few statistics.

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[1] Yet these very high rates of growth are not evenly distributed across the region. The three largest countries, Turkey, Iran and Egypt, comprising almost 75% of its inhabitants, have relatively slow growth. Turkey's population of 68 million is growing at 1.9%. These rates of natural growth are much higher than in Europe (Germany is at 0.4%, Italy 0.1%, France 0.4%, whilst the United States is at 0.9%) but far lower than elsewhere in the Middle East. The annual natural growth rate in Syria is 2.5%, in Jordan 2.8%, in Iraq 2.8%, in Saudi Arabia 3.3%. Data Country Report, 2003.

[2] The Iranian government has established birth control offices throughout the country, and sends hundreds of mobile centres to rural areas. In cooperation with international organisations, Egypt has undertaken a three-year plan to lower the natural growth rate, and before that, President Mubarak was making the case to Egyptians that to safeguard their children's opportunities for education and health, parents had to take their income into account when planning their families. Courbage, 1999.

[3] In addition to subsidies for large families, both governments reward the parents of numerous children.

[4] This affirmation has been attributed to Itzhak Ravid, a retired military analyst and former head of the Branch for Operations Research of the Israeli Air Force. Ravid was director of the national security team under prime ministers Yitzhak Shamir and Yitzhak Rabin in 1992-1993. On this question see Berkowitz, 2004.

Ethnic and cultural factors are obviously decisive in understanding the main dynamics. Among Arab Israelis of the Muslim faith, the natural growth rate is 3.5%, equal to that of Saudi Arabia. Within the Arab Israeli component, the annual birth rate for Christians is around 1.4%. On the other hand, the relative increase of the Jewish Israeli population, excluding those of the Orthodox community, is 1%. Finally, the ultra-Orthodox Jewish Israelis demonstrate a growth rate of 3.5%. If subsidies and rewards for more prolific families exclude more or less 70% of the Jewish population, these policies help, indirectly, the Muslim Arab minority.

The greatest worry for Israeli authorities, obviously, emerges from the realisation that the demographic increase of the Arab population demonstrates rates that are higher on average Jewish rates, notwithstanding migratory flows favourable to the Jewish community that have been experienced various times over the last fifty years, and the reduction of persons belonging to the youngest Palestinian generation as well as the exoduses of 1948 and 1967.

The demographic projections lend themselves to significant exploitation and various important aspects are not yet considered adequately. The most likely scenario, as well as the one most commonly accepted within the academic world predicts that the next twenty-five years will see a stabilisation of Jewish birth rates and a gradual reduction in Palestinian rates.

These conclusions find their own logic in Jewish and Arab birth rates which, from 1990 on, have remained constant notwithstanding natural increases in the Palestinian Israeli community that continue to be higher, as indicated in Table 1.

If these conditions should persist, within twenty years the Palestinian population, currently living in Israel, should grow and reach 28% of the total[5], posing a series of not-minor problems, especially in an electoral context.

The demographic policies of the government in Jerusalem must in addition take into account a series of internal dynamics that impede the development of clear demographic strategies. The age pyramid of Israeli society indicates a concentration of individuals under 25 years of age at over 36% of the total population, as well as average life expectancy rates[6] and a territorial distribution of the population, with significant percentages of residents in urban centres and a limited number engaged in the agricultural sector, comparable to that of countries along the opposite shore of the Mediterranean. The political priorities for the Israeli state, which considering the precarious nature of Middle Eastern geopolitical equilibriums, require remaining linked to the more advanced capitalist countries, can not refuse to guarantee a competitive school system for the younger generation and the maintenance of advanced services for the rest of the population.

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The entire question has been highly politicised, and suggest economic consequences that are hardly minor. Israel's per capita income remains some 30% below the average for European countries. One reason that explains this discrepancy can be detected in the significant category of the population that is voluntarily inactive, identifiable primarily with women belonging to the ultra-orthodox Jewish world, and the Muslim world in general, as well as to those ultra-orthodox men that often dedicate long years to religious studies. In other terms, if 75% of the population of Israel demonstrates productivity rates comparable to those of western countries, some 25% has rates more similar to those of the developing world.

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[5] Jewish birth rates in the period considered were higher amongst Eastern Jews, 3.14% in 1980 and 3.09% in 1996, intermediate amongst Western Jews, 2.1% in 1996 and lower amongst the immigrants from the former Soviet Union, 1.69%. Those relative to Palestinian Arabs should take into account several territorial peculiarities. In the northern areas, from Netanaya to the Lebanese border, for example, in seven districts that extend over about 5,100 square kilometres, the Palestinians constitute 36% of the regional population, with peaks that arrive at 63% in Acco. The demographic discussion concerning Israel does not take into account undermining effects that sudden political changes might cause in birth rate tendencies. For example, between 1987 and 1993, due to the *Intifada*, in Gaza the birth rate increased to 6.23%. On this question we refer the reader to Courbage, 1999, pp. 62-81.

[6] Life expectancy rates of Israeli citizens amount to an average of 79 years. These criteria are however only approximate. The data does not reflect the high mobility, the fact that many spend part of their lives abroad, and they exclude deaths due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Data CBS, (Central Bureau of Statistic of Israel), 2003.

Tab. n. 1. Sources of Population Growth. Thousands, unless otherwise stated

TOTAL POPULATION

| % of migration balance out of total growth (1) | % Annual growth | Population at the end of the period | Population at the beginning of the period | Total Growth | Period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 40,5 | 3,9 | 6.748,4 | 5.904,2 | 805,6 | 1948-2003 |
| 64,6 | 8.2 | 2150,4 | 1.344,8 | 805,6 | 1948-1960 |
| 37,8 | (2) 3,2 | (3) 3.220,7 | (2) 901,8 | 2.150,6 | 1961-1971 |
| 19.6 | (2) 2,4 | (3) 4.063,6 | (2) 936,2 | (5) 3.115,6 | 1972-1982 |
| 5,9 | 1,8 | 4.559,6 | 525,9 | (5) 4.033,7 | 1983-1989 |
| 56,6 | 3,5 | (4) 5.619,0 | 1.059,4 | 4.559,7 | 1990-1995 |
| 39,1 | 1,9 | 6.369,0 | 757,6 | (5) 5.612,6 | 1996-2000 |
| 34,5 | 2,4 | 6.041,4 | 141,5 | 5.900,0 | 1998 |
| 38,5 | 2,6 | 6.369,3 | 160,1 | 6.209,1 | 2000 |
| 17,6 | 1,9 | 6.631,8 | 122,.3 | 6.508,8 | 2002 |
| -- | 1,8 | 6.748,4 | 117,3 | 6.631,1 | 2003 |

POPULATION GROUP

Jewsh and others (6)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 59,0 | 2,4 | 5.180,8 | 347,8 | 4.067,4 | 1996-2000 |
| 0,2 | 1,7 | 5.445,8 | 109,8 | 5.180,6 | 2001-2000 |
| 45,7 | 2,2 | 4.936,7 | 105,5 | 4.830,5 | 1998 |
| 54,8 | 2,6 | 5.065,2 | 129,2 | 4.936,2 | 1999 |
| 46,9 | 2,3 | 5.180,6 | 115,4 | 5.065,2 | 2000 |
| 25,9 | 1,6 | 5.367,2 | 85,9 | 5.281,9 | 2002 |
| 13,6 | 1,5 | 5.446,7 | 79,6 | 5.367,2 | 2003 |

Arab population

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5.4 | 3,4 | 1.188,7 | 183,5 | 1.004,9 | 1996-2000 |
| 0,2 | 3,1 | 1.301,6 | 112,9 | 1.187,9 | 2001-2003 |
| 1,6 | 3,4 | 1.105,6 | 36,0 | 1.069,4 | 1998 |
| 6,0 | 3,5 | 1.143,9 | 38,4 | 1.105,4 | 1999 |
| 16,3 | 3,0 | 1.188,7 | 44,8 | 1.143,9 | 2000 |
| -2,1 | 3,3 | 1.263,9 | 36,4 | 1.227,5 | 2002 |
| -0,3 | 3,0 | 1.301,6 | 37,7 | 1263,9 | 2003 |

1. Until 1995, the balance of changes and corrections of religion were included in the migration balance, as of 1996 these balances are included in the total growth.
2. Excluding the addition of the Arab population in East Jerusalem in 1967 and in the Golan Sub-District in 1982.
3. Includes census adjustments. The Arab population comprises the addition of Arabs in East Jerusalem and the Golan.
4. Based on the 1993 Census.
5. Discontinuity due to census results.
6. “Jews and others” includes Jews, other Christians (non-Arabs) and those not classified by religion. Source: Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel, Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, Population, Table 2.2.

Tab. n. 2. Live births, by population group (1). Rates per 1000.

| TOTAL | JEWS | ARAB AND OTHERS | YEAR |
|---|---|---|---|
| 21.3 | 18.3 | 35.0 | 1996 |
| 21.4 | 18.5 | 34.4 | 1997 |
| 21.8 | 18.7 | 35.6 | 1998 |
| 21.5 | 18.5 | 35.0 | 1999 |
| 21.7 | 18.7 | 35.0 | 2000 |
| 21.2 | 18.2 | 34.3 | 2001 |
| 21.1 | 18.4 | 32.8 | 2002 |

(1) Annual rates for the average population.
Source: Central Bureau Statistic of Israel, Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, Population, Tab. C/1.

The organs of the Israeli government, at least officially, prefer not speak of the demographic problem in their country, even if the topic is frequently addressed in the mainstream mass media.

The frequency of demographic campaigns and the existence of legislation favouring more numerous families has sparked criticism from that part of Israeli civil society that views itself as closer to the West, being still in the majority, and considers these practices as incompatible with the concept of a democratic and modern state. The principal challenge for the government in Jerusalem is to maintain the majority Jewish component and extend rights to the growing Arab minority, which has complained of important discrimination in this regard[7]. This policy change is not merely an aspiration. In 2003, Netanyahu initiated a reform that severely cut Israeli's child allowances beginning with the fifth child. Interestingly, these cuts would not have been possible but for a courageous decision taken early in 2001 by the newly-elected Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. By forging a centre-right coalition government not dependent on the ultra-orthodox parties (and consequently no longer able to call on them in times of trouble), Sharon broke the decades-old, ultra-orthodox veto on social policy.

Tab. n. 3. Principal geo-demographic characteristics in Israel

| YEAR | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population Density (People per sq Km) | -- | 144 | 188 | 226 | 302 |
| Urban Population Growth (% of total) | 5,3 | 4,1 | 2,8 | 3,2 | 2,18 |
| Rural Population Growth (% of total) | 23 | 15,8 | 11,4 | 9,7 | 8,80 |

Source: UC Atlas of Global Inequality. (ucatlas.ucsc.edu/country/99/population)

[7] In December 2003, the Israeli Finance Minister Netanyahu, participated in the Herzliya Conference on national security. This was one of the rare episodes in which a high-level politician offered a declaration on the region's demographic question. Even though his words summed up the dimensions of problem rather well, Netanyahu denied that the problem was the direct competence of Israeli authorities: "We have no interest in governing the Palestinians and the demographic problem will not exist in the territories when the population will be governed by Palestinian law… within Israel instead, the terms of different… if the Arab population were to reach 35-40% of the total population and become perfectly integrated, that the Jewish state would cease to exist and would evolve into a bi-national state. If instead the Palestinian component remains, as it is today, around 20%, our relations will remain tense and violent, and this could conflict with the democratic character of our society… It is necessary above all to guarantee a Jewish majority within the state… I say this as a secular politician, a democrat and a Zionist patriot…" On this topic see Berkowitz, 2004.

Whether his government's reform will prove sufficient to cut the Gordian knot of Israeli's demographic problem is far from clear: the problem is not only one of numbers, but also of the quality of relations between citizens.

The intention of the Likud government was probably to re-vitalise the migratory flows into Israel[8], considering that less than 36% of the presumed Jewish population worldwide lives inside Israel at the moment[9]. Nevertheless, not even from this strategy do we detect a combination of premises coherent enough to define a new course in Israeli demographic policy. In fact, the most recent immigration trends indicate the seriousness of the problem relative to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the insufficient nature of the initiatives adopted so far to resolve the situation.

## 2. Migratory flows

Migratory flows in Israel have been linked to specific events in international politics during the second postwar period. The most significant exoduses, as is noted, were those immediately after the Second World War in the wake of the emotional shock provoked by the Holocaust, following the first Arab-Israeli war and favoured by the Law of Return, passed in 1951 by the Israeli government, which granted citizenship to anyone who could demonstrate Jewish relatives. Later, after the Suez Canal war in 1956, there was the expulsion of Sephardi Jews from the Arab countries. The last great migratory event occurred during the 1990's, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when almost 750,000 persons left the former Soviet republics for Israel.

These successive waves all had ethnic and cultural characteristics that were rather evident, and had a decisive influence on the concentration and territorial segregation of the population, as well as on the economic structure and electoral geography of the new Israeli state. As far as the recent Russian migration is concerned, it has not yet been possible to determine its overall effects, due to successive departures, to several naturalisation practices still under way, and to the conversion of many new arrivals to Christianity[10]. We might believe however that the exceptional nature of the event disguised a reversal of earlier trends that was already under way at the end of the 1980's, indicating the declining importance of migratory flows on Israeli demographic processes.

For a few years now, experts in this sector seem to agree that the great migratory waves towards Israel have ended. The most credible estimates quantify the possible migratory reserve towards Israel, in the course of the next ten or fifteen years, at between one and two million individuals (Shafir Y. and Peled Y., 1998, pp. 51-73). For these reasons, one of the principal objectives of the government in Jerusalem, beyond trying to render Israel an

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[8] In April 2004, for example, the Australian government arrested and then expelled two Israeli spies, demanding apologies from Israel, for trafficking in false documents.

[9] Effecting a census of the Jewish population around the world is no easy task, given the lack of homogeneous data available, the incomplete nature of various statistics, the speculation practiced by several communities, conversions and nuances inherent in the concept of Jewishness. It is possible however to obtain at least a general idea of the proportions. According to data from Central Bureau of Statistic in 2001, the Jewish population around the world was estimated prudently at around 13,450,000 individuals. Of these around 36% were concentrated formally in Israel and 42% in the United States. At least two other countries, Russia and France, count communities slightly over 500,000. Argentina, Great Britain, Canada and Ukraine have a population between 250,000 and a half million individuals. The Jewish community of the United States is probably the most studied, and is indicative of the recurring difficulties in defining Jewishness even if the data is readily available. Of the over five million Jewish Americans for example, more than a half million declare they do not identify themselves in the Jewish religion. Moreover, marriages to non-Jews in the United States have increased progressively in recent decades, and precisely from 9% in 1965 to 52% in 1990, posing further problems of identity for new generations. On this topic see the American CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics), Selected Statistical Abstracts.

[10] We should remember that during the 1970's there had already been a migratory flow from the Soviet Union of about 200,000 persons. Data estimating this migration from the former Soviet Union at around 750,000 is correct, as it takes into account departures before 1989. Finally, according to some estimates, a number between 30 and 40% of these migrants are not of Jewish origin, a statistic confirmed by the significant increase in the Christian community that took place in those years. On this topic see the Foreign Ministry of Information Service, 1998.

attractive destination for the diaspora, remains that of reducing the outward flow of individuals.

The general picture does not seem however to confirm these expectations. The weight of migratory flows on the growth of the Israeli population has decreased constantly over the last fifty years, and the tendency becomes even more evident if we consider only the migratory phenomenon of the Jewish component. If this evolution is comprehensible with the passing of momentary conditions, linked to the noted wartime events, one piece of data stands out, referring to the period between 2001 and 2003, which registered a decline in net migratory flows of 77% compared to the preceding three-year period.

It should be noted also that not all the migrants counted as moving to Israel are Jewish[11]. A few of these are in fact simply workers coming from underdeveloped countries that emigrate with a work permit, including a small percentage of Palestinians[12]. While observing the general flows, as indicated in Tab. n. 4 and n. 5, we note that Israel loses it attractiveness even for citizens arriving from developing countries that have traditionally performed the most thankless tasks. The total statistic for 2002, compared with that of 1999 indicates a drop of more than 25% of those entering Israel with a proper work permit, also reflecting a slight ageing of the immigrant population.

Asian labour which, together with the Philippinos, the Thai and the Chinese, represent the largest number of these, are the ones experiencing the most evident decreases, down by 42%. Statistics from Europe reached a peak in 2001, thanks to workers arriving from East European countries, especially Romanians and Bulgarians, which however dropped in 2002 by over 60% compared to 1999. The Israeli government has tried to target that part of the population which has been considered mostly likely to emigrate[13].

The outward flows from Israel have traditionally been directed towards the United States, Great Britain, and to a lesser extent, the other countries of northern Europe. Generally, they are young persons in their twenties, who usually have completed their military service and have experienced difficulties in securing independent adequate housing or in supporting themselves while pursuing their studies in institutions of higher learning.

The other important category is made up of professionals and technicians that find more rapid career advancement in larger countries. The problem, as might be guessed, is not a minor one, and has led the Ministers of Defence, Labour and Welfare, Education and Culture, and Finance to create special spending categories to stop the potential "brain drain" since the end of the 1980's[14].

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[11] It should also be stressed that many of the potential immigrants, especially those arriving from the former Soviet republics, prefer to choose other destinations, such as Germany, which in 2003 absorbed 19,000 Jews, as compared to 12,000 to Israel. Official notice of this phenomenon provoked criticism from the Chairman of the Jewish Agency, Sallai Meridor, who invited the Israeli government to "… take serious steps to counter Germany since this situation drastically affects immigration to Israel…" On this topic see Hazan, 5/21/2004, p. 7.

[12] It is difficult to count the real number of Palestinians arriving from the Territories that have a job in Israel, given that many are without contract, and the employment relationship is subject to periodic interruptions coinciding with the closure of the borders and the increase in attacks. All together, about 600,000 are illegal foreigners that remain in Israel. Even if without documents, these have often lived in Israel for years, have families and children that attend Israeli schools; a solution should be found also for them. On this topic see Friedberg, 2001.

[13] Their preference for the United States has been true for decades. At the beginning of the 1980's, applications by Israeli citizens to convert their temporary visa to a work or study visa were already the most numerous among western countries. On this topic see The Statistical Yearbook of the United States, Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1982-85.

[14] Among the most well-known initiatives, we remember the agreement of 1998, with major Jewish donors from North America and the Council of Jewish Federations to finance with $300 million the "Birthright Israel" programme, which sponsors any Jew in the world, between 15 and 26 years of age, to visit Israel. The creation of the Center fo Submicron Semiconductor Science as part of the Weizmann Institute has also been important, achieved at the beginning of the 1990's, created not only to stimulate the local high-tech industry, but also to bring Israeli emigrants back home and induce young graduates not to leave.

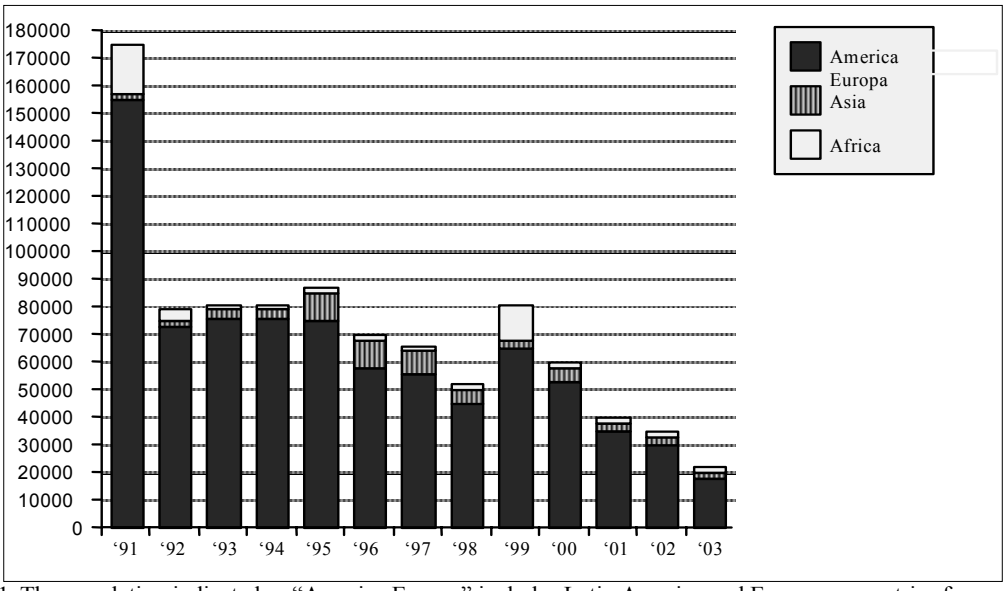
Tab. n. 4. Immigrants (1) and potential immigrants by type of permit.

IMMIGRANTS ACCORDIG TO LAW OF RETURN

| Year | Grand Total | Total | Entered with an immigrant or potential immigrant visa | Changed status from tourist to immigrant or potential immigrant | Immigrants (2) accordino to Law of entry |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1996 | 70.919 | 69.831 | 59.748 | 10.083 | 1.088 |
| 1997 | 66.221 | 64.725 | 55.135 | .590 | 1.496 |
| 1998 | 56.727 | 53.547 | 47.487 | 6.060 | 3.180 |
| 1999 | 76.766 | 74.498 | 68.338 | 6.160 | 2.268 |
| 2000 | 60.192 | 57.547 | 53.424 | 4.441 | 2.327 |
| 2001 | 43.580 | 40.950 | 36.949 | 4.001 | 2.630 |
| 2002 | 33.565 | 31.026 | 28.077 | 2.949 | 2539 |
| 2003 | 23.226 | 22.637 | 20.313 | 2.324 | 589 |
| % change | -31 | -27 | 28 | 21 | -77 |

1. Excluding immigrating citizens (born abroad to Israeli citizens and came to Israel to settle).
2. Including a small number of tourists who changed their status to immigrants.
3. Immigrants who received a permit for a permanent stay.
Source: Monthly Bulletin of Statistics e Migration and Tourism. Tab. E/2.

Graphic n. 1. Imigrants by year of imigration and last continent of residence, 1991-2003.




1. The population indicated as "America Europe" includes Latin America and European countries former ex Soviet Union included Russia.
Source: Central Bureau Statistic of Israel, Selected Data Imigration, Tab. 4.2.

Departures from Israel between 1998 and 2001 registered increases of 28%. The age group between 20 and 39 years of age was the most mobile, representing over 43% of the outward flows. Between 1999 and 2001, the number of relative to the younger, productive generation, after taking into account returns, increased by 7.1%. In the same period, the rate of net migration for subjects under 20 years of age increased by 8.5%, a symptom confirming the choice of a probable transfer abroad on the part of entire family units.

Tab. n. 5. Arrivals of work permit holders, by year of arrival, country of citeznship, thousands.

| | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 53,3 | 52,2 | 78,2 | 33,2 |
| Asia | 25,6 | 23,0 | 39,1 | 22,9 |
| India | 0,7 | 0,7 | 0,6 | 0,5 |
| Turkey | | 2,2 | 1,8 | 4,9 |
| 0,6 | | | | |
| Lebanon | 3,2 | 0,9 | 11,8 | 1,8 |
| China | 2,6 | 2,9 | 8,9 | 7,4 |
| Philippines | 7,2 | 7,6 | 11,7 | 12,1 |
| Tahiland | 8,4 | 8,0 | 1,2 | 0,5 |
| Other Countries (1) | 1,3 | 1,0 | 0,5 | 0,5 |
| ***Africa*** | ***0,5*** | ***0,6*** | ***4,5*** | ***0,3*** |
| ***Europe*** | ***24,0*** | ***26,7*** | ***33,9*** | ***9,4*** |
| Bulgaria | | 2,0 | 2,3 | 5,9 |
| 1,1 | | | | |
| Ussr (former) (2) | 3,3 | 4,3 | 0,3 | 2,1 |
| Germany | 0,7 | 0,4 | 0,5 | 0,2 |
| United Kingdom | 0,9 | 0,6 | 2,1 | 0,3 |
| Romania | 13,8 | 16,6 | 23,7 | 4,5 |
| Other Countries | 3,4 | 2,4 | 1,4 | 1,2 |
| ***America-Oceania*** | ***2,9*** | ***1,7*** | ***0,8*** | ***0,6*** |
| Usa | 2,1 | 1,1 | 0,6 | 0,4 |
| Other Countries | 0,9 | 0,6 | 0,3 | 0,2 |
| Not know | 0,2 | 0,1 | 0,1 | -- |

1. Included Asian Republics of the Ussr (former).
2. Include Europeaan Repubblics only.
Source: Central Bureau Statistic of Israel, Selected Data Imigration, Tab. 4.10.

The growth in the imbalance between outward and inward flows regards, in any case, all the age categories of the Israeli population, especially those persons over sixty years of age, whose net increase between 1999 and 2001 was actually 22%.

The ambivalent status of diaspora Jews and Jewish organisations has evolved substantially since the formation of the Israeli state fifty years ago, and may be interpreted more as a function of the Israeli state, responding to globalisation and other democratic pressures rather than the effects of globalisation itself.

Even though a positive spiral opened up at the first stage of the Peace Process, with the consequent cancelling of the boycott of Israeli goods by many Arab governments and the gradual flow of foreign capital to Israeli reversed this tendency, its effects petered out in a short time[15]. The reasons behind this situation were many, linked principally to the deterioration of negotiations, but not only. In general, a structural, economic and cultural crisis may be observed involving Israeli society and putting in doubt several of the original postulates of Zionism.

Above all, the negative effects deriving from the perpetuation of a conflict situation must be considered. After a four-year period of stability, the number of Israeli families living under the poverty line began to increase again after 2001, passing from 17.7% to 21.2% in 2004[16]. This tendency was the result of successive budget cuts in those monies destined for assistance to the underprivileged, equal to 7.2% in the previous two years. The recent Intifada, in 2003, cost Israel between 6.2 and 8% of GDP, while the related decrease was more significant than

[15] At the beginning of the 1990's, Israel registered the highest level of economic growth among OECD countries, with an increase in GNP of 6.2% in 1991 and 6.7% in 1992. Returns to Israel from the United States saw a maximum increase of 14,000 individuals in 1995. On this topic, see Arian, 1988.
[16] This statistic refers to the month of May. On this topic see Sinai R., 5/11/2004.

in the previous year, between 0.7 an 1.8%, due to the subsequent calming of the security situation. This impoverishment and decrease in the purchasing power of Israeli families has provoked a chain reaction: between 2000 and 2003, foreign investment decreased by 70%, tourism by 65%, and unemployment has increased by 40% between 2002 and 2003 ( Bank of Israel data, www.al-awda.org, 6/13/2004).

In the second place, several behavioural variables related to globalisation that have favoured the situation of those with dual citizenship, who usually alternated periods of study and work between the United States and Israel, must be considered. At the same time, the feeling among the younger generation that the *aliyah* is essential for the future of their country has become less pronounced, and as a consequence the stigma regarding those who decide to move has decreased[17]. Finally, it is significant to observe that as Israel has experienced rapid growth in economic strength, traditional support from the Jewish diaspora, particularly in the United States, has declined. This is the result of a shift in priorities that have coincided with the passing of the older generation of the Jewish American community leaders whose formative years were spent during the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel, in contrast to younger leaders, for whom Israel is a fact of life[18].

## 3. Conclusions

The anticipated emergence of a Palestinian Arab majority in the lands between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, coupled with the sense that the Palestinian mainstream still seeks somehow to deny Israel's legitimacy, and eventually to "Palestinise" the country, have obliged Israelis to contemplate unilateral withdrawal to lines that improve the country's demographic status as a Jewish state. This is the most evident development in Israeli politics. These demographic issues have a nationalist and political background, but there is an economic theme as well: an overlay to the Palestinian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli conflicts that is essentially classic between north and south in nature. Currently, there are some 100,000 Palestinians from the West Bank, Gaza and even Jordan, as well as an estimated 10,000 or so Egyptians inside Israel's internationally-recognised borders. The vast majority of these illegal immigrants were motivated to move to Israel by economic rather than ideological reasons.

One of the Palestinian complaints about Israel's security fence project is that it will stop the free movement of this illegal labour, hence depriving more Palestinians of their livelihood. While the fence is being constructed mainly for security reasons, and its many abuses and departures from the green line can still be linked to geographic motivations concerning the settlements, its demographic significance is not lost on Israeli strategic planners. If Israel's relative prosperity currently attracts illegal migrants despite conditions of conflict, a hypothetical, positive peace situation would have a problematic, demographic downside. This is particularly so when we assume that most of the migrant labourers from the neighbouring "south" would be Palestinians who end up remaining in the country.

This explains at least one aspect of the constant tension in Israel's economy over the past decade, between the importation of agricultural and construction workers from Palestine on one hand, and from countries like Thailand, China and Romania. Yet when Prime Minister Sharon indicates, in the course of planning the withdrawal from Gaza, that he eventually hopes to cease all movement of both labourers and goods between Israel and that territory, his rationale is not just security. It is also the recognition that "northern" Israel is sitting next to a heavily-overpopulated and under-developed "southern" time bomb in areas like the Gaza Strip.

[17] From an investigation conducted by the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption in 1996, it became clear that only 65% of the young people interviewed agreed with the necessity of the *Aliyah* for the future of Israel. The same statistic referring to 1992 was 71%, and 90% in 1979. Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, 1998, p. 57 and others.

[18] On this topic see Arian, 1998, pp. 67 and others.

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