

THE STUDIES ON DEMOGRAPHIC HISTORY ON PALESTINE DURING BRITISH ADMINISTRATION, 1917-1948: ISSUES AND CONCERNS

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Abstract

In the course of the history of Palestine, the years of 1917 until 1948 stood out as the time when it was briefly administered by the Imperial British, and became especially significance as the demography of the land was transferred from an Arab majority into a land dominated by the Jews. Various studies have been done this subject, and had centred on several issues that are integral to the understanding of how Israel was eventually formed in 1948. Therefore the purpose of this paper will be to identify the significance of demographic study on Palestine during the time it was administered by the British for 31 years. This paper will be divided into four parts. Firstly it will define the meaning of demographic study for Palestine for the purpose of identifying the borders and limitation of such studies, as well as the significance of such studies to broader study of Palestine in particular. Secondly, the authors will review several past studies which will be able to identify the concerns and issues of these studies and then elaborated in the third part, and the whole discussion will concluded in the final part. The authors have applied the use of historical method, by referring to primary and secondary sources.

Keywords: *Demographic Study, Demographic Change, Palestine, British Mandate, Palestine under British*

Introduction

What warrants a study on the demography of Palestine?. It is imperative that definitions are given to the term 'demographic study' before proceeding to relate its significance and contribution to the larger discussion of Palestine. Past studies on the demography of Palestine in various periods should also be taken into account, as to highlight some of the main concerns and issues in the study if demography in Palestine.

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Demographic Study and Demographic History Study

A demographic study is a study on the human population, especially in terms of size, composition and distribution, along with the reason for these characteristics and the consequences that they produce.¹ It is a scientific study,² statistical and mathematical for the purpose of developing *a body of theory to explain the events that it charts and compares*.³ These characteristics are developed through various means which demographers have listed such as birth/fertility, death/mortality and migration. Some demographers, such as Hauser and Duncan (1959) and Bogue (1969) also include social mobility as part of demographic study.⁴

Hollingsworth (1976) has made a clearer a division between these developments by separating them into natural changes (births and deaths) and mechanical changes (immigrants and emigrants).⁵ Abu-Lughod (1986) has also made two distinct two categories in regard to changes that occur within a particular demography; net migration (the difference between the numbers of people moving in out of a particular territory) or net natural increase (the excess of deaths compared to births of a particular territory).⁶ These categories of changes or characteristics serve to display how the numbers of people living in a selected area change over time, whether through natural causes or man-made causes.

Although a demographic study of Palestine entails a much more detailed and complete discussion of its own, it is not the purpose of this particular study. Here the author would like to make a clarification before proceeding with the chapter. While this study will indeed focus on the population of Palestine, it does not strictly follow a systematic demography study, but rather focus on the more historical aspect to it, which means examining the data in the light of the events related to it, attributing both cause and effect to the changes that took place within the population. For the purpose of this study, a more historic approach in terms of demography is required. Therefore, the question that may arise is whether this would be a study of 'historical demography' or 'demographic history'?

A point of interest is that some scholars have made a distinction between 'historical demography' and 'demographic history'. T. H Hollingsworth in his book, *Historical Demography* for example, points that the former largely centres on the quantitative aspect of the study in a specific period of time, "...the study of

¹ Joseph A. McFalls Jr., (2007), "Population: A Lively Introduction, *Population Bulletin*, 5th edition, 62, no.1, Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, Retrieved from <http://www.prb.org/pdf07/62.1livelyintroduction.pdf>

² United Nations, 1958:3 cited in Lucas et. al., (1980).

³ Bogue, 1969:1-2 cited in Lucas et. al., (1980).

⁴ Hauser & Duncan (1959:2) and Bogue (1969:28).

⁵ Births and deaths result in natural increase and decrease of the population. Immigrants are people who came from outside to settle in a particular place while emigrants are those who left his original place to settle elsewhere. See Hollingsworth, T.H. (1976).

⁶ Abu-Lughod, Janet (1986), "The Demographic War for Palestine" in *The Link*, Vol. 9. Issue 5, pp. 1-16

the ebb and flow of the numbers of mankind in time and space by a combination of geography and history using statistics, and the main concern is to achieve accurate estimates of human numbers.”⁷ This particular area of study will be much more detailed and concerned on achieving accurate estimations of the quantitative make-up of a particular population in the past.

Demographic history on the other hand is more concerned with the historic aspect, where it seeks “...to describe past events in a coherent way, using population as its yardstick, and population changes as the events of main interest that other factors must explain.”⁸ The demographic data is being used to explain the various characteristics of populations in the past as well as to elucidate the causes and consequences of the said characteristics.⁹ This study therefore is concentrated on how these changes occurred and the actual who and what attributed to the changes.

What warrants the study of past population of Palestine?. What is the significance of studying the population of Palestine, especially in the period of British administration?. A study on demography is in fact a merit in itself, as pointed out by McCarthy:

“The history of a place cannot be truly known without knowing who lived there, to which ethnic and religious groups they belonged, and how their numbers changed over time. To the student of population history, statistics on mortality and fertility also tells an absorbing tale of what was most important in the lives of all the people. That knowledge is sufficient unto itself. However many other branches of history also rely on accurate demographic statistics.”¹⁰

For the author, the branches of history referred to by McCarthy in the preface of his work will include - but not limited to - various aspects of Palestine such as sociological history, the economic history and political history; all of which are closely connected to the development of Palestine being transformed from Arab-majority into a Jewish land. All of these historical aspects are closely connected and require a holistic understanding so that the events that took place in Palestine during the selected period can be better understood. In fact, the author believes that for those who grasp the significance of the studying this particular period will be able to not only understand Palestine while it was under the imperial power, but also the subsequent events, including the conflict of the current day. Thus this is only one of the many justifications for focusing on this particular topic and period.

⁷ Thomas, Henry Hollingsworth (1876), *Historical Demography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 37.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39

⁹ Willigan, J. Dennis & Katherine (1982), A. Lynch, *Sources and methods of historical demography*, New York: Academic Press, p. xi.

¹⁰ McCarthy, Justin (1998), *The Population of Palestine: Population Statistics of the Late Ottoman Period and the Mandate*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. xvii

In fact, Janet Abu Lughod even went as far as to point that demography is the centre of the entire struggle that have been going on. As she puts it, the "...policies which may appear accidental or irrational have deep grounding in a demographic struggle for the country, and that the seemingly scientific discussions over numbers often conceal a deeper agenda."¹¹

Other academicians who have studied the demography of the Palestinians have also pointed out the significance of such study. A study of demography is just one the many studies which has the potential of contributing towards understanding the potential of the Palestinian people, which for the Palestinians themselves, could have been a vital step during the years where they were slowly being misplaced in their own land. Hagopian and Zahlan (1974) gave the example of the absence of record on mortality rate, which resulted in the Palestinians being unaware of the disadvantage that they were in in terms of public health.¹²

While Edward Hagopian and A.B Zahlan (1974) view that the Palestinians 'have rarely taken stock of their strengths and weaknesses', which include studying their own demographic potential, Janet Abu Lughod (1986) in her article *The Demographic War for Palestine* believes that population is a 'major weapon' that has long been used by both sides - Arab Palestinians and Zionists - as a justifications for their many claims¹³. It may be that prior to the Palestinian own dispersion, they may have not been able to see that advantages that they may gain through their demographic make-up, and it only became clearer to them much later,¹⁴ and perhaps in the coming future.

Past studies on demographic of Palestine

The researcher has mentioned several studies that have been carried out in the investigation of Palestine's demographic history in the first chapter. The purpose of including these past studies in a more detailed manner in this chapter is that apart from offering the author with the idea of what has been done in the past, these studies also serve the purpose of providing data on the population of Palestine. As will be discussed later, the availability of data in primary sources makes it necessary for the author to refer to other secondary sources, which in this case would be the past studies on the demography of Palestine. Another purpose is to identify the concerns of other researchers that exist within the literature, as to identify which are the key issues in the discussion of demographic history of Palestine. The researcher had done her best in obtaining the relevant works, and may only be limited by her inability to obtain some while unawareness of the

¹¹ Abu-Lughod, Janet (1986), *op.cit.*, pp. 1-16.

¹² Edward, Hagopian & A.B. Zahlan (1974), "Palestine's Arab Population: The Demography of Palestinians," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3, No. 4, pp. 32-73.

¹³ Such as the size of the Palestinian Arab refugee population created by the 1948 war, the national origins of residents, and other seemingly innocuous figures as live births, illegal immigration, forced or voluntary outmigrations. See Abu-Lughod. (1986).

¹⁴ Khalidi, Rashid (2007), *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*, Boston: Beacon Press.

existence of others. Therefore, it is noteworthy that the materials below are by no means exhaustive in their insertion and discussion.

In the study of the demographic of Palestine, one of the widely cited references is the work of Justin McCarthy, *The Population of Palestine: Population History and Statistics of the Late Ottoman Period and the Mandate*. McCarthy's study attempted to answer questions such as "What was the population of Palestine?" "What was the relative size of the different communities in Palestine at different times?" and "How did migration affect the population?".¹⁵ The population during the time of the Ottoman and British are studied separately in two distinct chapters and have been presented according to the availability of the sources for these two periods. Although it is acknowledged that the available data are scarce for both periods, the British Mandate period seemed to have received more attention in regard to the demography of its population, possible due to the nature of the population demography of that period itself and the events that have led to the changes in the demography.

McCarthy has carried out a rather thorough task by listing out the data on the demography of Palestine from various sources, which include the official census of Palestine and the reports on the said census as well as pointing out the differences in numbers when the sources are compared. For example, there is a marked difference in J.B Barron's statistics as compared to Arthur Ruppin's statistics in his book *Syrien als Wirtschaftsgebiet*, especially in the matter of Jewish population of Palestine.¹⁶ On the other hand, although the statistics have been well-provided and compared, the McCarthy did not offer detailed explanation on the reasons that these changes took place and not in the manner that the researcher is planning to expound in this dissertation. McCarthy did however states the numbers base on available resources, and discusses possible reasons as to why there have been differences in the numbers offered by respective resources. While his research provide tremendous help to the author in completing this dissertation, the events, individuals or groups that have direct correlation with the numbers are missing. McCarthy's research does not offer further details that may add readers in understanding the said period. His major concern was to provide the available data and discern and discrepancies that exist between them.

Another research that did offer better understanding on the demographic changes has been presented in an article *Palestine's Arab Population: The Demography of the Palestinians*, authored by Edward Hagopian and A.B Zahlan.¹⁷ This article that was part of the *Journal of Palestine Studies* published in 1974. The authors of this article had discussed the matter of Palestine's demography in five separate periods, which include the period prior to 1918, 1919 until 1948, 1948 until 1952,

¹⁵ McCarthy, Justin (1998), *op.cit.*, p. xix

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19

¹⁷ Edward, Hagopian & A.B. Zahlan (1974), *op.cit.*, pp. 32-73.

1952 until June of 1967 and finally the period after June 5, 1967. From the analysis, a number of points are apparent. Firstly, in the matter of demographic data, the authors of the article made references to various sources, which include the official census and statistics, and other researches that also provide numerical data, for example Tibawi's *Arab Education in Mandatory Palestine*.¹⁸ Secondly, this article is not a mere discussion on the numbers, but rather draws from important components of a society life, including education and economy.

In regard to the period corresponding to this dissertation, only the first two periods discussed in the article are relevant. The first period (before 1918) was only focusing on the educational opportunities in terms of how many schools were available during that time and the number of attendees and instructors. It provides an interesting view in the educational landscape of Palestine prior British time. The second period is discussed more elaborately, due to the more reliable existing data, mainly the two main censuses. Once again the authors have chosen to have a more in-depth discussion on education, primarily the number of students in attendance to these schools. For the authors, the concern lies in the matter of the characteristics of the population during the discussed periods according to their socio-economy and educational background, which serve to illustrate the strength of the population in developing as a community.

Another article that also focuses on the demographical aspect of Palestine during the British time is Janet Abu-Lughod's *The Demographic War for Palestine*.¹⁹ She presents her research of the Palestinian population by looking at the trend of the demographic changes, either through the migration or natural increase and decrease. Her studies span over the period of the mandate years until the time of her research (1986). While her analysis and conclusion of demographic changes based on what was current then, nevertheless she had provided valuable insights into how demography had been viewed and used by both the Arabs and the Jews, both during the time of the British and the post 1948 period. For example, the Jewish had been well-bent on the expulsion by the Palestinians, a systematic of displacing the inhabitants of the land in various ways,²⁰ while the Arabs fought back through their demands and protests against the British administrations to control the Jewish migrations.

Trends began to change according to Abu-Lughod, as the observation of her time noted that Jewish attempts have begun to include decreasing the Arabs' fertility rate (which they were countering back with high rate of natural increase) while the Arabs were making lives difficult for new migrants into Palestine and encouraging them to live. He author also predicted that while demography had been an effective factor in the past, it may no longer be the case for both sides, as Israeli

¹⁸ Tibawi, A.L (1956), *Arab Education in Mandatory Palestine*, quoted in Edward, Hagopian & A.B. Zahlan.

¹⁹ Abu-Lughod, Janet (1986), *op.cit.*, pp. 1-16.

²⁰ Masalha, Nur (1992), *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought 1882-1948*, Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies.

attempts to encourage more migrations had failed to achieve the desired results and even the Palestinian natural increase was no longer able to contend with its past numbers. However both Arabs and Jews share a somewhat similar fate in to the dispersion of their brethren in other parts of the world, where it may be that those that have taken roots elsewhere, particularly in the U.S may no longer contribute to the demography of Palestine in the future, which led Abu-Lughod to suggest that this may have future implications, such as the U.S having a role to play in this matter.

Fred Gottheil presented a study on the contention that exists within the discussion of demography of Palestine that Arab migration into Palestine during the Mandatory period was worthy of considerable notice, comparable to the Jewish migration even. He had produced an article on Arab Immigrations into what he termed as 'pre-state Israel', where he identified the number of Arabs who made the choice of entering areas that were later to become Israel.²¹ In terms of data, he referred to the available censuses, as he considers data prior to 1922 to be estimates and therefore the reliability can be questioned. Gottheil's main point of discussion was to make a distinction between the number of Arabs who migrated into areas that become Israel and those that remained as Palestine after 1948. He prove that there were significant increase in the increase of Arabs through migration between the year 1922 and 1931 (the two times the censuses were taken) into the pre-state Israel (54,790 or 6.8%) compared to the non-Israel Palestine (4, 677 or 1.4%).²² These numbers mostly include Arabs from other non-Palestine areas as Gottheil noted the various statements made by observers of that time and other scholars,²³ even if within Palestine itself, there was no way of ascertaining how many made their way from the non-Israel Palestine into the future Israel.²⁴

The can be deduced that the intention of such research was to stress that Arab immigration into Mandatory Palestine was no less significant than the Jewish immigration, especially to areas where the Zionists have developed the land substantially in terms of economic value. He highlighted this by including the economic growth of Palestine during British administration, and pointing out that it was the main attraction for the migration of the Arabs into the soon to be Israel. Thus Gottheil reinforced the challenge²⁵ towards studies that have made and tend to stress that the magnitude of the migration of the Arabs into areas that were to

²¹ Gottheil, Fred M. (1982), "Arab Immigration into Pre-State Israel: 1922 – 1931", in *Palestine and Israel in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, (ed.) Elie Kedourie and Sylvia G. Haim, London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, pp. 143-150.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 146.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

²⁴ Gottheil mentions this in his footnote, based on the comment in the *Survey of Palestine*. See *A Survey of Palestine – Prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry*, Vol. III, p. 1150.

²⁵ Of these, according to Gottheil include H. Laski and the view of the Royal Institute for International Affairs.

become Israel paled considerably when compared to the migration of Jews into the whole Palestine.²⁶

An article by Ami Isseroff, *The Population of Palestine Prior to 1948*²⁷ is another example of a study that focuses on the demographic situation between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine. Isseroff centres his arguments around one main thesis, which was “the nature of the data do not permit precise conclusions about the Arab population of Palestine in Ottoman and British times.” Here he contend that both sides of the claim – the Arabs insisting on the fact that Palestine was overwhelmingly Arabs in majority during the time of major Jewish migration, and that their number was significant, while the Zionist’s famous quote ‘a land without people for a people without land’ was the basis of their settlement – cannot be supported by a complete and reliable data for one obvious reason: such data does not exist. What came close were estimates based on the two official censuses and Isseroff believes that these should not be used as absolute evidence to back up either of the two sides’ claims. The issues that were linked by the author to his main conclusion include the nature of the data itself, where researchers cannot be completely certain as major issues in a census cannot be addressed, such as the undercounting of certain part of the population (like the Bedouins) and the lack of complete report on infant mortality and births. Economic and immigration into Palestine were considered by Isseroff to be closely linked, as to many other researches on this issue. Isseroff too seemed to agree that Arabs’ population increased dramatically during British administration, due to the economic prosperity of the developing land in Palestine, but unlike Gottheil however, Isseroff left the discussion open in regard as to whether the increase was due to massive migration or natural increase.

Alexander Scholch’s article in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*,²⁸ his study of demography concentrates on the period while Palestine was under Ottoman, which is 1850 until 1882. Although these are not the years of the focus in this study, this article will contribute in terms of demonstrating the demographic trend and concern during this period. For example, the reiterated issue of the reliability of Ottoman figures, as been stated by some other researchers mentioned previously.²⁹ Scholch’s study however, seems to almost solely concentrate on the numbers and brief analysis of these changes, without making mention of the demographic conflict between Arabs and Jews that was usually common within the literature. The author’s own main statement can serve to illustrate his central theme for the paper, that pattern of the population period “mirrored the general situation of the country.”³⁰ The researcher believes that this

²⁶ Gottheil attributed this view to various studies, such as by L. Hopkins and A. Ruppin as well as the *Survey of Palestine* by the British Administration.

²⁷ Isseroff, Ami, “The Population of Palestine Prior to 1948”, website mideastweb.org, accessed on 17 February 2013, <http://www.mideastweb.org/palpop.htm>.

²⁸ Scholch, Alexander (1985), “The Demographic of Palestine 1850-1882” in *Journal of Middle East Studies*, 17, No. 4. pp. 485-505.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 485.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 503.

is a universal principle that can be applied to all study of demographic changes within a population, and is true for the time of British Administration as well.

To further illustrate the 'war' of demography that has been continuing even until today, the article of Yakov Faitelson, *The Politics of Palestinian Demography*³¹ is a good example of how the issue of demography in the Palestine-Israeli conflict has never cease to be of relevance to the region. Faitelson highlights the political concern of Israelis that in today's proportion of Arabs and Israelis, that the Arabs of Palestine, including the ones in Israel, Gaza and West Bank would eventually constitute the majority of the whole Israel-Palestine region by the 21st century, based on various estimations. Although Faitelson proceeds to point out that some of the demographic forecasts appeared to be faulty due to miscalculation, he did not however provide a better estimation or numbers as to dispute what is considered a looming danger; that the Arabs would gain advantage over Israelis in terms of number and this could lead to the unforeseen consequences. There is one interesting aspect of this study that the researcher would like to point out, that it shares similarities with the study by Fred Gottheil, which maintains the central thesis that while Arabs natural increase have always been undoubtedly high compared to the Jews, and thus contribute to the demographic increase, there is the tendency to downplay that by pointing out the contribution of migration to the number instead. While in the past, the Arabs migrated into Palestine because of the economic prosperity, now the Arabs would be leaving Palestine³² Faitelson maintains that there is still 'hope' yet for Israel, that while the Jewish numbers will have a harder time to increase, the Palestine numbers may eventually decrease and thus averted the danger of the diminishing of Jews.

So far the materials presented by the above studies constituted of the discussion of data itself and what it represent in the history, and subsequently the current situation of Palestine. However the researcher believes that it is equally important to look into studies that favour another aspect of demographic history study; the more humane aspect of the data, which is the population that were involved in the demographic changes during that time. In this matter opinions and view also occupy various parts of the spectrum, from the ones who completely dismiss the significance of such study, and the ones who feel that it is in fact the heart of the demographic study, of without it there is no point at all. Rosemary Sayigh in her book *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*³³ had dedicated a chapter of her book to the account of the Palestinians during the time they were under the Mandate system, by describing their economic situation and social structure. The author actually dedicated a significant part of her chapter to the narratives of Palestinians refugees in Lebanon, as she believes that there is value in the understanding the Palestinians situation based on their own definitions, as it is one

³¹ Yakov Faitelson (2009), "The Politics of Palestinian Demography" in *Middle East Quarterly*, pp. 51-59.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Sayigh, Rosemary (1979), *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*, London: Zed Press.

way of dispelling the biases of some historians who have not paid much attention to the conditions and culture of the Palestinians.³⁴ The author's conclusion serves to reflect what a studies of demography on Palestine should always be aware of, that numbers do not necessarily reflect strength of a people, and that, "The 'dismemberment' of the Palestinians was the logical outcome of three decades of a systematically produced inequality – military, political and social – between the two communities."³⁵

Aryeh L. Avneri's *Claim of Dispossession: Jewish Land Settlement and the Arabs, 1878-1948*,³⁶ is a book that covers an extensive discussion on the issues of land in Palestine since the Ottoman time until the proclamation of Israel. The issue of land is closely connected to the demography of the population as land ownership was one of the reasons that made it possible for the changes in population to happen. This in turn is related to the economic and social development of Palestine, which in had led to the prosperity of Palestine, of which the Arabs were also able to benefit from. It can be deduced that the thesis of this book forwarded the idea that rather than forced evacuation by the Zionists' plan of expansion, the Arabs chose to leave on their own, and in some cases were quite a welcomed option. Though not a study that concentrate on demography per se, the book serves to provide other issues that are also critical in the discussion from a Jewish perspective, which is critical in order for the researcher to carry out a more balanced analysis without being overly biased to one side.

Elia. T. Zureik's *The Palestinians in Israel*³⁷ can also be referred as example of a demographic study of Palestine in the third chapter of the book under the heading "Arab social structure in pre-1948 Palestine." In regard to this study, the author concentrates solely on the social aspect of the Palestinian population by describing several issues pertaining to it, such as geographical, health and educational issues. In the discussion that concentrates on the demography of Palestine during the Mandatory period, Zureik sees the significance of demographic claim as a political endeavour for the land of Palestine by both sides.³⁸ Apart from discussing both the Arabs and the Jews, Zureik also discusses the British and its role in the changes within the population of Palestine. While the common demographic discussions of Palestine figure largely the components of Arabs and Jews, the researcher believes that the British is a significance influential force in determining the outcome of the demographic landscape of Palestine.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³⁶ Aryeh L. Avneri (1984), *Claim of Dispossession: Jewish Land Settlement and the Arabs, 1878-1948*, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

³⁷ Zureik, Elia T. (1979), *The Palestinians in Israel: A Study in internal colonialism*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Issues and Concerns in the Studies of Demographic of Palestine

Based on the past researches on the demography of Palestine under British administration, the authors have deduced that the following are the main topics for discussions in the body of literature that discusses Palestinian demography:

1. The extend of the reliability of data prior to 1922

As the first census ever taken for the British administration in Palestine, it must take into consideration the previous data that existed in order to compare the increase or decrease of the population to chart the trend of the population. The most current data that exist during the time of British census was the Ottoman's records, and the final year was 1914. In regard to Ottoman's record, it is acknowledged that there existed discrepancies with the actual number due to various reasons, such as intentional evasion by some part of the population, or inaccessibility to others such as the Bedouins and even women and children. To what extend a researcher might rely on the figures depend on his or her view on how the data were collected and the consistency that they projected with later estimates that would have been able to take into account of other factors. McCarthy for example, accepted the Ottoman figures while he did make some correction to the numbers based on his own calculation. Isseroff on the other hand showed to be more reserved to the Ottoman records and held that the opinion that to use the data as a support for any argument will only be misleading. However this should have come as no surprise as this matter had in fact been commented by the First Superintendent of Palestine Census, J.B Baron in his commentary that,

“In a country which had no experience of a census conducted on a scientific basis, it was to be expected that considerable difficulties would be encountered. Apart from the consideration that the public habitually regard with suspicion the ascertaining from individuals of information of a private nature, there are special difficulties applicable to any territory which had previously formed a portion of the Ottoman Empire.”³⁹

2. Estimations of population

Due to the unavailability of records for the years other than 1922 and 1931, estimations have been projected, both by the officials during the time if the Mandate, as well as present-day demographers. In the case of Palestine, since 1931, there had been quarterly and annual estimates by the Government of Statistics in Palestine, though it must be acknowledged that estimates cannot be

³⁹ Barron, J. B., (ed.)(1923), *Palestine: Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1922*, Government of Palestine, p. 2.

considered similar to official censuses in terms of reliability.⁴⁰ In any case, as the rapid changes experienced by Palestine in the aspect of natural increase and migration had made the degree of reliability of these estimates even lower.⁴¹ It may be added here that the interests that various parties had in the population of Palestine, especially towards the end of the Mandate period is caution enough for any researcher to be aware of the need for careful inspection of these estimations in particular and in the censuses in general.

3. The actual numbers of existing Jewish population in Palestine prior to 1922

This point has been one of the points of contention between demographers. This has been linked to the Ottoman registry as well. One of the reasons for contention was due to the fact that existing number of Jews in Palestine prior to the large immigration that took place later one is of considerable importance as it supports the idea of Jews as a consistent presence in the holy land, rather than just forcing and imposing their way into Palestine.

4. Arab migration into Palestine

In regard to the Arab presence in Palestine, their status as the habitant of Palestine was not contested, but rather like the issue of Jew, their actual numbers were questioned due to the claim of the major displacement of Arabs with the Jews during the final years of the Mandate. Proponents of the view that the Arabs themselves were immigrants contend that the immigration itself took place due to the economic development of the land, which in turn can be credited to the Jewish agriculture and land development. Demographers, such as McCarthy maintains that the Arabs, particularly the Muslims have always made up the largest part of the population, even during the time of Jewish mass migration as early the 19th century, their high natural increase had made it possible for them to be maintain their status as the largest group in the Palestinian population.⁴² This part will also be discussed more thoroughly in subsequent discourse.

5. British as an influential factor in the demography of Palestine

This is in fact one of the central themes of this dissertation. While the main components of the demographic make-up of Palestine are the Arabs and the Jews, the British as the ruling power of that time was involved. The question is, to what extend? What can be deduced so far is that as the administrator, the stance of the government played a significant role in the development of Palestine, whether through official policies or through the day-to-day decisions taken by the administrators. There are several policies that are known to be directly connected to the demographic changes, for example the White Paper of 1929 that put

⁴⁰ Shaw, J.V.W (1991), *A Survey of Palestine: Prepared in December, 1945 and January, 1946 for the Information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry*, Vol.1, Institute for Palestine Studies, p. 160.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁴² McCarthy, Justin (1998), *op.cit.*, p. 11.

restrictions on the Jewish migration. However, did it produce the desired effect? Or did the changes took place regardless of the situation, perhaps even more so? The can the British be said responsible for this turn of event?. The researcher hopes to ascertain the answers to these questions, especially in the fourth chapter.

6. The significance of demographic study of Palestine

All studies that concentrated on the demography of Palestine during the Mandatory period are in agreement that such studies are significant for various reasons. These reasons of which some have been state above pointed to two concerns of most demographers of Palestine. Firstly, the study of the demography of Palestine is not a study of demography for its own sake, but rather to better understand the on-going raging conflict in Palestine, and subsequently in the neighbouring regions, and in fact the whole world. For what we can see in the current times, such as the Arab uprisings, the Iranian nuclear issue, the massive humanitarian aid to Palestine, are all incumbent when one discusses Palestine. Demographic study especially, can be used to understand and explain the current situation, and perhaps suggest a solution to the existing problem.

7. The implication of demographic study of Palestine

In regard to the historical aspect of the demographic study, a question that may arise will be, ‘what is the implication of having all these studies?’. Does examining the numbers of people that were involved during a historic time will make a difference in the present times?. These concerns however were not present in all the studies. Some researchers may either study the particulars of the Palestinian demography just to understand the conflict and leave it as an event of the past, or conclude that it is of no particular significance either because it had passed or that the study cannot be used as possible evidence for the present-day conflict. Another concern that also prevails among the studies of Palestinian demography is that as an integral component of the Palestinian history, details that do exist cannot be ignored and therefore should figure in any discussion of possible conflict solution. Especially in the matters of Palestinian refugees, of which has always been a consistent component in past peace solutions. Hence the topic of Palestinian demography, especially prior to 1948 will always be brought up in all future considerations for Palestine. Another issue that cannot be overlooked is that based on the present-day studies of Palestinian demography, there exist concern, particularly on the Israeli side that the Jews may become disadvantageous in terms of population, as their natural increase is not as high as the Palestinians, and that planned migration, either on Jews to move to Israel or for the Arabs to leave Palestine, is no longer a viable option as it had been in the past. It remains to be seen what development will take place in the future in regard to this matter.

Conclusion

To conclude, a discussion of the demographic aspect of Palestine during the British Administration must take into account several major considerations, due to the fact that Palestine is no ordinary land due to its historical background, present condition and future outcome, as the current conflict can attest. To do justice to the depth of discussion that is ever-growing on this subject, researchers will need to identify what are the key concerns of the existing discussion, as to ensure that the analysis that will follow in the subsequent chapter takes them into account. The very topic of demographic changes in Palestine has been a source of many contentions, perhaps to further illustrate the situation of Palestine itself; Palestine will always be a heart of conflict, as some people are prone to believe. However the authors believe that to take this view is to simply accept today's situation without the due moral regard towards those who have become victims and the implication they hold, not just on the fate of the region, but even at the global level itself.

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