



Demographic Consequences of the Occupation

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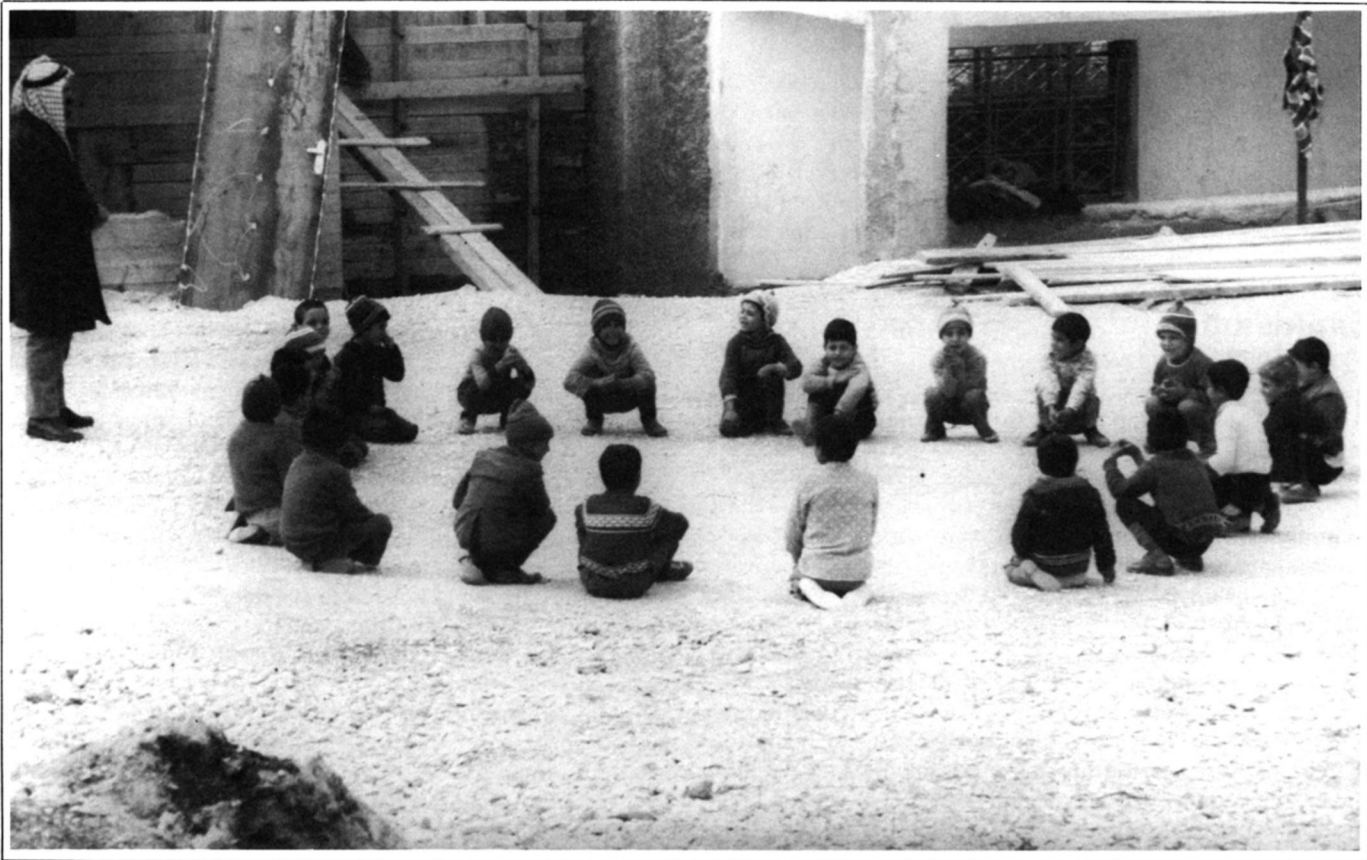
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Marisa Escribano

West Bank children playing in school.

Demographic Consequences of the Occupation

Janet L. Abu-Lughod

The residual areas of Palestine occupied by Israel in June 1967 (generally referred to as the West Bank and Gaza) contained a population of between 1,300,000 and 1,350,000 Palestinians. At that time, this population represented over half of all the estimated 2,650,000 Palestinians in the world. At present, the number of Palestinians who remain in these zones does not exceed 1,300,000—approximately the same number as lived there fifteen years ago. Had the population of 1967 remained in place, natural increase would have yielded a present population in post-1967 occupied Palestine in excess of 2 million. Therefore, we estimate that the June 1967 war and subsequent occupation were responsible for the

dispersion from their homeland of over 700,000 additional Palestinians. Given the fact that there are now an estimated four and a half million persons of Palestinian birth or origin in the world, those who remain in eastern Palestine (the West Bank and Jerusalem) and Gaza now constitute only 29 percent of the total. This dramatic drop (from 50 to 29 percent of the total) is the major demographic consequence of the June 1967 war. It is, however, not the only one.

We might summarize the demographic consequences of the occupation as follows:

- a massive expulsion of residents sufficient to stabilize numbers, despite a natural increase rate that has averaged 3.5 percent per year;
- a distortion in the normal population characteristics of the residual population, due to the selectivity of expulsions and emigrations;
- a transformation of the remaining population from a diversified independent society of peasants, businessmen and professionals to a proletarianized and

Author's Note: Close to 100 demographic sources were consulted in connection with the preparation of my study, "Demographic Characteristics of the Palestinian Population," Annex I to *Palestine Open University Feasibility Study*, Part II (UNESCO: Paris, 1980), c. 125 pp. The report includes a complete listing of these sources and detailed tables based on them. Critical evaluations of their relative accuracy and explanations for how and why various published figures were adjusted are also included. Since the time of that analysis, additional issues of the *Israeli Statistical Abstract* have appeared, and these have been consulted in connection with this article. Also available for consultation were three issues of a new publication, *Palestinian Statistical Abstract* (Damascus: PLO Central Bureau of Statistics, 1979, 1980 and 1981).

dependent reserve labor army at the mercy of Israeli political and economic interests.

These changes in the demographic characteristics of the territories occupied by Israel in 1967 have been the outcome of concerted policies adopted by the occupier. These policies have been intentionally designed both to contain the size of the population over whom dominance would have to be exercised and to reduce its capacity to resist domination.

Expulsions and the Stabilization of Population Size

At the outbreak of the June 1967 war, there were approximately 900,000 Palestinians living in what was then called the "West Bank," including perhaps 80,000 in the walled city of East Jerusalem and in the villages and towns in the vicinity. This population not only included Palestinians originally from the zone that had been annexed to Jordan in 1949, but also several hundred thousand refugees from the 1948 war who had resettled there from the portions of Palestine preempted by Israel. Some of these refugees were still living in camps, concentrated largely in the Jordan Valley just west of the river. Most, however, lived outside camps. The region, while relatively neglected in Jordanian development plans, managed to sustain a normal economy based upon agriculture, tourism, commerce and services and, to a much lesser degree, industry. During the early 1960s, a modest amount of emigration was occurring, as Palestinians filtered toward Amman or left the country entirely in search of better economic opportunities. But such emigration amounted to under 15,000 persons per year (many the sons and daughters of families that remained at home) and was viewed as temporary. Movement to the east bank of Jordan was simply internal migration without longterm significance. Movement abroad in search of employment was facilitated by the fact that the population enjoyed Jordanian citizenship and therefore carried acceptable travel documents.

In the Egyptian-administered Gaza Strip the situation was quite different. Within that extremely small area were concentrated between 400,000 and 450,000 Palestinians, about half of whom were refugees from the 1948 war together with their descendants. Almost half of the population lived in the densely settled villages that had evolved from refugee camps, and many residents were still being assisted by UNRWA, since citrus growing, the chief economic base of the zone, was insufficient to provide a living to all. Since the residents lacked an internationally-recognized passport (they carried Palestinian travel documents), emigration from Gaza was more difficult. However, there was relatively free movement to Egypt for specific purposes—notably, to attend institutions of higher learning (since Gaza had none) or to serve in the Egyptian armed forces. From there many individuals moved on to Kuwait or other parts of the Gulf. At the time of the June 1967 war, there were probably some 400,000 Palestinians actually residing in the Gaza Strip; the rest were temporarily outside.

Had there been no war or conquest, these 1.3 million Palestinians living in eastern Palestine and in the Gaza

Strip in June 1967 would have increased, through an excess of births over deaths, to about 2.3 million by June 1982.¹ Even assuming some gradual outmigration for employment and/or education, the districts would have contained some two million persons by 1982, of whom two-thirds would have been residing in the West Bank, while the remaining third would have been in Gaza.

Today, however, there are fewer than 1,300,000 Palestinians still left in the two districts Israel occupied during the 1967 war—more than one-third in the Gaza Strip, somewhat less than two-thirds on the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and environs.² The brunt of the expulsions/emigration has been borne by the West Bank areas outside Jerusalem. The population of the Gaza Strip has grown only slightly—despite a natural increase rate that approaches four percent per year. This means that net outmigration has come close to natural increase. In the area of East Jerusalem and environs, population has increased by 80 percent in the past fifteen years, which indicates that natural increase has been occurring without heavy pressures to leave. In contrast, however, the remaining portions of eastern Palestine have been subject to systematic depopulation. There have been numerous forced expulsions and deportations; there has been systematic economic strangulation through land confiscations and water deprivation; and there has been a systematic undermining of local institutions. The net result is that, despite 15 years of natural increase at the rate of some 3.5 percent per year, the population now stands at 110,000 *less* than it had been in June of 1967.

Table I shows our estimates of change in the size of the Palestinian population under occupation since 1967. Three phases of demographic decline are evident, but their impact has varied in the three subregions. During the first phase—from the outbreak of war in June 1967 to the end of 1968—there was a marked and rapid decline in the populations of all three regions: Gaza, Jerusalem, and the remaining West Bank. This precipitous drop reveals the number of persons who became refugees (some for the second time in their lives) as a direct result of the war. As best as we can determine, some 250,000 West Bank residents, plus at least 75,000 residents of Gaza, were driven from their homes between June 1967 and December 1968.³ Since these 325,000 persons would normally have increased through an excess of births over deaths by some 17,000 during that year and a half, we conclude that the number of Palestinians directly displaced as a result of the hostilities was close to 350,000. (This figure does not include the estimated 25,000 to 50,000 Gaza residents who were temporarily outside at the time of the Israeli invasion and who were subsequently prevented from returning.)

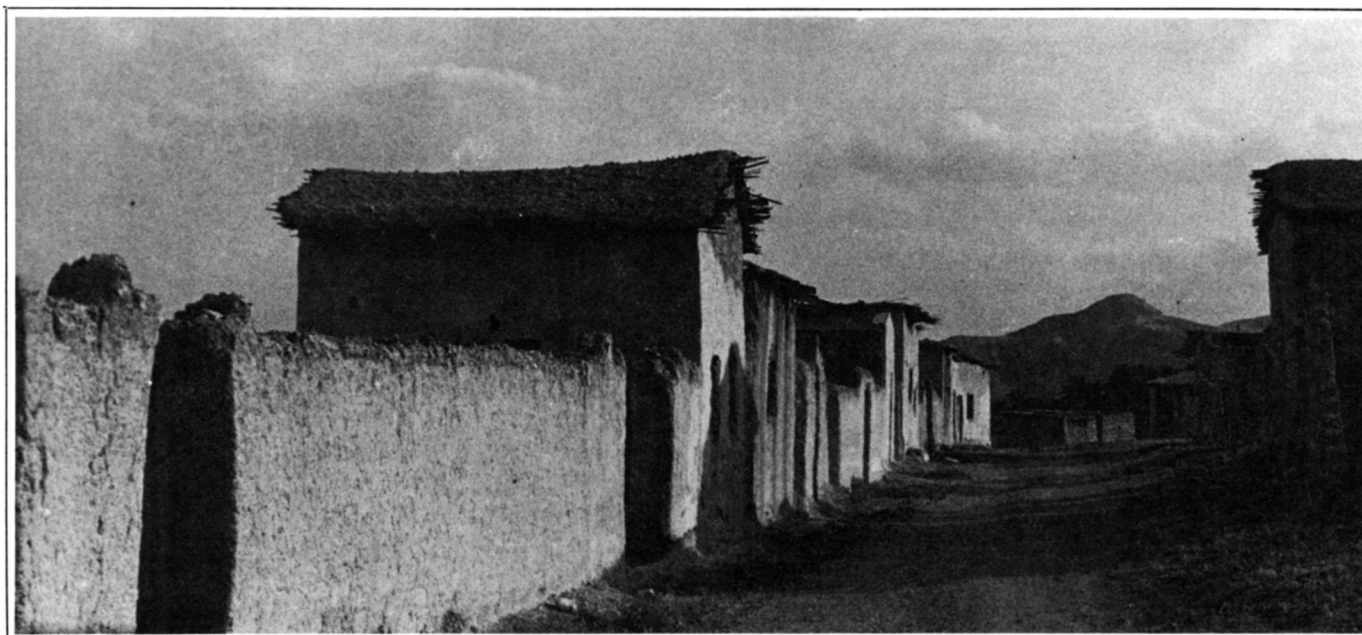
The second phase, from the beginning of 1969 to the latter part of 1974, was marked by a much slower rate of depopulation. On the Palestinian side, there was great resistance to leaving. Many assumed that the occupation was a temporary inconvenience rather than a permanent change of jurisdiction. Furthermore, there was a strong conviction that future rights in Palestine might be compromised by emigration. There was also some hope that the United Nations' resolutions might bring about an Israeli withdrawal or that the Arab states might succeed in liber-

ating the lost territories through renewed hostilities. On the Israeli side there was, after the first flush of victory (coupled perhaps with some trepidations about having to control so large a number of "captive" Palestinians), a growing appreciation of the economic value of the captured lands and even of their inhabitants. The considerable economic expansion that occurred in Israel between 1969 and 1974 can be attributed, first, to the incorporation of West Bank and Gaza Strip workers as low-cost day laborers in Israeli agriculture and construction and, second, to the opening up of the occupied territories as marketing outlets for Israeli manufactured goods.

Given this congruity of interests, it is not surprising that between 1969 and 1974 the population of the Gaza Strip expanded by about three percent per year while that of the West Bank (excluding Jerusalem and environs) grew by an average of some 2.2 percent annually. Clearly, this growth rate was considerably below that of the natural increase rate (four and 3.5 percent annually for Gaza and the West Bank, respectively), so that expulsions and emi-

First, the Israeli economy, after its initial windfall from occupation, went into a deep recession accompanied by inflation. This was in part related to local conditions, in part to the higher oil prices and worldwide economic recession that followed the oil embargo. The Israeli economy no longer needed as many Palestinian workers on its farms and in its industrial plants. The number of West Bank Palestinians working in Israel peaked at 42,400 in 1974; since then their numbers have held at about 35,000.⁴ Preference was shown toward workers from Gaza who could more easily be controlled. Male workers from the West Bank were less sought after, although women continued to be drawn into domestic service.

Second, after the collapse of the Arab military option in 1973, the Palestinians, particularly on the West Bank, began to realize that the occupation was long term and that quick liberation from outside was unlikely. They were faced with a number of possible alternatives, none of them attractive. They could remain and resist. By doing so, they risked imprisonment, death or, increasingly, deportation.



Marisa Escribano

Refugee camp, Jericho

grations were taking their toll. But a general *modus vivendi* seemed to have been worked out that was not radically altering the demographic picture.

The Third Phase

This state of affairs, however, began to change after the October 1973 war, which introduced the third phase. By the beginning of 1975, it was clear that depopulation of the West Bank had become a central goal of Israeli policy. Particularly after the *Likud* came to power in 1977, pressure mounted to clear much of the West Bank of its indigenous population. The cheap labor required by the Israeli economy could be provided by Gaza which, with the signing of the final agreements with Egypt, was quietly absorbed into the Jewish state. The 1973 war contributed considerably to these changing circumstances.

Some unknown portion of the decline in population since 1975 can be attributed to deportation.⁵ Another option was to emigrate. Many families living in the West Bank had sons or husbands working abroad; their remittances helped to support those who remained under occupation. Initially, such moves for employment had been viewed as temporary, and families were willing to endure the separation to keep their foothold at home. As Israeli land confiscations increased, as the military governor denied access to irrigation water, and most recently as the authorities have placed barriers in the way of remitting funds from abroad, dependent families were forced to leave and have joined their breadwinners abroad. Israeli policy has been to facilitate such moves—and to make them irreversible. A final option was to become dependent upon Israeli employers to eke out a living. Such dependence has been one device for "coopting" a small portion of Palestinians. Members of the Israeli-created Village Leagues have been given lucrative

TABLE I: The Movement of Population in Eastern Palestine and Gaza Between Pre-June 1967 and the Present (Estimated).

Date	West Bank	Jerusalem	Eastern Palestine Total	Gaza	Total
1967					
June 1	820,000	80,000	900,000 ¹	450,000 ²	1,350,000
Sept. 1	599,377 ²	66,000	665,377	356,260	1,022,000
Dec. 31	585,700	66,000 ³	651,700	350,700	1,002,400
(as of December 31)					
1968	581,700	69,000 ³	650,700	325,900	976,600
1969	595,200	72,500 ³	667,700	330,000	997,700
1970	603,900	76,134	680,000	337,700	1,017,700
1971	617,300	81,000 ³	698,300	344,500	1,043,000
1972	629,000	86,300	715,300	353,500 ³	1,068,500
1973	646,200	91,000 ³	737,200	365,000 ³	1,102,200
1974	661,600	95,000 ³	756,600	378,500	1,135,100
1975	665,100	97,500 ³	762,600	388,500	1,151,100
1976	670,900	99,500 ³	770,400	399,000	1,169,400
1977	681,200	103,776	784,976	411,300	1,196,300
1978	690,400	108,000 ³	798,400	420,000	1,218,400
1979	699,600	114,200	813,800	431,500	1,245,300
1980	704,000	118,400	822,400	441,900	1,264,300
1981	707,700*	122,000*	829,000*	450,000*	1,279,000*
1982	710,000*	125,000*	835,000*	460,000*	1,295,000*

For the period just prior to the 1967 war we have used data (adjusted) from the 1961 Census of Jordan and the Egyptian registered population of Gaza. For subsequent figures we have depended upon Israeli-released data for the "Administered Territories" with adjustments to include East Jerusalem with the "West Bank" and to exclude Egyptian Sinai from Gaza.

¹According to Jordanian projections, there was a resident population on the West Bank (including Jerusalem) of about one million. However, this did not take into account net outmigration from the zone between 1961 (census date) and 1967 which amounted to about 100,000, according to Sakhnini. I have therefore adjusted this figure downward to take account of net outmigration in the years just prior to the war.

²During the period during which the Egyptians administered the Gaza Strip, they kept a register of *de jure* residents. At the time the war broke out, there was no way to determine how many of the 455,000 *de jure* occupants were actually within the Gaza Strip. Some were working abroad, others were studying in Egypt, and still others were serving with the Egyptian army. There may also have been over-registration, due to a failure to remove individuals who had died. My best estimate is that the population of the Gaza Strip just before the outbreak of the war was no more than 400,000.

The figures for September and end of 1967 are taken from Israeli sources. The first was from the census undertaken by the occupying army; it was a *de facto* census taken during a curfew and is presumed to be relatively complete. The December figure is given in official Israeli sources (various issues of *Statistical Abstracts*). The September figure specifically excludes the 33,000 Egyptian residents of northern Sinai (the town of Al-Arish and other parts of northern Sinai occupied as a result of the June war). All figures for Gaza after 1978-9 also specifically exclude the 30,000 residents of northern Sinai after that region was ceded back to Egypt. The intervening figures have been adjusted to exclude approximately 30,000 Egyptians, since Israeli totals presented in successive issues of *Statistical Abstract* do not distinguish between Palestinian Gaza and Egyptian Sinai.

³It has been difficult to obtain annual totals for the area of East Jerusalem and its surrounding hinterlands, which was illegally annexed from the West Bank to the Israeli state. The figure of close to 66,000 in September 1967 is taken from the census conducted by the Israeli armed forces after the war. Where a figure appears for Jerusalem, it has been taken from published Israeli sources. Where a ³ appears next to a figure, this represents my rough interpolation between data points and is only provisional.

*The most recent "official" figures are those for the end of 1980. Beginning with the advent of *Likud* to power in 1979, a stepped-up expulsion of Palestinians began to show its effect on growth-rates of the population in the occupied areas. I have projected these new lower rates to the end of 1982.

rights over licensing and preferential access to jobs in return for their services to the occupying power. In turn, they have been helping to apply pressure on their compatriots and to assist the Israelis in their unconcealed policy of driving out recalcitrant Palestinians.

Thus, after 1974, both Israeli and Palestinian actions contributed to more rapid depopulation. Average annual growth rates in Gaza since 1974 have hovered around 2.5 percent while rates of population growth in eastern Palestine outside Jerusalem have recently been averaging only one percent per year. There was a noticeable drop in the increase rates after 1979, when *Likud* programs of stepped-up Jewish settlements on the West Bank were introduced. And although the data are not yet available, it is likely that a fourth and severe phase of depopulation will follow the PLO exodus from Lebanon. Recent literature out of Israel has begun to take a sanguine attitude toward Palestinian

population increase in the occupied territories. Some already believe that the "demographic nightmare" of a Palestinian majority has been averted.⁶

The Selectivity of Expulsions and Emigrations

The population remaining in eastern Palestine has been increasingly distorted by the selective expulsion or emigration (or incarceration, for which data are not available) of young adult males. Although the overall sex ratio appears balanced, the absence of males in the middle years of life is particularly noticeable.⁷ Recent increases in the crude birth rates on the West Bank (from 44 to 47/1000) may be attributable to the "feminization" of the population, although they may also be due to its proletarianization.

Adult males are most likely to be engaged in resistance and therefore more likely to be expelled. Families in which at least some workers have skills that are demanded in the oil-boom countries are more likely to emigrate as economic pressures mount. Professional workers and upper middle class businessmen have been particularly hard hit by the "merging" of the Israeli and West Bank economies. Unable to practice their professions or unable to survive in an unfair competition with Jewish businesses that are subsidized by the state, the members of the urban middle and upper classes have gradually been leaving.

Emigration from Gaza has been far less selective economically, but the population of Gaza was never as diversified occupationally as that of the West Bank. Proletarian to begin with, it had little bourgeoisie to lose. Incarceration rather than expulsion has been the fate of young males who resist the occupation. Furthermore, we have no records of the number of persons who lost their lives in Gaza, although there are almost daily incidents.

Proletarianization of the Population under Occupation

The final demographic trend that can be noted is the reduction of a diversified society to the status of a reserve labor army dependent upon the Israeli economy. This trend has been most marked in eastern Palestine, since Gaza was not viable from the start. The labor force characteristics of the West Bank (excluding Jerusalem) have begun to approximate those for Israeli Palestinians who earlier underwent the process of transformation from a peasantry to a proletariat.⁸ There has been a radical reduction in the proportion of the population that makes a living through farming.⁹ To some extent this is due to the confiscation of land and the deprivation of water to irrigate it. But to some extent it represents the marginalization of agriculture. Given the imported inflation that has caused prices to rise in the West Bank at rates that exceed even the Israeli rate of 130 percent per year, farms that were adequate to support their owners before are sufficient now to offer only an income supplement. Many family members are thrown into the wage-labor market, grateful for day labor jobs in construction and road building—even if these actually advance the Jewish settlement expansion into the West Bank.

In the brief fifteen years of the occupation, then, economic self-sufficiency has been severely eroded. As selective emigration and the deportation of leaders continue, the upper ranks of the social class pyramid are thinned. As land confiscations and economic strangulation of agriculture (through water deprivation and Israeli control over marketing) proceed, relatively autonomous peasants are increasingly reduced to dependence upon daily wage labor and upon the Israeli employers who provide it. The costs of living in the territories have risen sharply, due to the equalization of prices. This has created a serious economic squeeze for those Palestinians who remain. Thus far, remittances from abroad have masked the precarious position into which Palestinians in the occupied areas have been pushed. However, the levers that control their dependency are now in Israeli hands. Access to jobs is one major lever;

the right to receive foreign remittances is another. Both of these can be cut off at will.

A New Stage

Over the past fifteen years there has been a real net decline in the population of eastern Palestine and Gaza. Present Israeli policy is committed to intensifying the pressures upon Palestinian residents to further depopulate the areas intended for Jewish expansion. The absorption of East Jerusalem has been concealed by Israeli demographic practices which exclude the city's residents from any totals for "the administered areas." The Israeli economy has increasingly drawn upon the Gaza Strip as its source of cheap labor, and the military governor has used control over jobs, in combination with punitive force, to "pacify" the population. In West Bank areas outside Jerusalem, a very different policy is being followed—one aimed at reducing the number of inhabitants but also at reducing the capacity of the remainder to resist occupation. The selective ridding of the region of its males in the productive years of life, of its professionals and of its leaders is one part of this process. The second part is the systematic proletarianization of the remaining population and its reduction to dependence upon Jewish employers.

The final act in this drama remains to be played. Just as the 1967 war initiated the process and the 1973 war marked its turning point, so the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 is likely to set in motion a new phase in the struggle for Palestine—a struggle which has been demographic from the very beginning and will continue to be waged as such. ■

Footnotes

¹A natural increase rate of 3.5 percent per year is a reasonable minimum. The Israeli Palestinian population, until fairly recently, has been increasing at close to four percent per year. Crude birth rates in Gaza have remained remarkably constant at about 50/1000, while those in the West Bank have fluctuated between 44 and 47/1000. Death rates are presumed to be between 10/1000 on the West Bank and 15/1000 in the Gaza Strip.

²Soon after the 1967 war, Israel unilaterally (and illegally) expanded the boundary of Jerusalem to absorb not only the walled Arab city of East Jerusalem, with its 24,000 inhabitants, but a very wide peripheral area including heavily populated towns and villages. In all Israeli-released statistics, the population inhabiting this "annexed" zone has been reclassified and recorded as part of the "non-Jewish" population of Israel, even though they remain Jordanian citizens and an integral part of the occupied West Bank. In our analysis we have transferred this population back into the occupied territories.

³This estimate is quite consistent with those reached by different methods, notably figures released by the Jordanian government based upon bridge traffic and those estimated by J. Abu-Lughod (1980), based upon school transfer records presented in the *Educational Statistics Yearbook* for Jordan for 1968.

⁴The number of West Bank residents employed in Israel rose from about 12,000 in 1969 to 42,400 in 1974. It has subsequently stabilized at about 35,000. However, this does not indicate regained autonomy. Rather, West Bank workers have increasingly been employed on the West Bank itself, but in Jewish enterprises—road building, settlements, agriculture. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine the size of this dependent labor force since no statistics are released.

⁵Thousands of names have been recorded, some of which appear in Ann Lesch, "Israeli Deportation of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 1967-78," *The Journal of Palestine Studies* (Part I, Winter 1979; Part II, Spring 1979). However this appears to be only the tip of the iceberg.

⁶See Meron Benvenisti et al., *The West Bank and Gaza Data Base Project: Pilot Study Report* (mimeo, 1982) for what appears to be a new relaxation of concern.

⁷By 1978, the sex ratio in the middle years (ages 25-60) on the West Bank stood at 80 males for every 100 females; in the Gaza Strip there were only 75 males for every 100 females in these productive years of life. The sex ratio in the productive years is the single most sensitive indicator of selective outmigration for employment.

⁸See Elia Zureik, *The Palestinians in Israel: A Study in Internal Colonialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) for a description of this precursor to West Bank changes since 1967.

⁹At the time of the 1967 war, fully one-half of the West Bank labor force was engaged in agriculture. The proportion is currently under 20 percent.