JOAN PETERS' *FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL*: DEFINITIVE STUDY OR TRANSPARENT FRAUD?

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Few books dealing with the Middle East have received the praise that Joan Peters' *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict over Palestine* was accorded when it was first released in the spring of 1984. It was endorsed by such luminaries as Barbara Tuchman, Philip Houser, Elie Weisel and Lucy Dawidowicz. Theodore H. White's accolade was added to the cover of the paperback edition. Each endorsement testified to the book's historical importance, and *From Time Immemorial* was lauded by virtually every major North American newspaper and journal.

The New Republic told us that Peters' book would "change the mind of our generation" and that "it could affect the history of the future." Saul Bellow wrote that "millions of people the world over, smothered by false history and propaganda, will be grateful for this clear account of the origins of the Palestinians."

While many glorified the book, there were a few voices that challenged the chorus of praise. Norman Finkelstein described the book as "one of the most spectacular frauds ever published on the Arab-Israeli conflict."[1] Alexander Cockburn, in *The Nation*, titled his review of Peters' book "From Lies Immemorial."[2] Robert Olson characterized the book as "undeserving" and charged that it "was written for purely polemical and political reasons."[3] Other critical reviews by Americans in major journals included those by Bill Farrell in *The Journal of Palestine Studies*,[4] and Madeleine Tress in *Arab Studies Quarterly*.[5]

The reception accorded *From Time Immemorial* in Great Britain was, however, quite different. In the London *Observer*, Albert Hourani, an Oxford scholar, dismissed *From Time Immemorial* as "worthless and ludicrous."[6] Simi-

[1]Norman G. Finkelstein, "A Spectacular Fraud: *From Time Immemorial*," *In These Times*, September 5-11, 1984, p. 12.

[2]Alexander Cockburn, "Beat the Devil," *The Nation*, September 29, 1984, pp. 260-61.

[3]Robert Olson, "Review of Books," *American Historical Review*, April 1985.

[4]Bill Farrell, "Joan Peters and the Perversion of History," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Fall 1984.

[5]Madeleine Tress, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Fall 1984.

[6]Albert Hourani, "Back to the Roots of Middle East Conflict," *The Observer* (London), March 5, 1985.

lar reviews were published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, in *The Spectator* (which compared Peters' book to Clifford Irving's "autobiography" of Howard Hughes)[7] and *The Sunday Times*.[8] Sir Ian Gilmour, a Conservative M.P. and former Secretary of State for Defence in Britain, and his son David joined in the British onslaught, listing a large number of inconsistencies and outright falsifications and concluded in *The London Review of Books* that the book was "preposterous."[9]

Peters claimed that she originally intended her study "to be solely an investigation of the current plight of the Arab refugees" (p. 3). However, as her research progressed, she concluded that she was wrong in thinking the Palestinian Arabs had been victimized by the Jews and that, in fact, it was the Jews who were victimized. As *New York Times* reviewer, Bernard Gwertzman wrote, "What turned out to be a book about the downtrodden Arabs became a highly emotional defense of the Jews."[10]

Alexander Cockburn dryly commented that this change of heart "has certain theatrical accoutrements" and that:

> . . . this kind of thing always goes over well with reviewers, since it evokes the picture of a scholarly mind only gradually, under the impulse of overwhelming facts, freeing itself from the chains of ignorance.[11]

What Peters forgets to mention are her earlier articles published in *Commentary*,[12] in one of which, as Edward Said noted, her "notions about inveterate Arab anti-Semitism are trundled forth, along with the exchange-of-Arabs-for-Jews idea, all in a prose quite free of sympathy for the poor Arab refugees."[13]

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Finkelstein's questions about Peters' central thesis led him to do an exhaustive review of her documentation and to the discovery that much of her data was doctored and some of the text was blatantly plagiarized. Peters had "lift[ed] pages whole-cloth from Ernst Frankenstein's discredited propaganda tract, *Justice for My People* (1942)."[14] Despite tremendous efforts to publicize his findings, only the little-known Chicago magazine, *In These Times* saw fit to publish his work.[15]

In fact, the scope of the sins of omission that characterized the initial debate in America on this book is quite extraordinary. "Every single British reviewer noted that Peters got the Balfour Declaration all wrong." Yet Ronald Sanders, who had just published a book on the subject, and virtually every American reviewer missed this important point.[16]

[7]Edward Said, "Conspiracy of Praise," *The Nation*, October 19, 1984.

[8]John Keegan, "The Promised Land," *The Times* (London), February 3, 1985.

[9]Ian Gilmour and David Gilmour, *London Review of Books*, February 7, 1985. Reprinted in *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Spring-Summer 1985, pp. 181-95.

[10]Bernard Gwertzman, "Arabs Against Jews," *New York Times*, May 12, 1984.

[11]Cockburn, p. 260.

[12]Joan Peters, "In Search of Moderate Egyptians," *Commentary*, May 1975, and Joan Peters, "An Exchange of Populations," *Commentary*, August 1976.

[13]Said, p. 381.

[14]Norman Finkelstein, "Letter: *From Time Immemorial*," *Times Literary Supplement* (London), March 8, 1985.

[15]Norman Finkelstein, "Interview: The Scope of This Fraud Was Huge," *MERIP Reports*, October-December 1985, p. 39.

[16]Ibid. Sanders' book is *The High Walls of Jerusalem: A History of the Balfour Declaration and the Birth of the British Mandate* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983).

Peters even doctored her version by capitalizing "a "National Home' for the Jewish people" (p. 217).[17]

Interestingly enough, *From Time Immemorial*'s reception in Israel was quite different from that in America. The *Davar* (the Israeli Labour Party daily) review "treated it with unmistakable contempt" and reported its major "defect was its embarrassing use of discredited Israeli hasbara ('propaganda')."[18] It was not until November 1985 that *The New York Times* finally reported that in Israel, Peters' book "was almost universally dismissed as sheer rubbish except maybe as a propaganda weapon."[19]

While the book was treated with disdain in Britain and Israel, the debate in America was "insulated." It went into at least eight printings, and in 1985 a paperback version was released. Peters also received an award from the Jewish Book Council, in the Israel category.[20]

There are even suggestions that Peters did not write the book. Edward Said wrote that the book contains many disconnected items pieced together to make the same point. "The impression you get is of one team of experts tossing file cards into large file folders . . . and another team pasting them on to more or less consecutive pages."[21] Finkelstein believes that Peters "is simply fronting for the book." He reports that "a former president of the World Jewish Congress volunteered the opinion that the book was written in a Jerusalem office."[22]

While this allegation remains unsubstantiated, many criticisms that have been leveled at Peters' book remain unanswered. Peters' supporters seem bent on dismissing critics as from the "political left" or identified with the Palestinian cause. As *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis caustically noted, "In other words, only politics matters, not facts. That from intellectuals."[23]

After months of prodding, Robert Silvers of *The New York Review of Books* commissioned a review of Peters' book from Yehoshua Porath, a prominent Israeli scholar of Palestinian nationalism. His review was submitted in March 1985[24] and finally appeared in January 1986. It was the first highly critical review of *From Time Immemorial* to appear in the mainstream American academic press. Porath's conclusion:

> Everyone familiar with the writing of the extreme nationalists of Zeev Jabotinsky's Revionist party (the forerunner of the Herut party) would immediately recognize the tired and discredited arguments in Mrs. Peters's book. I had mistakenly thought them long forgotten. It is a pity that they have been given new life.[25]

Peters' thesis is essentially that the "Palestinians" were not displaced in 1948. This she claims is a popular myth. Instead, Arabs illegally immigrated into Palestine, attracted by the capital and skills brought by Jewish settlers. According to Peters, before Zionist settlement in the late nine-

[17]"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." Leonard J. Davis and Moshe Decter, *Myths and Facts 1982* (Washington: Near East Report, 1982), p. 3. This is a publication of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

[18]Said, p. 384.

[19]Colin Campbell, "Dispute Flares Over Book," *The New York Times*, November 28, 1985. This article was, however, buried back in the Home Section on page 16.

[20]Said, pp. 381-82.

[21]Ibid., p. 384.

[22]Finkelstein, "Interview," p. 40.

[23]Anthony Lewis, "There Were No Indians," *The New York Times*, January 13, 1986.

[24]Finkelstein, "Interview," p. 39.

[25]Yehoshua Porath, "Mrs. Peters's Palestine," *The New York Review of Books*, January 16, 1986.

teenth century, Palestine was largely uninhabited. Peters puts quotations around the word Palestinians because "Palestinian nationalism" was a myth manufactured as part of the Arab effort to discredit Israel (pp. 13-14).

After a "demographic study" Peters concluded that "the Arab population of Palestine increased in direct proportion to the Jewish presence. . . ." But even according to her own arguments the way she uses them to substantiate a "Jewish majority" in "Jewish-settled areas," is wrong.

Peters writes that in 1893 "*Jews* were perhaps actually a marginal *majority*." The population statistics cited are 59,000 Jews, 56,000 Muslims and 38,000 Christians. To get her "majority" she leaves out the Christian Arab population and in fact confuses the terms "plurality" and "majority" (p. 251).

The "Palestinian Arab" refugees, Peters tells us, ". . . were invited by their fellow Arabs . . . to 'leave' while the 'invading' Arab armies would purge the land of the Jews." Peters asserts that the Jews appealed to the Arabs not to flee, although she does admit that "there were exceptions" (pp. 12-13).

The refugees, Peters writes, "were actually continuing in 1948 their traditional pattern of shifting to where they thought 'their brethren were better treated' " (p. 394). Accordingly, Daniel Pipes asserts that "Many of those who now consider themselves Palestinian refugees were either immigrants themselves before 1948 or the children of immigrants. This historical fact reduces their claim to the land of Israel."[26]

Peters cites a research report from the Institute for Palestine Studies which "proves" that " 'the majority' of the Arab refugees in 1948 were not expelled, and '68%' left without seeing an Israeli soldier" (p. 13). The report Peters quotes actually deals with *1967* refugees, not the 1948 ones.[27]

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For evidence that the Arabs invited the "Palestinian Arabs" to leave, Peters cites "radio broadcasts" (p. 444) which "summoned Arabs of Palestine to mass evacuation" (p. 13). Peters avoids Dr. Erskine Childers' study of the BBC records of "all Middle Eastern broadcasts throughout 1948" which found that there were no orders for an evacuation of the Arab population and, in fact, there were repeated orders and appeals for the Arabs to "stay put."[28]

Peters' allegations of an Arab-engineered evacuation are challenged by Porath, who pointed to the Haganah "Plan Dalet," which called for the expulsion of

[26]Daniel Pipes, "Refugees?" *Commentary*, July 1984.

[27]Gilmour and Gilmour, p. 190. Peter Dodd and Halim Barakat, *River Without Bridges: A Study of the Exodus of the 1967 Arab Palestinian Refugees* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1967), p. 43. Cited by Peters on p. 445, note 2.

[28]Erskine Childers, "The Other Exodus," *The Spectator*, May 12, 1961. Reprinted in Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, eds., *The Israel-Arab Reader*, Fourth Edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 146.

the Arab population if they "violently opposed the Jewish attempt to gain control." This plan was made public in Israel in 1972 as an appendix to the semiofficial *History of the Haganah*.[29]

A secret Israeli Military Intelligence study, recently uncovered by an Israeli academic, Benny Morris, stated that up to June 1948 Jewish military action "accounted for 70 per cent of the Arab exodus from Palestine." Psychological warfare and expulsions accounted for an additional four percent. Morris indicated that the authors "seemed to exhibit a perhaps understandable tendency to minimize the role of direct expulsion." The report also declared that "the Arab institutions attempted to struggle against the phenomenon of flight and evacuation and to curb the waves of emigration."[30]

Morris also details the subsequent expulsion of the inhabitants of Lydda and Ramle, by order of Ben-Gurion, which resulted in the exodus of tens of thousands of Palestinians.[31] A great deal of other evidence, from both Israeli and Palestinian sources, disproves the myth of the Arab-ordered evacuation of Palestine that Peters attempts to infuse with new life.[32]

The question of Jewish terrorism is also almost entirely absent in *From Time Immemorial*. For example, the assassination of Count Bernadotte, the United Nations mediator to Palestine, by Zionist terrorists the day he submitted a report calling for the repatriation of refugees is ignored. He is, however, quoted in support of Peters' thesis (p. 234), but his subsequent reversal is somehow forgotten. Also forgotten are the murder of Lord Moyne in 1944 and the blowing up of the King David Hotel in 1948.

Somewhat surprisingly, Deir Yassin, a village where 254 Palestinians were massacred is mentioned (p. 71). It was

> . . . an Arab village harboring Iraqi and other Arab troops . . . [attacked by Irgun and Stern troops]. . . .British investigations found it to be one of the "few" Jewish reprisals . . . after years of "almost unbelievable self-restraint. . . ."

There were no Iraqi or Arab troops. According to Yitzhak Levi, Jerusalem Commander of the Haganah Intelligence Service, Deir Yassin had "signed and strictly adhered to a pact of non-belligerency" with nearby Jewish settlers.[33] Nor was there any "British investigation"; however, one that was conducted by the International Red Cross is ignored. The comment about "self-restraint" was made by a British politician in 1939; as the massacre occurred in 1948, it is unlikely that he had Deir Yassin in mind.[34]

[29]Porath, p. 37. See also Netanel Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword: Israel's War of Independence 1947-1949* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1961), pp. 87-89; J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror Out of Zion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), pp. 290-313; Walid Khalidi, "The Plan Dalet," *Middle East Forum*, November 1961.

[30]Benny Morris, "The Causes and Character of the Arab Exodus from Palestine: Israeli Defence Forces Intelligence Branch Analysis of June 1948," *Middle Eastern Studies*, January 1986, pp. 5-19. Morris also points out that the intelligence report gives evidence that not two percent, but at least five percent of the Arab population was expelled.

[31]Benny Morris, "Operation Dani and the Palestinian Exodus from Lydda and Ramle in 1948," *The Middle East Journal*, Winter 1986, pp. 82-109.

[32]See Nafez Nazzal, *The Palestinian Exodus from Galilee 1948* (Beirut: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1978); David Shipler, "Israel Bars Rabin from Relating '48 Eviction of Arabs," *The New York Times*, October 23, 1977, p. 3.

[33]Ian Black and James Naughtie, "Thatcher Returns from Israel Empty-Handed," *Manchester Guardian*, June 1, 1986, p. 6.

[34]Gilmour and Gilmour, p. 195. For the Red Cross Report, see Jacques De Reynier, "Deir Yasin," in *From Haven to Conquest*, Walid Kalidi, ed. (Beirut: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1971), pp. 761-66.

Another major contention of Peters is that the number of refugees who fled Palestine is exaggerated and, when considered with the Jews who fled the Arab countries, there was merely an exchange of population. Furthermore, Peters argues it was the fault of the Arabs and their religion:

> Clearly the massive exodus of Jewish refugees from the Arab countries was triggered by the Arabs' own Nazi-like bursts of brutality . . . .But the history is long of persecution against Jews by the Arabs, a chronicle of "intolerable pressure" that had its beginnings in and took its inspiration from the seventh-century book of the creator of Islam (p. 80).

Unfortunately for Peters, this type of rhetoric is routine, and a rather vicious undercurrent of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism pervades *From Time Immemorial.* Peters, it seems, has difficulty distinguishing between Islam as a religion and Arab as an ethnic category.[35] Christian Arabs present Peters with a quandary, and Jewish Arabs are a totally alien concept. Jewish opposition to Zionism, also, virtually does not exist for Peters.[36]

Jews in the "Arab World," according to Peters, live a precarious and persecuted existence.[37] The picture of Jews in the Islamic world, as presented by Peters, is contradicted by a considerable body of scholarly opinion (see, for example, Bernard Lewis' *The Jews of Islam*). Porath writes that Peters overlooks the position of Jews under the Ottoman Empire, where "the attitude of Ottoman authorities towards Jews was generally fair and decent. . . .This could not be squared with [Peters'] description of the oppression of Jews under Islam."[38]

Peters' thesis is essentially that the "Palestinians" were not displaced in 1948. . . .Instead, Arabs illegally immigrated into Palestine, attracted by the capital and skills brought by Jewish settlers.

Peters sees inveterate Arab anti-Semitism as the root cause of Arab persecution of Jews, and the European extermination of the Jews, at one point, becomes a "Mufti-Hitler conspiracy" (p. 382). Peters makes no allowance for the impact of Zionism, the Arab-Israeli wars or the behavior of Israel on the relations between Jews and Arabs. She of course ignores Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and is blind to examples of Jews peacefully coexisting with Arabs.

The assertion that the Jewish exodus from the Arab world was the sole result of Arab persecution neglects the prolonged campaign to propagate Zionism in the Jewish Arab community.[39] The bombs which Zionist agents set off in 1950 to pressure Iraqi Jews into emigrating to Israel are also forgotten.[40]

[35]For example, Peters writes "beginning with the Prophet Muhammad's edict demanding racial purity . . . 'Two religions may not dwell together . . . ,' " p. 175. Also, "Arab rule would be reigning over Christians and Jews," p. 155.

[36]Peters makes oblique reference to Jewish opposition to Zionism on pages 312-13 and on 129 mentions Nahum Goldmann as a "controversial Jewish personality." I. F. Stone is quoted in support of Peters' argument but his vocal criticisms of Zionism are ignored, p. 354.

[37]"A dhimmi or non-Muslim was allowed to exist as a 'non-believer' among 'believers' " with certain conditions. Peters, p. 34. This was far more tolerant than Christian Europe's usual treatment of minority religious communities.

[38]Porath, p. 36.

[39]Ibid., p. 38.

[40]Alfred M. Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection: What Price Peace?* (New Brunswick, NJ: North American, 1982), p. 360.

Porath writes that "Peters's confusion derives from her misunderstanding of Zionist history." He states that many Oriental Jews have "never been at ease" with political Zionism and have tried "to derive their own sense of Jewish history and identity" which "belittles the ideological and political revolution of European secular Zionism." What Peters calls "Sephardic Zionism" Porath indicates "most historians now consider . . . the opposite of Zionism."[41]

Ignored is Marion Wolfson's *Prophets in Babylon*, in which she shows that "the overwhelming majority of Jews were not expelled from Arab countries. They were the victims of Israeli nationalism." As the Gilmours argue, "Both movements were caused by the Zionists and both served Zionist ends."[42]

Needless to say, the enthusiastic response of some of the earlier reviewers to *From Time Immemorial* is now somewhat muted. Ronald Sanders, who wrote one of the first laudatory reviews,[43] has admitted that "since then, some patient researchers have found numerous examples of sloppiness in her scholarship and an occasional tendency not to grasp the correct meaning of a context from which she has extracted a quotation." But despite these failings Sanders believes that Peters' book has some "merit."

He feels that none of Peters' critics effectively deals with the phenomenon she calls "in-migration" of Arabs from elsewhere in Palestine into the "areas of Jewish settlement." Peters "shows" that between 1893 and 1947 the Palestinian Arab population only doubled in areas where no Jews settled, but "quintupled in the main areas of Jewish settlement." Sanders asks "How can this difference be accounted for without including Arab migration as a factor?"[44]

Peters' demographic thesis has three key components:

1. The demographic study and characteristics of "Jewish-settled Areas";
2. Arab immigration and "in-migration";
3. The economic attraction of "Jewish-settled Areas" for Arabs.

These form the "pillars" upon which Peters rests her case. We shall consider them in reverse order.

Walter Laqueur in his classic *History of Zionism* noted that the early Zionist settlements did not become "going concerns" until the first decade of the 20th century.[45] The first wave of Jewish settlers to Palestine in 1881-1882 was very small, numbering between a few hundred and a few thousand. These numbers would hardly attract a flood of Arabs seeking economic opportunities provided by Jewish settlers. It was not until 1904 that large numbers of Jews started to immigrate to Palestine.[46] Any population increase in the pre-war period must have been the result of factors independent of the few Jewish settlers.

Peters' argument that "the natives" reaped the advantages that the "Jewish settlers" bestowed on them smacks of a familiar "colonial" refrain. But there is a critical flaw in her argument. Arab economic benefit as an outgrowth of Jewish settlement was contrary to the expressed Zionist aim to develop a "Jewish National

[41]Porath, p. 37.

[42]Gilmour and Gilmour, p. 193.

[43]Ronald Sanders, "Demography and Destiny," *The New Republic*, April 23, 1984.

[44]Ronald Sanders, "Mrs. Peters's Palestine: An Exchange," *The New York Review of Books*, March 27, 1986, p. 50.

[45]Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972), p. 79.

[46]Farrell, pp. 129-30.

Home." Arthur Ruppin (the Director of the Palestine Zionist Organization from 1908 through the 1920s) stated that the Zionist goal could only be achieved by "the creation of a Jewish milieu and of a closed Jewish economy in which producers, consumers and middlemen shall all be Jewish."[47]

The Hope Simpson Report observed:

> . . . the result of the purchase of land in Palestine by the Jewish National Fund has been that land became extraterritorial. It ceases to be land from which the Arab can gain any advantage either now or at any time in the future . . . by the stringent [boycott] provisions of the lease of the Jewish National Fund, he is deprived forever from employment on that land.[48]

The Jewish Agency constitution declared that "it shall be a matter of principle that Jewish labour shall be employed [on Agency property]." Private Jewish businessmen also usually boycotted Arab labor.[49]

Ironically, Peters also provides evidence for this policy: "Jewish Capital was imported solely for the employment of Jewish labour . . . " (p. 300). Opportunity for Arab economic benefit from Jewish settlement was sharply curtailed by these policies.

The second pillar that Peters builds her argument on is the economic attraction of Jewish settlements resulting in Arab "immigration" and "in-migration" to the "Jewish-settled areas." Peters also argues that British connivance with Arab immigration deprived Jews in Europe of a sanctuary from Hitler's holocaust. Peters claims that the return of the Jews to the land of "their ancestors" was a topic of universal fascination. Arabs crossing artificial borders attracted little interest. It is to the massive immigration and "in-migration" of Arabs that Peters attributes the rise in the Arab population (pp. 234-68).

The growth in the Palestinian population was in fact due to the demographic revolution that swept much of the world at this time. Improvements in medical care, introduced by Ottoman authorities, Christian missionaries and later by the British, account for the increase in the population.[50]

Peters implies that there is something nefarious about Arab "in-migration." Moving a few miles within one's own country does not result in a change of citizenship.

Despite Jewish immigration, the dream of a Jewish majority was frustrated by the natural increase of the Arab population, which was at least twice the rate of natural Jewish population growth. The argument of immigration of Arabs was formulated by Zionists to rationalize their inability to form a majority.

Finkelstein checked Peters' documentation and he concluded that "the evidence that Peters adduces to document massive illegal immigration into Palestine is almost entirely falsified." For her proof of Arab immigration Peters relies almost exclusively on the Hope Simpson Report of 1930; the Peel Commission of 1937; and

[47]Arthur Ruppin, *Three Decades of Palestine, Speeches and Papers on the Upbuilding of the Jewish National Home* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1936), p. 62, cited in Nazzal, p. 104.

[48]*Sir John Hope Simpson Palestine Report*, p. 226, cited by Muhammad Hallaj, "*From Time Immemorial*: The Resurrection of a Myth," *The Link*, January-March 1985, p. 11.

[49]David Gilmour, *Dispossessed: The Ordeal of the Palestinians* (London: Sphere Books, 1982), p. 45.

[50]Porath, p. 37.

the 1946 Anglo-American Survey. These three documents found, in the words of the Anglo-American Survey, that "Arab immigration for the purposes of settlement [in Palestine] was insubstantial."[51]

The Hope Simpson Report states ". . . Egyptian labour is being employed in certain individual cases. . . ." Peters' version of this quote: "There was an uncontrolled influx of illegal Arab immigrants from Egypt, Trans-Jordan and Syria" (p. 232).[52] The Hope Simpson Report also said nothing whatsoever to suggest, as Peters claims, that there was "large-scale Arab immigration," let alone as Peters asserts, that it is "a recognized practice" (p. 233).[53]

Another example of Peters' use of the Hope Simpson Report to prove Arab immigration is the case of the pseudo-traveller who stays after his permit expires and is allowed to remain ". . . as being 'present practice', a method that was '*injustice*' to the *Jews*" (p. 232, emphasis Peters').

Peters argues as if the traveller were Arab, when, clearly, it was a reference to Jewish travellers. The injustice the report speaks of is to legal Jewish immigrants whom the "illegal Jewish immigrant" displaces on the Immigration Schedule.[54] This becomes one of Peters' "primary pieces" of documentary evidence for Arab immigration and is cited falsely, 19 times on 12 different pages![55]

The Palestine Royal Commission of 1937 reported that "the amount of illegal immigration into Palestine is negligible" and "as many as ten or eleven thousand Hauranis may go to Palestine temporarily in search of work in a really bad year" in the Hauran.[56]

The Peters version:

> The "Arab immigrants," particularly "Hauranis" from Syria, the Report stated, "probably remain permanently in Palestine."
>
> . . . the number of Hauranis who illegally immigrated was "authoritatively estimated" at 10,000-11,000 during a "bad" year in the Hauran . . . (p. 310).

Here we see the Peters approach to proving Arab immigration. When the Royal Commission stated that the permanent immigration was "negligible," she leaves out the word "negligible." The report states that 10,000-11,000 might come in temporarily, Peters implies that these temporary laborers are permanent immigrants.

The historian Makrizi is cited to back one of Peters' claims about 19th-century immigration into Palestine (p. 169). But as the Gilmours note "since Makrizi died in 1442, he is less than authoritative on what happened in 1860."[57] Many other examples of Peters' falsifying her sources have been identified.[58]

Peters gives special attention to an "alleged remark of an anonymous veteran archivist" at the British records office who told her that Arab immigration into Palestine "did not exist. There was no such thing. No one ever kept track of *that*" (p. 269). Finkelstein reports that "every British annual report to the League of Nations and every major British study of the period includes an exhaustive tabulation of detailed commentary on Arab immigration."[59]

[51]Finkelstein, *In These Times*, p. 12.
[52]Ibid., p. 12-13.
[53]Gilmour and Gilmour, p. 185.
[54]Ibid., pp. 185-86.
[55]Finkelstein, *In These Times*, p. 12. (Peters' pp. 229, 232-33, 296-97, 326, 330, 375-76, 380, 394 and 402.)
[56]Ibid., pp. 12-13.
[57]Gilmour and Gilmour, p. 183.
[58]Finkelstein, *In These Times*, pp. 12-13.
[59]Ibid.

One of the few pieces of hard evidence that Peters puts forward to document Arab immigration into Palestine is an interview with an obscure Syrian official in 1934. He was reported as saying, "in the last few months from 30,000 to 36,000 Hauranese [Syrian] (sic) had entered Palestine and settled there" and that this was cited by The Permanent Mandates Commission (p. 230). The Commission "asked a British representative for his opinion on this estimate, and he said it was 'grossly exaggerated.' "[60]

The Syrian official is quoted, but the British reaction ignored. But for Peters this becomes "verified by an official international document" and "hard evidence" by which British statements to the contrary can be dismissed.

Peters implies that there is something nefarious about Arab "in-migration." Moving a few miles within one's own country does not result in a change of citizenship. The process that occurred in Palestine was simply that of urbanization. This is a standard phenomenon that occurred in all developing countries. The only coincidence involved is that many of the large Arab population centers happened to be near the major Jewish centers.

The Arab population on the coast did increase, but this does not prove Arab immigration. According to Porath, "the main foreign factor that brought . . . about [the growth in the Arab coastal economy] was the Mandatory government. The Zionist settlers had a clearly stated policy against using Arab labour or investing in Arab industries."[61]

The Anglo-American Report estimated that only 19,000 Arab immigrants had entered Palestine during the Mandate period.[62] Even Sanders admits that Peters' "statements" that Arabs entered Palestine are "impressionistic and have no statistical value."[63] In the absence of hard evidence in support of Peters' thesis and the fabrications that have been discovered in her documentation, it is very difficult to dispute the findings of the Mandate Government that Arab immigration was "insubstantial."

The basic fallacy of Peters, and of people who believe as she does, is their belief that Palestine was largely uninhabited before Jewish settlement. Israel Zangwill first coined the Zionist slogan "a land without a people, for a people without a land." If Palestine was empty then, what could be more natural than for Palestine to become a land for the Jews? There was one problem with this scenario—as Arthur Ruppin, Director of the Palestine Zionist Agency pointed out—"Herzl's concept of a Jewish state was only possible because he ignored the presence of the Arabs."[64]

Two important sources that Peters "overlooked" are Ahad Haam's book, *Truth From Palestine*, published in 1891, and Y. Epstein's *The Hidden Question*, released in 1907. Both of these authors "exhorted their fellow Jews in Palestine to take seriously the large Arab population and its feelings; the Ottoman Empire might go, they wrote, but the Arabs would remain." Porath writes:

> Anyone who believes Mrs. Peters's book would have to conclude that these distinguished writers, a philosopher and an educator with close expe-

[60]Interview with Tewfik Bey El-Hourani, *La Syrie*, August 12, 1934.

[61]Porath, "Mrs. Peters's Palestine: An Exchange," *The New York Review of Books*, March 27, 1986, p. 52.

[62]Finkelstein, *In These Times*, p. 12.

[63]Sanders, "Mrs. Peters's Palestine: An Exchange," p. 50.

[64]Gilmour and Gilmour, p. 181.

rience of life in Palestine, had simply invented the existence of Arabs there.[65]

The final pillar of Peters' thesis is the demographic study and characteristics of "the Jewish-settled areas" which "proves" massive Arab immigration and in-migration.

Peters' approach to Palestinian demography is based on the assumption that existing comparisons at the beginning of the twentieth century are

> . . . in every case erroneous. It is wrong because invariably the *Arab* total population figure cited takes in the *overall Arab population of all* Western Palestine, while the Jewish total population figure relates only to the Jewish-settled area (pp. 241-42, Peters' emphasis).

This is a rather unsophisticated attempt at gerrymandering. Ordinarily, population statistics are based on uniform political boundaries, so meaningful comparisons can be made.

In 1882, Peters reports, roughly 200,000 Muslims (including 65,000 Bedouin), 55,000 Christians and 34,000 Jews lived in all of Palestine (p. 244). Peters then indicates that according to a study conducted by Vital Cuinet in 1895 (which she calls "detailed and scientific"), the population had increased to "more than 450,000, of which Muslims numbered roughly 252,000."

Peters gives us the following population figures: "1882: 141,000 'settled' Muslims*; 1895: 252,000 'settled' Muslims." She assumes "a high rate of natural increase of 1.5 percent" over thirteen years, which equals a population of not more than 170,000. This leaves an unaccounted increase of 82,000 using the 141,000 figure as a base.

"The only plausible answer," according to Peters, is that the extra Muslim Arab population "had to be immigrants and in-migrants whose arrival coincided exactly with the time Jewish development commenced" (p. 245). The real answer to Peters' question is that she omitted the nomadic population in her 1882 figure (i.e., the asterisk) and included it in the 1895 figure.[66] This is not clearly specified and is easily missed. This is how Arab immigration is "proven."

The basic fallacy of Peters, and of people who believe as she does, is their belief that Palestine was largely uninhabited before Jewish settlement.

Peters argues that based on an original population of 92,300, in the "Jewish-settled areas" the maximum the Arab population could have achieved is 249,000, but it grew to 462,900. This, according to Peters, indicates that 213,700 had to be the minimum total of 'Arabs' migrating to the Jewish-settled area." Subtracting the reported Arab immigration and nomads, Peters concluded that "170,000 is the minimum total of Arab in-migrants" to the "Jewish-settled areas before 1948" (p. 255-56).

Finkelstein describes Peters' demographic study as "impenetratable unless you're a fanatic."[67] The chaotic arrangement of data and absence of clearly delineated regions for valid comparisons literally make it almost impossible to get through. Peters, of course, distils the conclusion, and it apparently is based on a "legitimate" although incomprehensible study.

[65]Porath, "Mrs. Peters's Palestine," p. 38.

[66]Finkelstein, *In These Times*, p. 13.

[67]Finkelstein, "Interview," p. 39.

Peters' first finding is "central." "In 1893 at most, 92,300 non-Jews apparently lived in Jewish-settled areas," along with 59,431 Jews (p. 250). For the source of this information she refers to the table in Appendix V. However, Appendix V also does not list a source. Appendix VI, however, refers to the 1893 Ottoman census and indirectly to a study published by Kemal Karpat.[68]

Karpat's actual findings were:

Population of Sanjak

	Muslim	Jewish
Akka (Acre) Sanjak	58,840	1,618
Belka (Nablus) Sanjak	113,516	89
Kudus (Jerusalem)	199,613	8,110
Palestine Total	371,969	9,817

A *sanjak* is an Ottoman administrative district. The Ottoman census did not differentiate between native Palestinian Christians and those who were foreign nationals, and, thus, a breakdown of the Christian Palestinian population is impossible to give. However, the total number of Palestinians is higher than the Muslim population alone. Karpat's finding, that 9,817 Jews live in the whole of Palestine, clearly contradicts Peters' figure of 59,431 Jews living only in the "Jewish-settled areas." Peters does not explain this discrepancy, nor where she got her data.

Peters, instead of using the Ottoman Jewish figures, used Cuinet's for the Jewish demographic statistics. As Sanders admitted, in a reply to Porath, Peters' "unheralded switch in the main text from the Ottoman figures to Cuinet's has the look of a suspect sleight-of-hand maneuver . . . ."[69]

Sanders tells us that the Ottoman figure for the Jewish population "is patently absurd" and that "a good deal of responsible, if impressionistic, countings" had been conducted of the population of Palestine and the "general consensus" was that "the Jewish population for Jerusalem alone was something more than double that of the official Ottoman figure for the Jewish population of the whole country." Buried in Appendix V Peters had written:

> The Ottoman Census apparently registered only known Ottoman subjects; since most Jews had failed to obtain Ottoman citizenship, . . . a representative figure of the Palestinian Jewish population could not be extrapolated from the 1893 Census (p. 424).

This is the "reason" for the unheralded switch.[70] However, this is not true. The Ottoman Census enumerated all residents, including foreign nationals.[71] There were problems with the Ottoman Census, but not in the sense claimed by Peters.

A demographic study conducted by Justin McCarthy and published by the University of Haifa in 1981 has shown that the Ottoman censuses undercounted the population of Palestine "by almost 19 percent in Acre and Nabalus and by 7.5 percent in Jerusalem." When corrected for this factor, the total number of Muslims in Palestine, in 1893, becomes 419,311. The corrected figure for Jews becomes 10,796.[72]

Karpat writes that despite their shortcomings, the "Ottoman censuses provide by far the most reliable figures available . . . because their margin of error was far

[68]Kemal H. Karpat, "Ottoman Population Records and the Census of 1881/82-1893," *International Journal of Mideast Studies*, Vol. 9, 1978, pp. 262 and 271.

[69]Sanders, "Mrs. Peters's Palestine: An Exchange," p. 50.

[70]Ibid.

[71]Karpat, pp. 256 and 271.

[72]Farrell, p. 128.

less than the figures given by observers, travellers, and biased informants."[73]

Cuinet's figures are, therefore, not considered as reliable as the Ottoman census. His figure for the total 1895 Muslim population of Palestine is 252,000. The credibility of Cuinet's data does not stand up very well against the 1893 Muslim total of 371,969, which, when corrected for undercounting, becomes 419,311.

***From Time Immemorial* is a deeply disturbing book. . . . because it is a polemical work to "prove" the discredited Revisionist Zionist argument that the Palestinians do not exist and that Jordan is a "Palestinian" state.**

Porath writes that "Cuinet's figures should make any serious historian recoil from using them." He fabricated large numbers of Syrian Christians and Maronites in Palestine. Porath indicates "Cuinet's mistakes were deliberately made in order to prove that Palestine, as much as Lebanon and Syria, should be put under French protection." This requires that Cuinet's "material be used with great caution."[74]

Porath confirms that Jews were certainly undercounted because since they were foreign nationals with special privileges under the capitulatory regime they "would have refused to have anything to do with the census authorities." He indicated that the 1893 Ottoman census figure for Jews is not correct but "neither is the Ottoman figure for the Muslims." Only after 1909 did the "Young Turks" government begin to draft Christian and Jewish subjects into the army.

> . . . until that date, it was mainly the Muslims who had good reason not to register their names with the census authorities or, for that matter, with any other official authorities, since registration made them easy prey for the draft officers.[75]

The fact that the Muslim population was undercounted to a large degree effectively destroys the centerpiece of Peters' "demographic study." The critical starting point for the Arab population is seriously underrepresented. This, however, still leaves the question of Peters' figures for the population of the "Jewish-settled areas."

The censuses of 1893 and 1915 were never published, and Peters does not indicate that she examined the Ottoman archives, and so she had to rely on secondary sources. It is impossible to ascertain what Peters defines as "the Jewish-settled areas" from Karpat's study.

However, after a bit of detective work, Porath discovered that the figure given by Peters (59,431) for the Jewish-settled areas, is "exactly the same number [that] is given for the aggregate of Jews living in the seven subdistricts (kaza) of Acre, Haifa, Tiberias, Safed, Nazareth, Jaffa and Jerusalem" by Cuinet.[76]

The Ottoman census figures given in Karpat's study for the same seven *kazas* are 158,279 Muslims and 39,884 Christians "making a total number of 198,163 non-Jews in the Jewish-settled areas." This is a far cry from Peters' 92,300 non-Jews living in the Jewish-settled areas. The corrected figure for these seven *kazas* only makes the situation worse.

[73]Karpat, p. 240.
[74]Porath, "Mrs. Peters's Palestine: An Exchange," p. 52.
[75]Ibid., p. 51.
[76]Ibid., p. 52.

Even if we use Cuinet's figures, we still do not get much closer to Peters' numbers. His figures for the same seven *kazas* are 124,686 Muslims and 61,964 Christians, for a total of 186,650 non-Jews living in the "Jewish-settled areas."[77]

No population data from an area smaller than a *kaza* were ever published. So it is virtually impossible that Peters managed to break down the population statistics into smaller areas than outlined in either Karpat's or Cuinet's studies. Nor does Peters explain that in fact this was the case. The inevitable conclusion, according to Porath, is that "Mrs. Peters's figures were, at best, based on guess work, and extremely tendentious guess work at that."[78]

The 1911 and 1915 Ottoman census statistics confirm that there was an overwhelming majority of Muslims and not one *kaza* had anything even close to a Jewish majority. Furthermore, these censuses give direct evidence of sustained natural growth in the Palestinian Arab population.[79] Peters also almost completely ignores the 1931 British census of Palestine, which also confirmed an overwhelming majority in the native Arab population.[80] This, of course, is a curious omission in a book that relies extensively on a demographic argument to make its case.

Porath also comments on the tremendous growth rate of the Palestinians and states that their rate of natural increase reached a world record of 4.5 percent in 1964 and 1966. As Porath notes, since 1949

> The Israeli authorities cannot be blamed, as the British "imperialists" were, for helping the Arabs enter the country. And despite the strict control of Israel's borders, the number of Arabs living in Israel proper has more than trebled. . . .[81]

Peters' demographic argument is central to her thesis that the Palestinian people really don't exist. Finkelstein, after his study of Peters' statistics, concluded that "her demographic study of population shifts within Palestine is a transparent and vulgar hoax."[82] Unfortunately for Mrs. Peters, the facts support Finkelstein's assessment.

From Time Immemorial is a deeply disturbing book. Not because of its historical revelations, but because it is a polemical work to "prove" the discredited Revisionist Zionist argument that the Palestinians do not exist and that Jordan is a "Palestinian" state. Peters has resurrected the Zionist slogan "a land without a people for a people without a land." In doing this, Peters attempts to revise history and ignores evidence that challenges and, in fact, destroys her central argument.

Peters' book has many failings. The questions avoided and the amount of material and basic documents that are omitted are almost staggering. Nothing, it seems, could get in the way of a preordained conclusion. The number of serious "mistakes" and misrepresentations and their common character leave little doubt about their nonaccidental nature.

The book found a receptive audience in North America because it reinforced an existing framework of belief that was staggering under the weight of reality. Images of Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and the graphic horror of Israel's invasion of Lebanon weakened the carefully nurtured selective memory of important support groups in North America, and in particular in the Jewish Diaspora.

[77]Ibid.
[78]Ibid.
[79]Farrell, p. 130. See also Porath (both articles).
[80]Said, p. 382.
[81]Porath, "Mrs. Peters's Palestine," p. 37.
[82]Finkelstein, *In These Times*, p. 12.

Peters herself gives credence to this claim when, in an interview, she said, "The whole Palestinian issue . . . is a big lie that has caused bewildering, squeamish reactions of doubt and guilt among Israel's supporters."[83]

But what is most disturbing about Peters' *From Time Immemorial* is the exalted treatment it has received in North America in academic and literary circles.

Whether Peters' book was part of a calculated attempt to reinvigorate a faltering support base, or just conveniently filled this role and then was eagerly seized, it is difficult to say. However, the carefully contrived and obscure documentation that Peters uses, or was provided with, leaves open the possibility that this was not just the work of a single researcher.

But what is most disturbing about Peters' *From Time Immemorial* is the exalted treatment it has received in North America in academic and literary circles. That a book that has been dismissed as a poorly contrived hoax in Britain and in Israel can be described by Lucy Dawidowicz as bringing to "light the historical truth about the Middle East,"[84] and that this claim can go virtually uncontested in North America is simply appalling.

Peters' book, in effect, displays a certain contempt for the North American media and academic communities. The fact that someone like Peters can virtually get away with it is frightening. This episode speaks volumes about the state of intellectual discourse on this continent when it comes to the Middle East.

[83]Campbell.

[84]Joan Peters, *From Time Immemorial* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), p. ii.