

Basketball Players Get It and We Don't! Denying Lebanese Women the Right of Nationality

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Lebanese women, including my mother, suffer from inequality in citizenship rights based on a sexist, racist, and sectarian 'rule of double standards.' Being born into a mixed-cultural family, my father Palestinian and my mother Lebanese, they have persistently explained to me how women are considered a lower class of citizenry in Lebanon, particularly under the law.

According to Lebanese law, my mother is unable to transfer her nationality to her nuclear family members. Consequently, the family has been facing, for years, many problems with racist Lebanese laws that restrict 'foreigners' in work opportunities, ownership rights, and social and economic entitlements.

In 1945, my father was born in Haifa shortly before his family was expelled from their home and forcefully fled to Lebanon. Since then he has spent 57 years of his life on Lebanese soil and has grown to call this country his home. My father graduated from the University of Cairo with a BE in Aeromechanical Engineering. He was one of the first graduates in this specialized discipline, which is in high demand in the Arab employment market. When he came back home, my father certified his degree in the Ministry of Education and obtained a per-

mit for practicing his profession from the Ministry of Labor. The General Directorate of Civil Aviation was quick to call him in for an interview and immediately offer him a job. When he was about to sign the contract the government discovered he was a Palestinian and withdrew the offer. My father was also restricted from working in the private sector. As an engineer, he has to fulfill two conditions before legally practicing his profession; he has to obtain a work permit and join the syndicate. While getting a work permit might be feasible, it is ineffective because no Palestinian can join a Lebanese syndicate. Consequently, my father had to travel away from his family, away from his home to get a decent job in the Gulf.

My older brother also faced similar problems. Lebanese work law effectively rules out Palestinians' prospects for employment except within a limited number of permissible jobs that do not require the hardship of getting a work permit. My brother, a graduate of the American University of Beirut (AUB), started working for a Palestinian NGO at a relatively low salary. Other jobs he applied for were legally permissible, yet Lebanese companies refused to get into the labyrinths of government bureaucracy to obtain a work permit for him (that is, if

we exclude the high probability of the decision being racist or sectarian). In contrast, when my brother applied to a multinational corporation, he was accepted and appointed to a comparatively high position, tripling his previous income. Obviously, the reasons behind these variations in treatment are vague, and cannot be ascertained empirically. Yet based on logical speculation, one of two things can be concluded: A multinational corporation is disinterested in the applicant's nationality and sect, and thus is far from taking a racist or sectarian decision. It is also possible that a company with a considerable international reputation and power in the market has enough corporate power to efficiently obtain a work permit, even for a Palestinian. Yet even as an employee in a multinational corporation, my brother is not entitled to full social security coverage, although he pays for it!

In 2001, things got even more complicated. The government enacted a law that deprived nationals whose countries denied Lebanese property ownership rights from owning real estate in Lebanon. Translation: First, you have to have an internationally recognized country in order to own real estate in Lebanon. Second, someone born in Palestine is either an Israeli or a Palestinian. The former, unlike the latter, may obtain other nationalities through which one can easily own real estate in Lebanon. However, an Israeli national, to begin with, is prevented from setting foot on Lebanese territory. Conclusion: This law is worded in such a manner that it intrinsically prevents Palestinians from owning property in Lebanon. Consequently, my father now refuses to move out of and sell our grandfather's house in Beirut since it is the only property he owns. He worries about the fact that his 'half-Lebanese' children are not permitted to inherit any real estate. Thus, the house should be liquefied and inherited only in monetary value.

The final blow was two years ago, in 12th grade. I got the highest score nationwide in the official exams, specifically in the Sociology and Economics sections. The first three students in ranking received a 30 million Lebanese Lira scholarship from the Educational Center for Research and Development. I was denied this scholarship, which I academically earned, on a purely racist basis. The president then had the courtesy to invite us to his palace yet didn't

have enough courage to speak to my mother, a Lebanese citizen, when she required justification for this racist decision. Like all our official bureaucrats, he denied responsibility and 'transferred' her to 'those in charge' who only had one thing to say: "You know how it is for Palestinians in this country." Two things they failed to see and admit: they are 'those in charge' of this inhumane treatment, and the person they were talking to is Lebanese!

Another intriguing conversation around this same event went on in the Ministry of Education, which made sure to pay its share to its excelling students. I was invited to receive a check from the Minister of Education at that time. I went. "Hmmm, you're Palestinian...one second." five minutes later: "But you're mother's Lebanese...one second." Another five minutes passed.

A check for voting status...

Not only is my mother a Lebanese citizen; she is also above the age of 21 with full mental capacity to vote for our generous official.

Unlike her fellow male citizens, my mother had to seek her right to get us the Lebanese nationality, but she was rejected since we didn't fit the right demographic quota. We had to convert to Christian Maronites to obtain the nationality. My mother enthusiastically upholds 'The Right to Return,' and she fights for her family's basic human rights in their 'motherland.' How ironic is this terminology's structural analysis:

Mother: Lebanese
Land: Lebanon
Motherland: confiscated by sexism, racism, and sectarianism.

Citizenship is a constitutionally acquired right for foreign women marrying Lebanese men and a matter of convenience with foreign basketball players that are needed on the 'national' team. Ownership rights consolidate the economy with greater investments. Employing rare human resources increases the country's self sufficiency, and investing in potential brains reverses its brain drain. Nevertheless, I guess when it comes to the Rule of Law, to secure basic human rights for all citizens, it seems that foreign basketball players are more entitled than native Lebanese women.

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