**The nightmares of 1948**

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Tuesday, May 16, 2023

When Zionist militias started attacking Palestinian villages and ethnically cleansing them in 1948, news reached my grandparents in the village of Reineh in Jalil, northern Palestine. Fearing Zionist violence, they packed their bags and along with their newborn (my uncle) and several members of their family, they fled to Lebanon, where they found haven in a refugee camp in Baalbek

Despite facing misery and destitution, my grandparents remained in the camp, as news of the atrocities the Zionists were committing – what came to be known as the Nakba – continued to come.

Several months later, the holy month of Ramadan began and then came Eid, which was usually a time of happiness, when families and communities came together. But being away from their homeland, my grandparents felt much more pain and sense of loss during the holiday.

The cries of women and children filled the camp and broke my grandfather’s heart, and that was the moment when he became determined to return to Palestine. “We are going home,” he declared. And they did, risking their lives in the process.

My grandparents were of the few fortunate Palestinians who managed to return. They were also fortunate to find their village and their home still intact. But a new reality awaited them in their homeland. Their village fell within the borders of the newly founded Israeli state, and they, the natives of the land, became “infiltrators” and were, therefore, deportable under Israeli law.

Now, their struggle was to remain in their homeland.

The Israeli army would regularly raid their home looking for my grandfather. Every time they found him, they would expel him to the outskirts of Jenin, which at that time was under Jordanian control, and every time he would make his way back to this village and his family.

Soon my grandparents realised that in order to remain in Palestine, they would have to secure a (semi) permanent residence status from Israel – the very state that was occupying their land.

They despised it for what it was doing to them and their people, but they had to acquire these papers. It was the only way to survive, to be in Palestine; it was an act of sumud (steadfastness).

As a result, all of their children and grandchildren, including myself, would eventually become Israeli citizens – part of the so-called ’48 Palestinian community.

Decades later, under different circumstances, I would find myself terrified of losing my Israeli citizenship. Over the past few years, successive Israeli governments have indicated they are looking for ways to denaturalise Palestinians, considering us a “demographic threat”.

This has increasingly fed my anxiety. Several months ago, I began to have a recurring dream, a nightmare to be precise, in which I am stripped of my Israeli citizenship.

In one version of the dream, the Israeli authorities had made the citizenship of ’48 Palestinians resemble the permanent residence they have issued to Palestinian Jerusalemites since the occupation of the city in 1967. This status is contingent on Palestinians – who have lived in Jerusalem for centuries – being able to prove that the city is their “centre of life”.

Given that I have been living outside of Israel for nearly 15 years now, in my dream I was not able to claim my residency any more and the authorities stripped me of my citizenship. This meant I was permanently barred from entering or living in my homeland, unable to visit or return, which is the fate of many Palestinian Jerusalemites and Palestinian refugees.

I woke up from this nightmare in panic with a pounding heart, sweating and breathing heavily. To calm down, I had to remind myself that this had not happened… yet.

My attachment to my Israeli citizenship is not a choice but a necessity. I hate that I have to hold on to this citizenship so my kids and I can continue to visit our homeland and maintain the possibility to live there. This is a citizenship of a state that is colonising, occupying, and dispossessing us, and yet I have to fight to keep it – just like my grandparents fought to acquire it.

My nightmares, the deep-seated anxiety, are not merely paranoia. Israeli citizenship for Palestinians is fragile and conditional. With Israel having the most far-right government in its history in power, not only do Israeli ministers and lawmakers publicly call for a second Nakba, but they are also actively pursuing ways to expand their ability to strip Palestinians of their citizenship, as a means to eliminate Palestinian presence in Palestine.

From day one, 75 years ago, Israel grappled with the question of the Palestinians who remained in Palestine. David Ben Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, objected to a proposed citizenship law as it would have led to the naturalisation of the Palestinians who remained. Instead, he wanted to keep them under the status of residents as it would have been easier to expel residents than citizens.

The citizenship law, he told his cabinet ministers, can wait. “When you have a country in a stable condition, then the question of citizenship is a simple one. But here you are asking to make decisions about matters that we are not interested in finalising … We are in an unstable and changing situation, so why should we get ourselves into trouble by resolving this matter? I don’t understand the urgency.”

Despite Ben Gurion’s position, in 1952, Israel legislated a citizenship law that led to the naturalisation of the Palestinians who remained. This citizenship, however, did not grant them the full rights that Jewish Israelis enjoyed. It was a racialised, inferior citizenship – one that did not allow many of the Palestinians who received it to return to their villages, homes and land, of which Zionist forces had dispossessed them.

More than seven decades later, Israel is taking active steps to undermine the already crippled citizenship for Palestinians and to make them more vulnerable to denaturalisation. Enjoying total impunity for its crimes on the international arena, Israel knows it can continue to water down the little protection that its citizenship offers to Palestinians.

Excerpted: ‘The nightmares of a ’48 Palestinian’. Courtesy: Aljazeera.com