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The Civic Status of Palestinian Citizens in Israel

The recent estimations show that Arab citizens make up 20.6% of Israeli citizens or approximately 1.6 million people (Hai & Shoham 4). While being a big part of the Israeli population as an “indigenous minority” (Nakhala), Palestinian citizens face an active discrimination and oppression of their rights and freedoms, especially when compared with Jewish people. An analysis of literature has allowed us to determine the most commonly discussed topics below, which in turn will allow us to reveal the possible gaps existing within the present research.

The first thing to consider while assessing the civic status of Palestinian citizens of Israel is that the inequalities between Arabs and Jewish people are legally supported. For instance, the Declaration of Israel's Independence states that Israel is a “Jewish State,” challenging the status of Palestinians. According to the Institute for Middle East Understanding, now there are more than 50 laws that discriminate against Palestinian citizens of Israel, using various methods and bases. As a result, the unequal civic status of Palestinian citizens of Israel originates from state legislation. Moreover, the analysis of literature has revealed that the legal framework for inequality significantly impacts citizenship rights. For instance, as Ben White highlights, one law

blocks family reunification for Israeli citizens – almost all of whom are Palestinians – with their spouses from the West Bank or Gaza (White, “Explained: Palestinian citizens of Israel”).

When speaking about unequal citizenship rights, it is worth specifying that this practice refers to particularly every sphere of human activity. One of the most significant gaps between Arab and Jewish families relates to income. In 2000, the monthly income of an Arab average earner was NIS 4,472, which was a little more than 60% of the income of an average Jewish wage earner (Central Bureau of Statistics, “The Arab Population In Israel”, 11). Despite the recent improvements in the financial state of Arab Israelis, more than half of such families are still poor, while only around 14% of Jewish people are poor (Surkers). These statistics point to an important finding that allows us to trace the causation between the unequal status of Palestinian citizenship and their poverty status.

Income status goes alongside with employment, which, as a result, should be considered as a specific variable impacting the civic status of Palestinian citizens of Israel. The statistics demonstrate that of the 40 towns that suffer the highest unemployment rates in the country, 36 are Palestinian towns (Arshad 3). Furthermore, while being already employed, the Palestinians face a range of discriminatory practices related to the promotion and assignment of offices. According to data provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics, the industry of construction involves 28.4 percent of Arab employees and 5.4 percent of Jewish employees; the percentage of unskilled workers is 14.6 for Arabs and 6.4 for Jewish people, and managerial positions are held by 14.3 percent of Jewish people and only 5.6 percent of Arabs (Adalah). In addition, such industries as banking, insurance, and finance employ less than 1 percent of Arab employees (Adalah). This means that both statistics and existing literature highlight the discrimination in the sphere of the employment of Palestinians.

Another important issue raised in available sources is health care. Comparing simple statistics demonstrating the number of deaths and life expectancy, both indicators are better for Jewish people (Central Bureau of Statistics. "Israel in Figures"). Simultaneously, the range of social issues faced by Palestinians is not restricted by those related to health care. For instance, Arab students are extremely underrepresented in Israeli universities. According to new research by Israel's Council for Higher Education, the number of Arab students in Israeli universities grew by 78.5% over the past seven years (Lieber). However, the percentage is still low, as Arab students constitute only 13% of the student population. In this way, it is clear that the civic status of Palestinian citizens of Israel is impacted by a much wider range of factors than only unfavorable laws.

The final but not least important aspect to consider while analyzing the discussion of the civic status of Palestinian citizens of Israel is political participation as one of the major determinants of citizenship. Statistics say that only one in seven Palestinians can vote in Israel's elections (White, "10 facts about Israel's elections"). To add, worsening racism in Israeli society has increased the desire of Arabs to vote (The Arabian Fund Initiatives). In such a way, it is possible to understand Palestinians' awareness of the discrimination as well as a sobering assessment of their civic status, together with the striving to improve it by political participation.

At the same time, recent surveys indicate that most Arab citizens (60%) relate positively to Israeli citizenship and to the current living conditions in Israel, and only one quarter of the respondents hold critical views on these topics (Radai & Rudnitzky; Radai et al.). The matter is how, despite the fact of discrimination, poverty, inequality, and oppression, the majority of Palestinians remain satisfied with their living conditions and civic status. The question requiring

clarification is about whether this state of affairs has resulted from biased surveys, or complicated and deep social processes.

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