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# Analysis // Where the Far Right of Israel and Lebanon Meet

Lebanon's discriminatory and xenophobic policies echo those of right-wingers in Israel. Upper Nazareth is a case in point

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The Lebanese town of Hadat, where Christians are banned from renting or selling property to Muslims, on June 24, 2019. Protests against this and other racist policies have taken place recently. Credit: Bilal Hussein/AP

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It's a shame Israel's right wing can't recruit political leaders from our neighbors. If it could, the Free Patriotic Movement would be a natural partner. Gebran Bassil, [Lebanon's](#) foreign minister, is a leading member of that movement, and his utterances echo and even surpass the racist rhetoric of our luminaries of the extreme right in Israel. In the way he hounds foreign workers, for instance, he sounds just like Culture and Sports Minister Miri Regev, and his comments about Lebanese genetic superiority sound just like touts of fans of the so-called Chosen People here.

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Recently Bassil tweeted: "We have established the concept for our Lebanese belonging which is above any other belonging. We said that it was genetic." In a recent meeting with young supporters of his party, he explained that, "we definitely do want to distinguish the Lebanese citizen [as being] above non-Lebanese, at work, in taxation and in many other things as well. This is not racist discrimination but an expression of a state's sovereignty over its territories."

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Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, right, talks with General, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, April. 9, 2019 Credit: Bilal Hussein,AP

General, Ahmed Aboul

He added that the state must naturally favor the Lebanese worker over any other workers – whether they are Syrian, French, Iranian or American. The

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Three years ago Bassil suggested enacting a law to the effect that a Lebanese mother could confer citizenship to her children only if she wasn't married to a Syrian or Palestinian.

Racism in Lebanon, however, isn't confined to a specific political leader or party. In a country that officially recognizes 18 ethnic groups – based on which political power and funding are determined – there is constant anxiety over alien ethnic and religious elements penetrating the delicate balance. That is also the main reason why Lebanon refuses to grant citizenship to Palestinians or refugees from Syria, whether they recently fled for their lives or have been living for years in that country.

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Xenophobia is also a familiar phenomenon in Lebanese society. A leading journalist, Dalal al-Bizri, wrote years ago that "Lebanese are mostly racist." One doesn't have to dig deep to find the roots of racism, she wrote: Many people oppose the ethnic situation in the country but don't realize that this very arrangement has seeped into their very souls, and as a result they maintain ethnic and regional loyalties.



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The result is that even perfectly legitimate Lebanese citizens, not just refugees or other aliens, find themselves in the same situation as [Israeli Arabs](#) who are trying to find housing in a Jewish town.

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Take the [case of Hadat](#), located near Beirut. Its laws forbid Christians from selling or renting property to a [Muslim](#), whether Sunni or Shi'ite. Mayor George Aoun, a member of Minister Bassil's party, declared that the city opposes demographic change and "it isn't ashamed of that. We are operating according to the constitution, which dictates a life of cooperation."

It's true that Hadat has changed: Where it once had a solid Christian majority, today only 35 to 45 percent of its population are Christian; the remaining residents are Muslim. Aoun says he isn't racist and is proud of "our Shi'ite brothers who bought 60 percent of the properties in the city," but if he is forced to revoke the legislation about selling property to Muslims, he will quit.

All that remains is for the mayor to sign [a twin-cities agreement with Upper Nazareth](#) – whose name was just changed to Nof Hagalil or, literally, Galilee View – and change his city's name from Hadat to Lebanon View.

The reasoning cited by the people of Hadat are also strikingly similar to those of their peers across the [Green Line](#) in Israel: "We want our sons to stay in the city, not leave it," one Hadat resident told Yahoo News. But why should they leave? There's no need for elaboration – after all, who wants to live in a city with a Muslim majority?



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In Lebanon, the discrimination against foreign workers, Syrian refugees and Palestinians isn't just a personal or municipal matter: There have been reports of the police and army harassing refugees, and frequent arrest of Syrian and Palestinian workers is a part of reality, as is denying work permits to refugees and migrants and banning them from a host of jobs.

Some Lebanese are ashamed of the extreme positions taken by the mayor and foreign minister, and protest them openly. Last week hundreds of intellectuals, journalists, artists and academics signed a petition expressing disgust at the racist narrative disseminated by Bassil, with respect to treatment of those they call "unfortunates who were expelled from their own country by the murderous Syrian regime. This racism does not represent us," the petitioners wrote, adding that it is designed to serve populist leaders hoping to reap political benefit.

In addition, commenters on Lebanese social media have called Bassil's recent declarations "Nazi utterances befitting Hitler." In Saudi Arabia, there have been calls to throw out the roughly 200,000 Lebanese workers in the kingdom, who have been helping to boost the Lebanese economy.

The Lebanese constitution states that any citizen in the country can live wherever he or she wants. But property owners and municipal authorities have found ways to circumvent the law, by rezoning the lands, converting those earmarked for housing into lands for agriculture, and banning high-rise construction that could attract "undesirables." The upshot? Even so-called kosher Lebanese citizens, not just refugees or foreigners, are finding themselves feeling like Israel's Arabs do when they want to buy a home in a Jewish locale.



**Zvi Bar'el**  
Haaretz Correspondent

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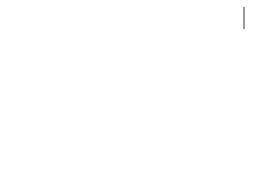
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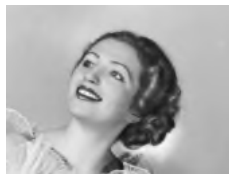


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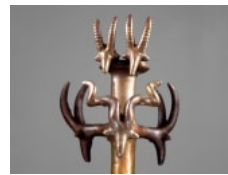
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