



Stateless

Stripping of Nationality Explained to **Amaseel**

Ali Ahmad Al-Dairy

Translated by:
Batoul Assi

ISBN 978 - 9953 - 0 - 4183 - 4



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Independent Bahraini Online Newspaper

Title: Stateless: Stripping of Nationality Explained to Amaseel

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Translated to English by: Batoul Assi

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Batoul Assi is a Lebanese translator, who translated multiple publications to Arabic and English.

First Issue, Beirut, August 2017

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Dedication

To

Martyr Ali Al-Moemen

They stripped me of my nationality on
the day they spilled your blood

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We All Left the House

I am Amaseel from Bahrain, but I live in Canada. I am from the village of Al-Dair, but I live in the city of Windsor. I was born in Muharraq Hospital on 30/7/2003, yet I have celebrated more of my birthdays outside Bahrain. I am the daughter of Ali and Fadaa, Haji Ahmed and Haji Abbas.

My father left Bahrain in 2011. I was in second grade at the time and went to the Salam Elementary School for Girls. I lived with my mother and my brother Bassel in Bahrain in our house built by Baba Haji (my grandfather), and I have a picture of me with him when our house was still under construction. My grandfather died less than a year after we moved into the house and was buried in the city of Mashhad on the grounds of the Imam Reza (pbuh) shrine, and two years later my father left our house.

My father used to drop me off at school in the morning in his GMC Envoy and wait for me at the school gate in the afternoon. In the second semester of 2011, I missed my father's rides. After

school, I used to go to my friend's house and my mother would come late to pick me up, since she had a job as a teacher and her workplace was far from my school.

We used to go to my grandfather's house, Abbas, in Manama every Thursday, and meet with my cousins, especially my cousin, aunt Hadia's daughter named Fatima, who was my close friend. On some days, she would come to our house and sleep over, and sometimes she would go with me on Fridays to Baba Haji's house in Al-Dair.

When my mother would travel to Lebanon to visit my father on short holidays, I would sleep over at Fatima's home. My aunt, her daughter and I, used to pass the time and have fun with art crafts.

On spring break in 2015, like usual we were in Lebanon. On January 31, while my father, mother and I were heading to the south on a trip, my father suddenly stopped. I had earphones on listening to a song that I can not remember now. I paused the song and heard my father say: They stripped me of my nationality. I did not take much notice of the matter, since I did not understand what it meant. I continued to listen to the song, and my father resumed our ride to the south. I do not recall my father being sad or agitated.

In the summer of the same year, we began our preparations for leaving Bahrain, as I was about to start changing the decor of my room. I began to understand that the revocation of my father's nationality means that I would abandon my room without leaving my mark on it.

I wanted to design my room before leaving Bahrain .It was my dream room. I wanted to have a big white bed and a large white dresser. I also wanted my wardrobe to be white with a large mirror next to it, surrounded by white lighting, and I wished I had a desk that was big and white as well with a black chair and a pink curtain in the room. I also wanted to have a white teddy bear and another pink and violet one. This is the room of my dreams. I hope to make this dream come true when I return to Bahrain.

We left home and I left my room behind. My mother and I arrived in Lebanon, and Bassel had left and arrived there weeks before us. On the second day we completed the procedures at the United Nations who told us: You cannot go back to Bahrain anymore. We stayed in Lebanon for seven months, but still the decision allowing us to travel was not issued. We missed the first semester of school, since we thought that we would be in Canada at the end of summer.

At the end of October, my father received a call from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), informing him that they scheduled November 18, 2015 as our date of travel. We were very happy by this. We prepared everything and ourselves for leaving, but the trip was postponed days before our departure. Another date was later set on December 14, but we were contacted hours before traveling and informed that the trip was cancelled. We became very upset and felt disappointed, as we were left without a travel date. The travel dates were canceled, because my father was stateless and special security measures were required for getting him out of Lebanon. We found out that the reason was related to Lebanon, not the United Nations. I began to understand more the meaning of being stripped of your nationality after our trip was cancelled several times.

Following the New Year, they called and said that our date of travel – for the third time – was set on January 18, 2016. We expected the trip to be canceled as well. We went to the airport that night, anticipating a phone call cancelling the flight. We left Lebanon with a Lebanese passport, with which we were allowed to only travel once.

February 10, 2016 was my first day at school. It was a difficult day. I did not know how to act or what to do. I started to make friends from Iraq and

Syria. I was the only Bahraini and the only one from the Gulf. They did not understand everything I said, but then they began to understand and sometimes use the words I say. We turned this situation into a fun game, so I started to collect all the strange Bahraini words I hear at home or when I call my grandmother (Mama Sabah) and jot them down on a piece of paper. I now have this list of words that I play with and which makes me feel that I will always remain a Bahraini.

One day I was in school with my friends from Iraq and Syria. They were talking about their clans, and asked me which clan I was from? I told them that I do not have a clan. I did not understand what a clan meant, and I do not know whether or not my father would have been stripped of his nationality if we had belonged to a clan.

At the end of our first year in Canada, I found out that my cousin Fatima won first place on the level of Gulf States in the Sheikha Latifa Bint Mohammed Award for Childhood Creativity. She had participated in the competition in previous years, but was not lucky enough to win. This year; however, she won first place. I told her I wanted to participate with her in the competition. I asked her to send me the terms and conditions of the contest, but I realized that it exclusively was for Gulf States. I gave up and was upset that I was no

longer Amaseel, the Salam School girl. That is the reason why I decided to take part in my father's book instead of participating in the contest.

I miss our big family gatherings and my aunts dearly, for I grew up on their care and love. I miss my cousins. Inside my locker at school I had a picture of my little cousin Sarah. I left when she barely could pronounce my name, and now I hear her say it clearly as if she is telling me: Do not worry, all the children of our family chant your name and keep your image in their hearts.

We all left the house – my grandfather first, my father second, and then us third. This is what I comprehend from the revocation of citizenship. As for my father's explanation, I leave it for you, and I also leave you with his introduction, which I begged him not to write, so it would not overshadow mine.

Amaseel Ali Al-Dairy
February 14, 2017

Why are we at Tim Hortons?

In the first week that marked the end of our first year [of immigration] in Canada, Amaseel and I decided to hold our first meeting, setting about the draft of this book, which discusses the revocation of my citizenship on 31 January 2015 under Royal Decree No. 8 of 2015 among a list of 72 citizens. We sat together on a Sunday morning, January 22, 2017, at Tim Hortons Cafe. I asked her to read one of Amnesty International's statements on the lists of revoked Bahraini nationalities, and her first question was: "Why are the grounds for revoking the Bahraini nationality vague, as Amnesty International states?" I found it to be a key question to start off the dialogue of the book with, and from which a host of other questions came about. The issue presented in this book became the main topic we talked about while we were on the road, at home and in the cafe. I began to form the questions through these discussions, and then arrange them according to the logic of the answers that were not all on

the same level. I left them as they were and did not make an effort to rephrase them so that they would tie in with Amaseel's chronological age of 13. I wanted this book to stay with her for years to come, and I figured that my answers would open up to her more as she grew older, blooming with maturity and potential.

Amaseel was only twelve years old when she first heard the term "stripping of nationality", like many other children whose parents' were stripped of their citizenship. I wanted to explain to them the meaning of this term with all its indications, the meaning of nationality and citizenship and the meaning of not having a homeland to which one legally belongs. I wanted to explain why their parents' nationalities were revoked, and why their siblings born after this date will not be granted nationalities.

The title was inspired by Tahar Ben Jelloun's book (*Racism Explained to My Daughter*). "The idea for this book came to me on 22 February 1997, the day my daughter and I went to protest the Debré law, a law dealing with foreigners' rights in France. My ten-years-old daughter asked question after question. She wanted to know why we were demonstrating, what certain slogans meant, if protesting would do any good. That's how we began to talk about racism. I wrote this

book as I thought about her questions”, Jelloun stated in the prologue.

Many children of February 14 are also wondering: Why were their parents stripped of their nationalities? Why were their brothers executed? Why are their cousins sentenced to life imprisonment? Why are their classmates arrested? Why do funeral processions of the martyrs of their homeland do not end? This book is an attempt to answer some of these urgent questions poking at their thorny existence in this tiny country.

Ali Ahmad Al-Dairy
February 28, 2017

Stripping of Meaning

- 1. I remember a couple of years ago when we were riding our RAV4 on the Old Saida road, on a Saturday winter afternoon of January 31, 2015, heading towards South Lebanon. My aunt Zainab called while you were driving the car. I heard you tell mom, “I was stripped of my citizenship.” You did not stop the car and told her to write something and mentioned “Mama Sabah”. I did not understand what the revocation of a citizenship meant. Do you remember those moments?**

Yes, I do remember vividly. Bassel was not with us, for he was in Bahrain, and we were very concerned about how we were going to tell your grandmother, Mama Sabah. She most certainly found out, since she follows everything and does not miss any important news, but how was I going to tell her that stripping me of my nationality does not mean that they stripped me of what she passed on to me and I carry within me – for I am the son of her womb, her secret, safeguarded by all the prayers and supplications she readied and recited

for me since I was a mere sperm cell in her womb. I wanted to make a statement well-founded on this conviction that is as clear as the sun of the bright morn, during which I was born from her light, hence I wrote this tweet: As the revocation of my citizenship does not mean I am not the son of Sabah Abdulhussain, it also does not mean that I am not the son of Bahrain, for I am the mirror of the earth and you are the mirror of invasion.

I uttered these words with the firm conviction of my mother that is ingrained within me .Nothing is stronger than her motherhood that bestowed upon me my Bahraini self with all that it stands for and the history of ordeals drawing the fate of this land .There is no land stronger than Sabah’s to lean on in this moment in which I felt as if I was being rocketed into the vacuum of outer space .When I wrote “it does not mean that I am not the son of Bahrain”, it was as if I was a screaming newborn who had just come out of his mother’s womb.

The land is the most to perceive the tree as it is being uprooted from the soil, as if being stripped from the heart of that land, leaving an existential dreary emptiness. That is how a mother’s heart is. It drops when her offspring’s heart is stripped of something; when her son is stripped of one of the essences of his belonging to this homeland, embodied by his mother herself.

2. Baba, you always like to give your words a philosophical touch, but I was able to understand since “Mama Sabah” was included. What do you mean by “I am the mirror of the earth and you are the mirror of invasion”?

Of course when I am talking about the revocation of my nationality, I need to express myself philosophically, in the way you mean I speak when I comment on a certain event or action that may seem simple. Since you can easily comprehend something when your grandma “Mama Sabah” is mentioned in the sentence, then let me tell you that she is one of the manifestations of the land. For I was in her womb and so she is my first land where I was rooted, from which I came to being in her land Bahrain. I am the mirror of “Sabah” and Awal (ancient name of Bahrain). Her blood is in my blood, her features are seen on my face, her dye painted the color of my skin, her essence is in my flesh, her sweetness is in my nature and from her pearls my identity was shaped. This is me; I am part of this land. I do not know any other origin. The tribes – my ancestors – that once walked this earth have disintegrated and become one with the soil from which the palms grew. Hence, I knew no roots other than that of these palm trees and surrounding plants that this land embraces. As

for those who stripped me of my citizenship, they are a mirror that, since 1783, has been reflecting bloodshed, repression, plunder and greed that drives them to take possession of everything. They take pride in what is reflected in their mirror, to which they devoted a military museum so they could showcase their “achievements”. They have taken farms and lands by force of invasion yet that still did not satisfy their hunger. They took over the sea and buried it yet that still did not quench their thirst for more. They killed the people of this land ripping into their flesh with blades and bullets and still that did not fulfill their greed.

What I am writing here is the mirror of this history as well as the events leading up to this day from a reality based on this history. They wanted to strip this mirror and break it to exclusively give their mirror the right to record, fabricate and tell their version of history and impose it on us all.

3. Baba, do you remember the “no one” game? Bassel and I used to make fun of you when you were too busy to answer us, by saying “he is in the state of “no one” in order to draw your attention to us. You used to notice us then and laugh. Now I feel like it might be a hurtful thing to say to you. I feel as if we’re telling you that after your

nationality was revoked, you are no one. Is that true?

No, not at all. This is a phrase I love very much, especially that you were able to turn it into a fun game before it became so serious and cruel. We; however, could safeguard the positive meaning it portrays. Let me tell you its story.

During the first week of my ordeal of leaving Bahrain, on April 11th 2011, I was in a local Lebanese café called T-marbouta on Hamra Street, enjoying my time reading the then recently published novel entitled, (Tell Me About the Vision), by the critic, Abdelfattah Kilito, who is well-known for his interest in the pleasure of literature and narrations.

At the beginning of his book, Kilito wrote: “This is what someone looks like when reading: like no one,” quoting German novelist and critic Botho Strauss. These words caught my attention.

This quote speaks of the passion and pleasure of reading. For when you are engrossed by a book, you lose yourself to a state of utter lust and total absence. You will lose contact with others. You will no longer hear their voices or take notice of their movements. You will lose yourself (the fact of being someone) yet you will not lose who you really are. It is a state of bonding with something beautiful.

After this phrase turned into a playful inside joke to my family, to me it meant my connection with you and the password that unlocks my return to you from that state. Not once was I able to resist letting out a chuckle or giving you a hug every time I heard you say it. We; however, did not know that one day it will reflect a serious political situation in 2015.

When I was writing an article for the Lebanese Al-Akhbar newspaper about the revocation of my nationality, I could not find a better title for it than that phrase. I texted Bassel, asking him if he remembered the quote about the state of being “no one”. He said that he had it on his phone but lost it recently and then added: “Don’t worry, I will never feel like I am no one’s son.”

4. Neither did I feel like I am the daughter of “no one”. I feel proud when I say that your citizenship was revoked because you are a writer. Do you think I would be able to take this book with me to Bahrain and explain to them what the revocation of a citizenship means, just like you are explaining it to me right now?

There is no doubt that you are capable of turning the “no one” phrase into a meaningful statement, and even turning it into an introduction for a speech that everyone would applaud. Your

demonstration of the intended meaning would have a much smoother flow than mine. You would be able to make of our story a tale that tells the history of our tiny island.

5. Then please continue your philosophical view so I could benefit from your explanation of the phrase” no one.“

Before I had my nationality revoked, it was hard for me to explain the meaning of “being no one” and that I, according to the regime, am not worthy of being recognized by its legal, academic, cultural and administrative institutions. For these institutions are limited to the regime’s restrictions. They are not fitting for a country that respects citizenship based on diversity, difference, opposition and observation.

There is a difference between the state of being “no one” on a cultural level and on a political one. The former is a beautiful educational experience while the latter is an experience of exile and unrecognition. The second state; however, will not affect your existence because you already existed before it happened, that is if you were a mirror reflecting this world and everyone in it. That is what I witnessed in the mirror of my friends.

The inauguration of my book entitled, (My Grandmother Salama Salloum), which took place

in the Hypa⁽¹⁾ hall at my home back in Bahrain on February 9th 2015, days after the announcement of the royal decree ordering the withdrawal of my nationality, made a clear statement, proving that I am someone. I am someone from this land – someone who cannot be removed nor replaced. “Your presence was dominant here,” was one of the comments that my friends wrote on the walls of my house. It was a very meaningful and emotional moment.

¹ A monthly seminar held at my house that discusses books as well as debatable intellectual and cultural issues. It was established in 2009 and comprises a group of my friends.

Stripping of Nationality

- 6. During the book signing of “My Grandmother Salama Salloum” at our house, your friends wrote “My grandmother is my nationality” on the walls, what did they mean?**

A nationality is an attribute that allows me to resemble you or have something common with you, and to belong to you. It is an attribute that renders me a Bahraini and grants me the rights that I share with you. My nationality is a series of attributes that I amass from my belonging to the people who resided on this land since hundreds of years ago. I speak your language, use your accent, and have customs and traditions like yours – that’s what makes me a Bahraini.

The attributes that you have make you a female and the attributes that your brother has makes him a male. These are attributes that are born with us. From birth, we are granted attributes that dictate our gender and nationality.

Hence, we become entitled to our rights and bound by our obligations according to our gender and nationality.

Stripping me of my nationality formally means stripping me of the attribute that I share with you, i.e. what makes me a Bahraini, and thus there is no longer a citizenship that unites me with you.

That event marked one year after my grandmother's passing, which also coincided with the revocation of my nationality among a list of 72 others. Our friends wanted to express their solidarity with me and show that they are here for you during this hardship. They wanted to give the celebration of my grandmother a symbolic meaning, for she defines my Bahraini identity and honorable lineage that can never be stripped from me. That is why Mr. Hussein Al-Mahrous wrote in the dedication on each book, on my behalf, "*My Grandmother is my nationality*".

That night, I wrote my address for the occasion, but I was not able to deliver it. I published it in Al-Wasat newspaper's coverage of the event. That was; however, before my name was banned from being mentioned even in this newspaper. My publications were banned as well, as a result of government pressures.

In my speech, I said the following:

“[I express] peace, love and longing [to you all]...

I welcome you in our home in the Hypa cultural hall, as I called it in 2009, when the project of holding intellectual gatherings with a group of friends was first launched.

It seems that Hypa’s character possessed me to the extent that a part of my existential destiny became harmonious with his. In my favorite newspaper Al-Waqt in 2009, I wrote an article entitled “Was ‘Hypa’ an intellectual or a monk?”

At that moment, I recalled Hypa the [Copt] Monk, in his most distressing moments, when he left the country after he felt torn inside, when he witnessed the philosopher Hypatia get skinned alive in the streets of Alexandria, under the umbrella of the political rule and religious authority.

The truth that Hypatia dedicated her life to rendered her a sacrifice that was offered at the public square (The Ajoura). Hypa could not bear to be a false witness to that murder, so he fled and roamed about. He took the name Hypa in respect for Hypatia, a name that he

carries, also carrying her cause with him. Hypa became an intellectual, the moment he carried the cause of Hypatia and the injustice she suffered. He gave up his name, place of residence, stability and official occupation as a monk, which would have allowed him to be in good terms with the authority that killed Hypatia.

I am reliving that same moment since February 14, 2011. I can bear being distant from there, where my Hypa hall, house, homeland, stability and grandmother lie. I can bear all that in order to be an intellectual that defends the public space where my country was being murdered and skinned as Hypatia was. I accept the burden of enduring the stripping of my nationality and the psychological death sentence imposed on me. I have an overabundance of [assets from] my homeland that outpowers the administrative measure that strips me from the regime and its deaf authorities. It is the abundance of identity that I acquired from my grandma, whose book I am signing in absentia yet with your presence, as in your hearts my nationality lies.

“I am gladdened by your heavy presence in the Hypa hall and happy to have this place offer me part of its name, way and destiny...”

My friends filled the walls of our home with statements confirming that I am indeed the son of this land. Journalist and writer Radhi Al-Sammak held a poster that read: *“The grandmother’s kind roots are lasting and deep, and her branches are like a lofty tree.”*

These roots cannot be stripped from me for they clench the soil, so tightly. My nationality is not a piece of paper in the hands of a dictator, but rather a spiritual and cultural belonging, in which one sees his image. This was expressed by my friend journalist Fadel Anan when he wrote on our walls: *“My brother, every time I looked at the face of my homeland, I saw you in it.”*

When you are satiated with your country, and when your country leaves an impact on you and you leave your impact on its culture, people and history, you become present within it and your name becomes linked to it in spite of those who want to make it a possession they control to fulfil their interests. This is what my friend and [freedom] fighter since the 1970s journalist Ahmad Al-Bosta expressed to me: *“My friend Ali, you were here amongst us in spite of them. This celebration suited you. May you always be a Bahraini.”*

7. Why did he say “may you always be a Bahraini,” what is the difference between Bahraini and Bahrani?

A native of Bahrain is called a Bahrani. Until the 1960s, no one used the word “Bahraini”. The first party established in Bahrain and the Gulf was named “The National Liberation Front –Bahrain”. Journalist Ahmad Al-Bosta was affiliated to this party. Outside Bahrain, the majority of intellectuals and politicians, when introducing us, say he is a Bahrani, these are Baharna (plural). When he said “may you always be a Bahrani,” he was underlining that I am an original Bahraini, I will continue to be one and no one can take away from that originality. Here, originality is not meant in a racist sense, but rather to differentiate the native from those imported and naturalized by the government to commit inhumane acts against the citizens. The definition of Bahrani, here, is as expressed by the Sunni [freedom] fighter in the 1950s, Abdulrahman Al-Baker, when addressing those who wanted to revoke his nationality: *“I will keep my Bahraini citizenship and will stay in Bahrain”*.

On a related note, the word “Bahrani” now has a political connotation, as it refers to the indigenous Shiite Arabs who resided in Bahrain before the arrival of Al Khalifa and the Arab

tribes in 1783. These “Baharna” were particularly subjected to oppression since the Al Khalifas invasion of Bahrain. They became steadfast opposers of Al Khalifa since then and commenced holding protests in the 1920s as well as submitting political petitions, seeking justice and calling for their political rights.

8. Does the King only revoke the nationalities of Shiite citizens, because they oppose him?

Let me tell you the story of the most famous activist in the history of Bahrain, Abdulrahman Al-Baker. He led an assembly of Sunnis and Shiites in 1954 called the “National Union Committee”. He was a skilled politician, a truthful activist, and a popular orator whose words were heard. He; however, along with companions Sunnis and Shiites alike, ended up in Bahrain’s prisons or in exile. Abdulrahman Al-Baker left us an important book in which he wrote his memoirs, “From Bahrain to Exile, St. Helena.” In this book he spoke of the political movement in Bahrain in the 1950s and how he became an exile in the island of Saint Helena. In the part about the revocation of his nationality, he says: “*Completing his game, Belgrave [Advisor to the Government of Bahrain] sent me a letter, saying: The ruler of Bahrain ordered the withdrawal of your citizenship...So I sent him a letter to protest against the revocation*

of my nationality, insisting that I shall keep my Bahraini citizenship and shall stay in Bahrain”⁽¹⁾.

The ruler is capable of withdrawing the nationality of anyone whose words and opinion constitute a threat to him. The ruler feels threatened when he finds someone calling for political reform, taking part in the political decision-making process, or putting an end to his family’s monopoly over power and control over people. In brief, he does not measure a threat by potential harm inflicted on the country, but rather by harm that might befall him and his family.

Nonetheless, all those who were stripped of their nationalities due to the February 14 uprising are Shiites. This issue requires further explanation and clarification yet this is not the suitable place for it.

9. Baba, how come I have a Bahraini nationality and you do not? Would it not be funny and awkward if someone asked me?

When you were born on July 30, 2003, I still had my Bahraini nationality and the Law in Bahrain grants the Bahraini nationality to anyone born to a Bahraini father, but does not revoke the child’s nationality when the father is stripped of

¹ Abdulrahman Al-Baker Memoirs, From Bahrain to Exile, St. Helena, 1965 edition, p.73.

his. This is what happened to me. I was stripped of my nationality but you kept yours.

I do not know, if you had stayed in Bahrain for a longer time, how you could have responded to the questions about your father's nationality in school. How could you have explained to them that you are a Bahraini but your father is not. This is an unusual case in Bahrain. I know that it would have caused you a great deal of discomfort, and that it would have opened the door for many bothersome questions that are tough for your young age and more difficult and larger than your experience in life. Perhaps, this book that we are writing together spares you the trouble of answering these questions over and over again. Ask them to read the book to know the answer and all its details.

10. In fourth grade, two years after you were away from Bahrain, there was a girl at school that bothered me and always used to say that I am not a Bahraini. She challenged me to prove that I am Bahraini and told me to bring my passport. I do not know how I would have responded to her if she continued to harass me after the revocation of your nationality. When I was born, I became a Bahraini because you had a nationality, but now I think about those who are born to fathers with no nationalities, how could

they prove to those who make fun of them that they are Bahrainis?

You certainly remember the Bahraini youngman that used to joke around with you at our apartment in Beirut. He was newly married and was forced to leave Bahrain when his wife was in the beginning of her pregnancy. His son Ali was born while his father was outside the country. He still has not seen his son to this day because the government refuses to give him a nationality and passport, although his father was not stripped of his nationality. It is a form of extreme harassment and humiliation inflicted on the people.

The scene of a father crooning at his baby via Skype – because he was stripped of his nationality and thus his son was stateless – broke my heart. A father who has lost his nationality cannot grant any of his newborn children a citizenship as of the date of revocation.

In Bahrain, there are dozens of cases of stateless children, such as Sarah, who is the daughter of the secretary-general of the largest political party in the Gulf, Sheikh Ali Salman. She wasn't granted a nationality, as she was only 40-days-old when her father was imprisoned.

The nationality of Lawyer Balqees Al-Manami's husband was revoked within the list of

72 that included me. His wife attempted to make use of her experience in the law in order to have a passport or travel document issued for her son Sayed Ali, who was born in January 2016, yet she failed to do so and continued to contact the General Directorate of Nationality, Passports and Residence Affairs until she felt humiliated and lost hope.

Imagine the condition of these children who are fatherless and stateless, belonging to nothing and recognized by no one, as if the government is telling them: “We do not recognize you. You do not belong to this land. Your fathers are traitors that harmed the security of the country, so you are not welcome here.”

What about future children who will be born outside the country! I always think about my friends who have long suffered from the ordeals of immigration and revocation of their citizenships, and need to get on with the [legal] process of their marriages. They have no nationality to pass on to their children who dream of carrying their names and belonging to their country.

My friend Hussain Yousuf was so close to tying the knot when his citizenship and mine were revoked. I was worried that he would not be able to get on with his engagement. His fiancée

journalist Rayan Sharara was very determined and insisted on finalizing their engagement, a week after his citizenship was withdrawn. She sent a very strong implicit message telling him: I am your nationality, and no one could ever strip you from my heart.

11. How did you deal with the revocation of your nationality on a practical level?

When your nationality is revoked, your passport gets canceled as well, and no longer becomes valid. This means that you will become paralyzed and cornered. When they stripped me of my nationality, I was in Lebanon. A few days later I found out that my passport was no longer valid for use in Beirut International Airport, and that I can get arrested in the airport and extradited to Bahrain, considering I was wanted by the Government of Bahrain, although there were no charges raised against me and I was not summoned by the security authorities in Bahrain. I was; however, told that this could possibly take place.

Meanwhile, my status in Lebanon was not legal anymore, since I was no longer a citizen of a state. It is a complicated situation. Even if I was permitted to leave Lebanon, no country would have welcomed me since I was stateless.

12. What did you do then?

I resorted to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). I became a refugee that waits along with other refugees in long queues – that wound one’s sense of pride – at the UN office in Beirut. I fell into a whirlpool of numerous follow-ups and interviews that require detailed information about my life, activities, family, work and travels. Fortunately, I had submitted my papers in January 2013, finished a major stage and received the approval for my naturalization in Canada before the decision to revoke my nationality was issued. Perhaps the revocation of my citizenship expedited the process.

13. Could we have been subjected to any harm due to your situation?

In Bahrain, no one is safe from harm. By good fortune, you; however, were not targeted. On the long run, we did not know what could have happened regarding the affairs that required the head of the household’s official papers, which became invalid following the cancellation of my nationality. For instance, the housekeeper [migrant laborer] was registered in my name under the inhumane Kafala system adopted in the Gulf. Following the revocation of my nationality, her status was no longer legal and your relation with

her was no longer legal either, for you can neither renew her residence nor request a replacement. That is what made us work on concluding all your affairs by the end of the school year, before matters got more complicated.

14. Could they have taken our house because you became stateless?

They did do that. They confiscated the pension dues of those stripped of their nationalities and banned them from having authority over their properties, such as their houses and lands. Your mom and I expected that something like that would happen, yet Allah's divine care was bestowed upon us. The house was registered in both your mother's name and mine, so she was lawfully my proxy. I asked her to rush and register the house in her name and then we finished the remaining loan payments for the housing bank, which is affiliated to the government. Thus, your mom obtained the property documents and the government no longer had an excuse to lay their hands on the house. A week after I left Bahrain, the government dismissed me from my job and transferred my pension dues to my bank account, as a punitive measure at the time. However, as part of our precautionary plan, the pensionary dues were transferred to your mother's account as well, by proxy.

There was another bank account left that consisted of a sum we had saved up for your brother Bassel's education and yours. It is the amount of money that your grandfather left for me. I wanted to dedicate that money for both your education, because I know that would please your grandpa in his grave, for he was extremely keen on investing in education. This inheritance was transferred to your mother's account and so after that, I owned nothing in Bahrain, and nothing owned me anymore.

15. I really love our house and my room. I hope you never think about selling it. You do not think about that, right?

Of course not, I do not think about that at all. That place is more than a mere house, larger than a cultural cafe, roomier than a guest lounge, more appealing than a forum and cozier than a family nest. I did what I could to protect the house from confiscation. Do you know that what we feared would happen to the house almost did? Months after our nationalities were revoked, there was a Shura Council member called Fatima Al Kooheji who started to provoke [the authorities] and call for confiscating the families of stateless Bahrainis' houses. *"The families of those stripped of their nationalities should not be permitted to benefit from housing units after the head of the*

household is stripped of his nationality [...] If we revoke the head of the family's nationality and let his family stay, it is as if he did nothing [wrong [...]] This is unacceptable."

At the time, I wrote and posted a letter addressing her, which later promoted widespread reactions. The following is an excerpt from the letter:

To Fatima Al Kooheji,

Your address delivered yesterday to the Bahraini audience took me back to the discourse of Fascism that was founded by Mussolini. Similar to you, he was a teacher before he became a politician and his mother was a teacher too, yet he turned into a dictator while you became a servant of a dictator. You overdo the promotion of his arbitrary laws to prove your loyalty to him and his family.

Your father was granted his nationality according to the gazette in 1955, noting that he had an Indian citizenship. It does not concern me to prove if you or your family deserve the nationality, and I am not qualified to judge your patriotism. I also do not intend to shame your origin behind which I know stands a great nation that is worthy of having one express pride and honor to belong to it.

I am; however, concerned about fighting against your incitement, fueled with malice and hatred, against my nationality. I was born a Bahraini and you will not ever find in the state's official archives a record of my family being put on the list of naturalized citizens of non-Bahraini (Baharna) origin.

I lost my nationality by your favor and the legislative authority members' favor of the King's bale of inhumane decrees, just as the likes of you gave Mussolini their blessing in 1926 to pass "exceptional laws" that gave the government a wide-range of authorities allowing it to repress the opposition. Just as those prosecuted under the emergency Italian racial laws, who amounted to 450 persons, were exiled to three nearby islands in terrible condition, after your father was granted the Bahraini nationality, the National Union Committee activists were exiled to the island of Saint Helena and Abdulrahman Al-Baker was stripped of his nationality.

I am not sure if there was someone who called for targeting their families, like you did, when you demanded inflicting punishment on my little family: 16-year-old Bassel, 11-year-old Amaseel and their mother Fadaa. They lived in our home that we built in 2009, which I was forced to leave behind in 2011.

16. You told me to read the Amnesty International statement on the revocation of nationalities, and what Philip Luther, the Middle East and North Africa Director at Amnesty International, said caught my attention. “The authorities have provided the vaguest of reasons for the deprivation of nationality, which appears to have been taken on the basis of the victims' political views,” he said. How does the government make such serious decisions without providing clear justifications?

It is because if it was explicit, the government would be put in a critical situation. The obvious reason [for such decisions] is because their opinions and stances opposed that of the authorities. Generally, when the obvious reasons are missing, one resorts to vague ones to cover up the truth. Do you remember when I asked you why you did not memorize the multiplication table? You told me: who memorizes the multiplication table these days? You did not reveal the real reason so you would not embarrass yourself. You mentioned something vague so you could avoid embarrassment.

That is how the government acts. It cannot say the real reasons, so it states vague and general reasons, such as: They violated national unity, supported terrorism, betrayed their country and

incited people against the government. No one can prove and back these accusations and no one knows how, so they remain vague.

Should we apply these reasons for the revocation of your dad's nationality, do you find them to be clear? If I said the reason was terrorism, could you comprehend how your dad could be a terrorist or how he could practice terrorism? Would it be clear to you how your dad could betray his country? Do you live an excessively luxurious life that would imply that I was paid huge sums of money in return for my betrayal?

If there was one clear reason that the government would admit to and the world would understand, we wouldn't have needed to make this long discussion explaining to you why my nationality was revoked and what that means.

17. Is there a reason why they placed your photo next to the terrorist Turki Al-Binali's photo?

Yes, the list of those stripped of their nationalities was the second. It comprised 72 names, including four terrorists. My picture was placed on the front page of the newspaper beside the ISIS chief religious advisor Turki Al-Binali.

When we mix things up, they become blurred and difficult to understand and figure out. That is

what the government in Bahrain wants. It wants to prevent the world from seeing the truth behind what is happening. It mixed together the names of terrorists and the names of those who differ on political views and want to call for reform and change.

I write, give lectures and take part in seminars and conferences related to culture, literature as well as ideas and issues in society that involve people's lives. I left Bahrain during the declared state of emergency on April 11, 2011, after the authorities had arrested my friend Zakaria Al-Ashiri and tortured him to death for writing in Al-Dair blog and having views that demand change and giving people their rights.

As for Turki Al-Binali, he was giving religious lessons promoting violence, Takfir and extremism. Al-Binali also left Bahrain to join ISIS. He calls for killing people who have differing religious beliefs, does not acknowledge the Bahraini government and threatens to practice Jihad against it and overthrow it.

Is there any connection between them? Are we similar to each other? Is there something common between us that would make us be on the same list? There is nothing common between us but the government's desire to make the reason behind revoking nationalities vague to the world – not

only vague but also shocking to major international and human rights figures. One of these figures is Professor Sir Nigel Rodley, who passed away on January 25, 2017, a couple of days after starting our dialogue in this book. He was a member of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI). Thanks to this person, an international report was issued in November 2011, locally known as the Bassiouni report, which proves that we are not traitors, we have legitimate political demands and that the government committed torture and killings.

Following the first list of people stripped of their nationalities, Nigel said: *“I was admittedly surprised when I read that activists were deprived of their Bahraini nationalities after brief procedures. It is a slap in the face of human rights and a provocative step to poison the political atmosphere.”*

18. What harm could those deprived of their nationality cause to society if they kept their nationalities?

The government considers our activism in speaking and writing against it to be aggravating and harmful to it, yet it does not want to admit that. Hence, the government lies and states false reasons, by claiming we are a threat to society, cause divisions within society and compromise its unity and stability.

It wants to confine our movement and corner us. Stripping us of our nationality means that we cannot travel or even stay in any country with a legal status, as we no longer have any official identification papers. The government thinks that by doing so, it is protecting society from our menace, believing that it is the only way it can silence us and intimidate anyone who thinks about doing the same or carry on in the same path.

Having a nationality means that we are recognized citizens with rights – citizens who can speak of their country. All of this harms the government that wants to put an end to any movement that exposes its repression and tyranny.

Stripping of Citizenship

19. There is a subject I used to study in school back in Bahrain called “citizenship education”. Honestly, I do not remember what it was about or any of the topics it covered. However, when you asked me to read it again, I found that it addresses human rights in Islam and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Is the revocation of citizenship against human rights?

Let me introduce you to the writer and international activist Hannah Arendt (1906-1975). She was persecuted in the 1940s in Germany during Hitler’s rule, so she fled to France and then America, where she became a journalist, copyeditor and university professor. She was more concerned about what was taking place in the real world than devising theories. She wanted to figure out how Hitler rendered Germany a living hell of war, destruction, repression, persecution, imprisonment, and immigration, where intelligence forces hunted down and prosecuted people for their opinions, writings and beliefs. In many aspects,

this resembles what is happening to us in Bahrain. People are being arrested over a tweet, executed over suspicion, tortured over their opinions, and their homes violated at any moment. Thousands of Bahrainis are lingering behind bars, hundreds have been either expelled from the country or have immigrated, and dozens have been stripped of their citizenships.

The ruler, authorities and intelligence agencies carry out full-scale interference in everything; your thoughts, faith, political opinions and writings. You do not have any private space left in your mind, heart and land. Hannah described these governments that enforce their power on everything and intervene in all matters as totalitarian regimes, putting out her book entitled, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

Such regimes strip a human being of his humanity, uniqueness, individuality and differentness. They want people to be exactly like them in everything; to speak, think, feel and love as these regimes do, so that a person would become a mere robot in their hands. And if one does not do so, this person will be stripped of his citizenship and sent to his death. Such regimes strip you of your belonging to the human race, as they forbid you to be different, or strip you of your belonging to your homeland and citizens

of your country, thus stripping you of both your “citizenship” and nationality.

20. Is Bahrain deemed a totalitarian regime?

What is taking place in Bahrain is how a totalitarian regime would act, with a difference in the form, level and historical state. However, it has the same nature of a totalitarian regime. All authorities are in the hands of the King, fealty is sworn to his person and all newspapers glorify him. People are prosecuted for criticizing him, calumny and security forces determine the fates of citizens, torture is rife, human rights are violated, prisons are overcrowded, and night raids are launched against political dissidents. Neither independent media outlets are allowed nor the existence of a local opposition. Citizenships are revoked and death penalties are implemented in an unnatural manner.

“The Rights of Man, supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable—even in countries whose constitutions were based upon them—whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state,”⁽¹⁾ says Hannah in this book of hers.

I currently belong to those who are not citizens of any sovereign state. Citizenship is

¹ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 293.

a human right, thus every human being has the right to a citizenship. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) stipulates that this right cannot be denied. When this right is violated – when a government deprives a human being of his citizenship by revoking it for instance, it is threatening its international reputation.

A sovereign state has authority over its citizens, and imposes laws upon them. Citizens are obligated to abide by its rule and comply with its order. That; however, does not mean that it has the right to violate their rights recognized by the UDHR, for the state cannot exercise its sovereignty over such rights. Every sovereign state is obliged to allow its citizens to enjoy these rights, and when these rights are violated, the international community has the right to criticize, denounce and hold it accountable at the Human Rights Council (HRC). This is what happened to Bahrain, when the HRC issued 176 recommendations from different countries across the world, condemning Bahrain in 2012 for subjecting its citizens' rights to violations.

Citizenship is not ruled by a state's sovereignty. When it comes to human rights, no state has the right to deny its citizens these rights in the name of its sovereignty. When a national sovereignty does not protect its citizens, guarantee their rights

and preserve their dignity, it will shift into a sadist state, whose ruler derives pleasure from inflicting torture on his citizens.

21. You repeated the word “citizenship” multiple times. When we studied “citizenship education” at school, I did not comprehend the meaning of the title. What does “citizenship” mean? And how can “citizenship” be taught?

It is the relationship established between citizens of any state. Let me simplify the concept of citizenship for you. You and a group of your schoolmates formed a relationship between each other. You regularly meet with one another, thus creating a special sense of belonging to your group. Each individual in that group has a set of rights and responsibilities that need to be respected. When one of your friends becomes sick, you are all required to pay her a visit. When one of your birthdays comes up, you should celebrate it and offer that friend presents and when one of you needs help, you stand by her and lend her a hand. This urges you all to feel the need to pay back these acts of love, generosity and care. This is how a special bond of friendship bloomed between you. Citizenship is a kind of friendship between a larger number of people on the level of a state.

Having citizenship in a state makes every holder of this citizenship feel that he is respected, his dignity preserved, and that he has the right to defend his rights, call for reform and protest against any wrongdoing committed in his state. There is a code that includes all the laws of citizenship called the constitution. This constitution determines what you can and cannot do. No one is above the constitution. Even the ruler abides by the constitution, and if the sovereign does not respect it, the citizens have the right to stage demonstrations and protest against him. They also have the right to sign petitions in their names, which is a liberty recognized and guaranteed by the constitution.

A ruler who does not revere the right to citizenship is imprisoning his people and depriving them of freedom of expression. They are forced to sing the praises of the King, hold celebrations declaring their loyalty and pledging allegiance to him, and plastering his photos everywhere across the country. Allegiance; however, should be pledged to the country, the constitution and homeland and not to the ruler himself.

The constitution stipulates that the revocation of the Bahraini nationality by the ruler is not permissible unless in situations of great national betrayal and conspiracy against the country, and not when the citizen is calling for his rights.

This is underlined by Amnesty International, as it stated that passing a decision of revocation of nationality is reserved for the judiciary and not the executive authority represented by the Interior Minister, noting that a number of citizens deprived of their citizenships were never previously charged with anything linked to what the court ruling stripping them of their nationality was based on. The group also said that there were never any previous communications on the matter of this decision, investigations or even questioning and prosecution. I am one of those whose nationality was withdrawn for high treason without undergoing trial or even interrogation.

22. If the state treats its indigenous nationals, who hold no nationality other than that of Bahrain, in this manner then how could there be “citizenship education” when “citizenship” does not even exist there in the first place?

For instance, there is a constitution yet there is no constitutional life. There are elections yet there is no parliamentary life, and we have a king and oil yet we do not enjoy a royal life.

We do not have a maker of citizens, and as philosopher Gorgias says: *“As mortar-makers made mortar, so the Larissaeans «makers» made citizens of Larissa.”*

Still, the question is: Who is the maker of politicians? The people make politicians, for they are the ones who elect them, telling them, “you represent us, hence you should make laws that protect us, conform to our interests, maintain order, establish justice, and safeguard citizenship. This occurs in democratic states where the will of the people and their choices are respected, where the government feels that it is being held accountable by them and knows that if it does not make high-quality “mortars” [decisions], then the people will not elect it.

Look; however, at Bahrain, do we get to choose our politicians? Do we choose the prime minister? Do we choose the ministers? Do we have the power to change the government? Of course not. We do not make the politicians that rule us and that is why they do not represent our will. They are imposed on us. We are forced to obey them and follow the orders they make. They handle us as a mortar handles almond shells and onion heads; grounding them until they’re entirely crushed. They are not capable of resisting the mortar, since it is much stronger and exploiting its power over them, eventually reducing them into bits and pieces. Citizenship in our political system is pounded and crushed. We; therefore, live at the mercy of the politicians whom we do not elect. The mortar-maker is the king. He is the owner

of the system of citizenship and the citizens. He decides who should be granted a citizenship and whose citizenship should be withdrawn.

Citizenship demands a political system that is penned by the citizens. It requires politicians chosen by the citizens. It needs maintenance, supervision and protection through the citizens as well. If citizenship is not the making of citizens, then it is not [true] citizenship. It is a patronage, as in how a shepherd tends his sheep, or a property; just like how a farmer has ownership over his sheep as well as the trees and land in his farm.

The secret lies in the maker of citizens. The maker must not be a king, prince, sheikh, caliph or sultan. These figures do not make citizens, since they do not acknowledge the system of citizenship. To them, citizenship means that you should belong to their kind, and when they find that you do not fit in with their kind, they strip you of your citizenship.

Should the maker of citizens be empowered by the the citizens' will for a specified period of time, citizenship will mean that you belong to a kind, which is a nation of citizens who have elected their maker. That maker will not have the right to strip anyone of their citizenship, unless one betrays that nation of citizens and plots against its higher interests.

23. So what we study in “citizenship education” class has nothing to do with what we are going through in Bahrain?

Yes, that is right. It is safe to say that we do not have citizenship education, but rather political advertising (propaganda). I was left flabbergasted when I opened your sixth grade “citizenship education” book and found the definition of political advertising, which read: *“It is an attempt to convince a member of society to adopt certain political views, for instance influencing people to vote for a certain candidate in the elections. Political advertising can be more persuasive and influential if based on the truth and facts, whereas if founded on falsehood and fabrications, it will not reach its goals, since it will not earn the people’s trust.”*

Totalitarian regimes, according to Arendt, employ the media to serve their interest, generating and spreading lies and fabrications, and every dictator has a false political propaganda champion. When Hitler established the Nazi dictatorship in Germany in 1933, Paul Joseph Goebbels⁽¹⁾ was his propaganda minister. His ministry was named the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. The Nazis

¹ Famous quotes attributed to him: “When I hear the word ‘culture’, I reach for my revolver,” and “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.”

skillfully used education, films and journalism to create and direct the public opinion, which is the best example of the use of political propaganda in modern history.

During the rule of despot Saddam Hussein, Mohammad Saeed Al-Sahhaf, who served as both Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs and Information Minister, was at his side. He was well-known for his press conferences, during which he declared the successive triumphs of the Iraqi forces whilst the US ground troops were advancing steadily on the Iraqi capital Baghdad. In his last press conference on the day Baghdad fell in 2003, Al-Sahhaf claimed that American soldiers “were committing suicide by the hundreds at the gates of Baghdad.”

In Bahrain, by the dictator’s side stood journalists Saeed Al-Hamad and Sawsan Al-Shaer as well as Information Minister Samira Rajab.

These were the most prominent promoters of the political propaganda serving the dictatorship. They fabricated a narrative alleging that the February 14 movement targets the Sunni component as a whole, not the regime, and that it is a scheme dictated by a foreign agenda for the purpose of establishing the Wilayat Al-Faqih rule. They also accuse the protestors of being traitors,

agents, plotters, saboteurs, terrorists, gang of occupiers, murderers and Safavids that should be fired from their jobs. Calls for the revocation of citizenships in the form of popular demands come as part of this political propaganda.

24. Does this mean that the political propaganda divided society, thus turning citizenship education into an education of hatred?

This political propaganda has killed [the concept] of citizenship and disfigured its corpse before the public eye. It spread hatred and “citizenship education” curricula continued to be taught in schools, merely as a political propaganda whitewashing the King and his family’s image and commending his achievements, casting a veil over the reality of events taking place, from atrocious violations of human rights to the annihilation of citizenship and the homeland. What attests to this is the fact that neither mention of the fierce crisis tearing the country since 2011 could be found in these curricula, nor any reference to the statements and reports of international human rights organizations that condemn the practices of the government in Bahrain. The curricula talk about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, stating that one of its principles is to “*protect [the citizen] from any assault on or violation of his rights.*” They; however, do not speak of the violations of the Bahraini citizen’s rights

in 2011 documented in the Bassiouni (BICI) report, the findings of which the King himself publically acknowledged. The curricula also do not mention the atrocities in Jaw Prison which was addressed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and Amnesty International. A novel was even published under the title “Jaw⁽¹⁾,” which was read by the young before the old in Bahrain to learn about the heinousness of the crimes committed, violating the humanness of prisoners.

25. In countries around the world, a citizenship is granted to a person who was born to a citizen parent, and in some it is enough to be born in the country itself to have the right to a citizenship, so how is it that in Bahrain, Bahraini children are being deprived and fathers stripped of the Bahraini citizenship?

“Citizens are not sprung from the earth or the womb; nationality is not genetic.”⁽²⁾ Nationality is a matter of civilization as is human rights which reflect development and how it varies between societies. For instance, there are countries that consider that birth within their territories allows

¹ A novel written by a political prisoner, recounting the torments of March 10, 2015 that he encountered in Central Jaw Prison in Bahrain. It was published by Bahrain Mirror and was well-received, gaining great popularity.

² Quote by Jacqueline Stevens, a political science professor at Northwestern University and author of *States Without Nations: Citizenship for Mortals*

a child to be entitled to a citizenship, but the details of the matter vary from one country to the other. If a child is born in Canada, he shall acquire the right to a citizenship straightaway, even if his parents are non-citizens. When a child is born to a Bahraini father, he shall be instantly granted a citizenship as well naturally, yet in the anomaly we are now experiencing, it is different. When one's Bahraini father, for political reasons, is imprisoned, pursued, expelled, displaced, has immigrated and sought refuge, and is now living abroad, – in all these cases – the security authorities interfere in an uncivilized manner disrespectful of human rights and obstruct his child's acquirement of a citizenship, and even render the issuing of a birth certificate an arduous process, given that the child was not banned from receiving one.

Citizenship is not genetic, such as the state of being a male or female, an Arab, Persian, Chinese or Indian. Citizenship is a law made by man as part of a system governing the state politically. It is a citizen's identification card in his country, determining his rights and obligations. It is also a national's identification card around the world, needed as he travels from one country to another.

Nationality laws in one country differ from that in another. The development of the system of citizenship in a certain country determines

the development of the nationality system in that state. For instance, in Bahrain there is a person, who is the king, who is in control of the nationality system, granting the citizenship to whomever he wishes and withdrawing that of others. In Canada; however, there is neither a king nor ruler who does that. There is the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), a Canadian federal government department, established in 1994, which supervises all matters relating to immigration and citizenship according to a clear set of terms.

26. You said you once wrote an article in a letter form addressed to a member of parliament and mentioned my name. What does the parliament in Bahrain have to do with the revocation of your citizenship?

The parliament should be elected by the people and should defend the people. Its mission is to monitor the government's actions and set laws for it, aimed at serving the people. Nonetheless, like I told you, in totalitarian regimes, everything yields to the ruler and corresponds to what he wants, for the will of the regime encompasses all and all answer to it.

In Bahrain, the executive authority is vested in the King and Prime Minister. The Council of Ministers (Cabinet) is appointed by a royal decree.

The legislative authority is vested in the King and National Assembly (Bahraini Parliament), which is composed of the Council of Representatives (the lower house) and the Consultative (Shura) Council (the upper house). Members of the Shura Council are appointed by the King. The judiciary also issues its rulings in the King's name and members of the Supreme Judicial Council are appointed by the King as well.

You can find this information in the "citizenship education" school book for first grade. You can notice here that the King's power is inclusive of all executive, legislative and judicial authorities. Nevertheless, the book says that the ruling system in Bahrain is based on the separation and independence of powers. Hannah Arendt says that this is a totalitarian despotic regime where all authorities are in the King's grasp, while the "citizenship education" book says that the ruling system in Bahrain is democratic. Should we believe the expert in totalitarianism or a totalitarian regime's political agenda?

The Council of Representatives or Parliament in Bahrain represents the people in form; however, in substance it only represents the King, as everything in a totalitarian state represents the monarch or is allied to him

in its nature. In Summer of 2013 before we celebrated your 10th birthday, the King ordered the Parliament members to assemble although they were on holiday. They convened an extraordinary session on July 28 for the purpose of confronting a peaceful protest event, which was described as a “rebellion”. In this historic session, they issued a recommendation which stipulates “*stripping all perpetrators and instigators of terrorist crimes of the Bahraini citizenship.*”

27. Did you ever imagine that after a year and a half that recommendation would put you on the list of those stripped of their nationalities?

Not at all. It never crossed my mind that this recommendation would add me to a list of perpetrators and instigators of terrorist crimes. It was naive of me to think that my message and means as a writer would not allow me to make it to this list, no matter how much they manipulate the definition of terrorism and instigation of terrorism. I also made a naive underestimation of what I was doing; I thought that the government was frustrated at the people on the ground and the political activists who constantly appear in the media, and that I was not one of them.

28. Did the King need this recommendation in order to withdraw your citizenship?

No, he did not need it, for he had issued the first list of Bahrainis stripped of their citizenship on November 7, 2012, which consisted of 31 citizens, including two former MPs. He does not need such a recommendation, but he wanted to give his decisions a sense of formality, to give the impression that he does not take any action without referring to the constitutional statutory bodies. Furthermore, he wanted to give the Parliament a role in broadening the citizenship revocation law, so that it would be an associate in this act. Hence, the revocation of citizenships would seem as if it is a popular demand, since those who broadened this law are the representatives of the people.

It is noteworthy to highlight France's experience following the terrorist attacks that targeted its capital Paris on November 13, 2015, leaving 130 people killed and hundreds of others injured. In this serious security case, a citizenship revocation bill was proposed in the French Parliament. It was subjected to extensive discussion and it eventually was not passed. Do you know what the French President François Hollande said in his speech at the end of 2016 coinciding with the end of his term?

He announced that he will not run for a second

term and expressed that his only regret during his presidential tenure was that he suggested the citizenship revocation bill. Notice how serious this matter is, which is being taken lightly in Bahrain. Notice how a president of a major country is voicing his regret, not because he passed a citizenship revocation law but because he proposed it.

Do you know what the French Justice Minister Christiane Taubira's reaction was?

She resigned and deemed the bill an ineffective punishment and discriminatory against French nationals of foreign origins.

29. Does this mean that the people stripped you of your citizenship, not the King?

This is what the King wants to imply. That is why the supporters of the citizenship revocation measures reiterate that it was done according to the law, that the law was subject to the Parliament, and that justice took place.

There is a Bahraini MP called Sawsan Taqawi who backed the recommendation of citizenship revocation, although her slogan during the supplementary election in 2011, following Al-Wefaq Society's withdrawal from the Parliament, was "*citizens' rights are our purpose*"!!

I believe she perceives a citizen's rights to be within the scope of the most basic rights to food, water and housing. I do not think she takes a citizen's rights to dignity, equality and freedom to criticize and object into consideration. The proof of that is that she did not only voice her absolute support for stripping anti-government Bahraini citizens of their nationality and issuing a recommendation "*to not include perpetrators of terrorist acts [political dissidents] in the royal pardon for penalties,*" when she was an MP and appointed by the King in the Shura Council, she also highlighted these recommendations as achievements and lauded its transformation into Law No. (21) of 2014 by the amendment of some provisions of the Bahraini Citizenship Act of 1963. An article of this act stipulates that the Bahraini citizenship may be withdrawn on request of the Interior Minister and approval by the Cabinet from any Bahraini national who causes harm to interests of the Kingdom or behaves in a way that contradicts the duty of loyalty towards it.

This is how an authoritarian regime operates. The regime turns everyone into channels expressing what it wants, mirroring its every move and complying with its stances. Hence, journalists lose their power to monitor and write about the government's faults, and writers also lose their courage to oppose government decisions. Neither

does the parliament have independence to monitor the performance of the government, nor do judges have an independent conscience to rule by the voice of justice. Everyone; therefore, becomes an advocate, apologist and defender of the decision to revoke citizenship.

30. Did this law adversely affect nationals residing in Bahrain or just those living abroad?

The financial costs are difficult for everyone, whether at home or abroad. This law issued in July 2014 first targeted nine Bahraini youths inside the country.

On August 6, 2014, the Fourth Criminal Supreme Court decided to withdraw the Bahraini nationality from nine defendants, after the charges raised against them were changed from “illegal gathering” to “forming a terrorist organization”, based on the recently amended “Terrorism Act”, which was an unprecedented move. With this ruling, the number of denaturalized Bahrainis increased to 40 at the time.

This ruling was a shock to the parents of the nine young men whose nationalities were revoked. They were aware of the fake justice of the judiciary in Bahrain, as described by Amnesty International, and accustomed to its unjust and

exaggerated sentences, but they were not yet used to the revocation of their sons' nationality and the questioning of their identity and eligibility for keeping it.

They felt that their citizenship has been wounded – a feeling that goes beyond the bitterness of being subjected to oppression and injustice. In their first statement, they declared that “Bahrain is their land and the land of their forefathers, and that revoking the nationalities of their sons does not strip them of their emotional belonging to Bahrain and its people, whether in the past, present or future, demanding the reinstatement of their sons' citizenships.”

Revoking the citizenship of one's son is an act of questioning its authenticity. It is similar to questioning one's honor, as if the government is telling the people that these youths are fatherless and that they do not belong to our homeland, as if they have no lineage or kin.

It was striking to me to see a case involving a son and his father, as the father, 53-year-old Hasan Adam Qaher, was sentenced to five years in prison but his nationality was not revoked, while the son, 23-year-old Ali Hassan Adam Qaher, was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment and stripped of his citizenship.

One does not know how to condole. Should one condole the son for his father's ordeal, condole the father for his son's adversity, condole the devastated family for losing both their son and breadwinner, or condole Bahrain for losing its sons?

Ali will not be able to see his homeland. He will in fact get out of prison without eyesight, since he lost seventy percent of his vision as a result of a retinal degenerative disease, which will lead to complete vision loss over the years, according to doctors. He has also lost his citizenship and will not be able to return to his university in India to resume his studies. This is how MP Taqawi reinforces the aim behind her slogan, "*citizens' rights are our purpose*"!

Fate; however, saved these nine Bahrainis from the decision to strip them of their citizenships. During an appeals court hearing held on January 27, 2015, the verdict ordering the revocation of their citizenships was annulled, since the act over which they were convicted took place before the amendment made to the "Terrorism Act", which stipulates withdrawing the citizenship in case of conviction.

Nonetheless, this law was destined to compensate for these nine Bahrainis with nine

others before the appeals court verdict was issued. On September 29, 2014, nine Bahraini nationals were stripped of their Bahraini nationality and sentenced to life imprisonment by a court order based on the “Terrorism Act”.

Stripping of the Judiciary

31. Will you file a lawsuit to get your nationality back?

I was neither stripped of my nationality in court, for me to bring my case to court, nor was that decision made by a judge. My nationality was revoked by Royal Decree No. (8) of 2015. Nonetheless, I assigned lawyer Mohammed Al-Tajer, a human rights defender, to raise a case on my behalf. I asked him to do, so that I would have taken the necessary procedures. A number of those stripped of their nationalities requested that he do that as well. Thus he has filed lawsuit No. 8/6599/2015/02. The court responded by rejecting the case. I was struck by what was written at the beginning of the court's decision:

In the name of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, King of Bahrain;

In the hearing held publically at the First Supreme Civil Court on December 7, 2015;

Presided by Judge Juma'a Al-Mousa

With the memberships of Judge Ashraf Abdulhadi

And Judge Dr. Mohammad Tawfiq Al-Majid

The decision to revoke the citizenship was issued by a decree in the King's name, and the request to look into it was rejected by virtue of the King's name. Everything in our country is done in the name of the King. Our homeland is where the King is, as everything in the country is in his grasp. It is a totalitarian regime as we called it. He who wants to belong to the homeland must belong to the King. "Citizenship education" means teaching allegiance to the King and his family. Citizenship is granted on the basis of one's allegiance to the King who owns this whole country. Therefore, a complaint in court is deemed a complaint against the King himself and filed to him as well, which means that the King is both the legal opponent and the judge.

32. As long as Bahrain is a kingdom, is it not then normal to have everything be in the King's name and under his control?

No, it is not normal to have everything be in the King's name. The judiciary must be in the name of judges. A judge must speak in his own name and the name of justice, with which his conscience is entrusted. The judiciary must

be independent in order to ensure that justice is served, and not tampered with.

The parliament must also be a spokesperson of the people and not the King. A member of parliament should speak in the name of the people, who elected him, not in the King's name. The King has taken over the parliament to have it enact a law that opens a door wide open for the revocation of citizenships, and he has taken over the judiciary so that it would rule in favor of every issued decree of his, withdrawing a nationality. He has made everything in his name, and under his command and will.

In democratic constitutional monarchies, matters carried out in the name of the king are of honorary nature only. However in totalitarian autocratic monarchies, matters carried out in the king's name are done based on the king's intervention, serving his interest, will and power. The King proudly boasts that he is transformed from a prince who governs a state to a king who rules a kingdom. He says that we are now in the ranks of long-standing constitutional monarchies, such as Canada and Britain.

What he says is just false political propaganda, for in constitutional monarchies everything is not in the hands of the king. He does not involve

himself in the parliament and does not have the right to interfere in the judiciary. The king in these countries neither rules, intervenes in laws, nor revokes nationalities. He is merely a symbol of the state. He attends celebrations, charity events, horse race competitions, and opens flower and art exhibitions. You can look up Queen Elizabeth II and Hamad bin Isa on Google to find out the activities she takes part in and compare the authority she has to the set of powers that the King of Bahrain has.

33. Can we file a lawsuit against the king over the revocation of your citizenship?

We can not raise a case against the King. Article (33-a) of the Constitution states that the King is the head of state and its supreme representative, whose person is inviolate. “He is the loyal protector of religion and the homeland, and the symbol of national unity.

The King’s person is inviolate so are his words, decisions, decrees and family, and every person who follows him becomes inviolate as well. The King must not be touched by either your spoken words, written opinions or in any other way. If you wrote something criticizing the King, you would be considered to be violating the constitution, and that means you would subsequently be punished, as was the case of many Tweeters.

When the lawyer raised the case, in which he objected to the decision to revoke my nationality, he did not file it against the King, according to the official lawsuit record. When I reviewed the official papers, I found the following written on the front page:

First Defendant: General Directorate of Nationality, Passports and Residence

Second Defendant: Interior Minister

Representative of Defendants: State Cases Authority (which is affiliated with the Justice Ministry and specializes in representing the government in courts)

34. Can judges rule against the King's decree?

Of course not, as the judicial system is linked to the Justice Ministry which is under the King's control. To justify their support for the decision to revoke citizenship and refusal of any appeal against it, the judges say: *"The decision to revoke citizenship is within the scope of the state's [the king's] discretion, which is exercised in light of what public interest considerations dictate and indications thereof without being challenged by the administrative judiciary."*

The King considers the revocation of nationality to be one of the competencies of his

sovereignty, for he is the sovereign of the state and what he issues is deemed a decisive and final ruling, not an administrative decision, which the judiciary can object to and challenge.

This means that we can go to court and object to decisions issued by the head of a school, the Ministry of Education or the Northern Governorate municipality under which our house that we left in Bahrain is listed, yet we cannot object to a decree by the King, revoking my nationality and stripping me of my authority over my property.

That is why the lawyer filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of Interior, General Directorate of Nationality and State Cases Authority as a formality only, in order to prove that we tried to resort to Bahraini courts, and to prove that these courts responded to us according to the formal law.

35. What did the judges say? What are the evidence they provided proving you are eligible for denaturalization?

They said that the request to repeal the decree of nationality revocation was based on unsound grounds, and therefore it is a “decline-worthy” request.

They said that the decision to revoke nationality

is based on any incident or presumption that results in it without being restricted by a certain means of proof. This means that one can, for instance, be punished for being seen outside the house, without any need to prove that this person did any wrongdoing. That is the reason why I do not know how to answer those who ask me: Why was your nationality revoked? I tell them that no one told me why, I did not receive a message stating the reason, and there was no case raised in court accusing me of anything.

Perhaps the King saw me outside the house once and decided that I deserved to be stripped of my nationality. Since the King is inviolate and immune from being questioned, we can not ask the King why, subjecting his person to insult or embarrassment. Perhaps the Interior Minister saw me participating in a symposium and informed the King that I said something indicating my high treason.

The judges also say that *“the administrative body in this regard has a broad discretionary power that is not subject to judicial oversight so long as its decision is not based on an abuse of power.”*

I do not know who they are referring to as (the administrative body). Is it the parties against

which the lawyer raised a case, i.e. the Interior Ministry, General Directorate of Nationality and the State Cases Authority? I do not think they mean these parties, for if it is indeed these parties, then the case raised by the lawyer would have been rejected from the start, since the judges said that this administrative body is not subject to the judiciary. I think what they mean by the administrative body is the King, but they consider that mentioning him here subjects his inviolate person to embarrassment or insult.

36. Is there something that proves they are referring to the King?

What confirms that they are referring to the King as the administrative body is the fact that the judges also said that the reasons that justify the revocation of nationality are not of significance, as the issuance of citizenship revocation orders is subject to the will of the competent authority [the King]. We can not doubt what the King decides and what pleases him: *“No matter what the case may be regarding the reasons that may justify revoking the nationality of the plaintiffs, the matter, before and after, shall remain subject to what the competent authority [the King] decides [pleases] in the revocation of citizenship.”*

The judges do not know the real reasons and

have no evidence or facts to prove that I deserve to be stripped of my nationality, and there is no case raised against me in court. There is only their content with the King's judgement as well as their faith that he would not deviate in his power to what would harm the country and its citizens.

When these judges failed to prove the reason behind the revocation of our nationality, they wrote a general title that did not mean anything, *“Carrying out some activities and actions that cause harm to the interests of the Kingdom and contradict the duty of allegiance to it,”* and demanded us to prove that we were targeted for political reasons. *“The plaintiffs did not provide any evidence that their citizenship was revoked over political or religious reasons, or reasons related to gender or race,”* they said.

37. What is the meaning of his inviolate person?

After February 14, 2011, the people acquired the courage to criticize the King and raised the slogan (Down, Down Hamad), until it became a popular anthem whose rhythm the people memorized and performed with different instruments while they laughed. The King felt that his character was disrespected, and violated, which is the opposite meaning of inviolate. He; therefore, wanted to regain his prestige, so he imposed the emergency

law and summoned the Peninsula Shield forces⁽¹⁾. This; however, did not restore his prestige. People returned to the streets and chanted the (Down, Down Hamad) slogan. Activists on Twitter did not stop criticizing the King's measures, speeches and statements, ridiculing him, especially when he makes unconvincing statements that are far from reality.

38. I know the “Down, Down Hamad” slogan. I used to hear it a lot, but why don’t I see it a lot on Instagram now?

British experts advised the King to use the law to punish his opponents. As I told you; just like he broadened the citizenship revocation law as a cruel punishment, he also used the law to toughen the penalties against those who criticize his person or ridicule his statements. He passed a law that punishes whoever publicly insults him with up to seven years in prison and a fine of up to BD 10,000 (USD 26,500), and that punishment is toughened if the insult was made in the King’s presence. This penalty is an amendment to the Bahraini Penal Code issued in 1976 in Article (214).

The article in the old version of the law

¹ 1,200 Saudi military troops and 800 Emirati soldiers entered Bahrain under the banner of the Peninsula Shield Force on March 15, 2011 upon the request of the Bahraini government, and took part in the crackdown on protestors.

stipulates that a prison sentence shall be imposed on whoever insults the King without specifying the duration of the sentence. Under the Criminal Code, any penalty of imprisonment shall range between ten and three years unless otherwise specified. The MPs also had a hand in amending the law so that more citizens could be denaturalized. They have made a substantial effort in broadening this law so that many citizens would be imprisoned and prosecuted. What a shame it is to read what they said in the Parliament in November 2012 for the sake of legislating this law.

During the discussion of the proposal, the majority of the MPs participated with interventions that not only supported the new law, but also called for more, demanding further sanctions.

“The King, according to the Constitution, is the head of state and its supreme representative, whose person is inviolate. He is the loyal protector of religion and the homeland, and the symbol of national unity. One cannot accept the abhorrent statements that these terrorists fabricate. This law must be approved by the Parliament, and all deterrent legislations must be enacted against the acts committed by those who have been deceived,” said MP Ahmad Al-Mulla.

For his part, MP Hassan Al-Dosari said: “I see that the proposed punishment is not commensurate

with the size of the offense. Five years of imprisonment is not enough. I think that the punishment should be 10 years of imprisonment. As for the fine, which amounts to 10,000 dinars. it is not a large amount to them.”

As for MP Abdullah bin Huwail, he said: “This proposal is of particular significance. It has come at the right time or perhaps late, as the offenses have began to increase since February of last year.”

MP Latifah Al-Qa'ud also expressed her full support for the proposal and said: “It is one of the most beautiful and best proposals. I can even say that it is the number one among the legal proposals submitted from the previous session. It is also a popular demand because freedom of expression does not mean making insults and offenses. These terrorist have responded to favors with ingratitude and generosity with treason, so these penalties against them must be toughened.”

As you can see, the MPs reiterate what the King wants, not what the people want. They approve the laws and amendments that broaden the jurisdiction of the King and his state bodies, at the expense of the interests and freedom of the people. They do not mind at all even if he wanted to change an article in the Constitution that would

allow him to further take over the state and oppress the people.

39. Does the saying, “Royals more than the king himself” apply to them?

It absolutely applies to them, especially if you know that in February 2012, ten months before the law was issued, King Hamad bin Isa was interviewed by the German Der Spiegel newspaper. When the journalist asked him: “Your Majesty, what would happen if we were to shout: ‘Down with the King?’”, King Hamad said: “They do shout it on the streets. As I emphasized in my speech last year, this is not a reason to imprison someone. It’s just a case of manners. But when they shout: ‘Down with the king and up with Khomeini,’ that’s a problem for national unity.”

Elliott Abrams, a researcher interested in the subject of Bahrain, comments by saying: “By that standard the King should be protesting the abuse of the statute to imprison people who ‘offend’ him so long as they do not then shout their loyalty to Iran.”

He notes that there are three problems with this statute. First, it is ambiguous: the law only says “A prison sentence shall be the penalty for any person who offends the emir of the country...”. But what is an insult to the King? Does a speech

criticizing his handling of public affairs “offend” him? A speech condemning him for human rights abuses? A speech criticizing him for failing to fire his uncle the prime minister? Slogans at a demonstration? It is unfair to imprison people when the bounds of acceptable criticism are in fact unknown.

Pursuant to this statute, a court sentenced Zainab Al-Khawaja to three years in prison and fined her a sum of BD 3,000 (USD 7,950) over the charge of “insulting the King” after she tore up a picture of him inside a Bahraini court in October 2014.

Commenting on the issue, Amnesty International said: “Tearing up a photo of the head of state should not be a criminal offense.”

Stripping of Journalism

40. Baba, you used to write in the press in Bahrain and I used to see your picture in the newspapers before I entered school. Frankly, I do not understand your writings, but I understood what you wrote about Mama Salama. How could it be that no one defended you in these newspapers?

Yes, no one. Newspapers in Bahrain do not defend anyone, for they do not have the authority to do so. They say that the press is an authority and a power just as the judiciary is an authority and a power and the Parliament is an authority and a power. However, as I told you, in a totalitarian regime, there is no authority and power but the authority and power of the ruler. Newspapers in Bahrain are powerless with no authority, and even no message.

Just as the King and his family destroyed social harmony and spread the culture of fear, skepticism, calumny and hatred among the people, they destroyed the press and journalists. They cast them into the depths of instigation, fabrication,

falsity and eating of people's flesh [backbiting]. The press has stripped us of our nationality. We are no longer one nation having common characteristics, traditions and values. We no longer have common issues that unite us. We do not even all agree on the Constitution. There is no mosque that renders us one body, where every person feels compassion for another. We have become divided on everything – extremely and conflictingly divided.

Let me tell you what was published in newspapers, inciting the revocation of the nationalities of government policy opponents. In the first month of the National Safety Law (Emergency Law) i.e. in April 2011, the Alayam newspaper published a statement by the Al Saaf Islamic Society, which called for stripping of nationalities and retribution: “Al Saaf Islamic Society (SAAF) appealed for taking necessary measures to revoke the Bahraini nationality of the perpetrators, who have attempted to harm state security and the safety of its citizens and residents on its territory, whether by instigation, implementation or active participation in undermining the integrity of the state [...] The Society also stressed that the state bodies, after conducting fair trials for such people, should publish their photos and confessions via local media outlets, calling on the competent authorities

to carry out public retribution, according to the Islamic Shariah law⁽¹⁾.”

In this context, the Islamic Al Asalah Society also issued a statement, which was published in Akhbar Al-Khaleej newspaper, demanding the revocation of citizenships and retribution: “Amid the exceptional circumstances the Kingdom of Bahrain has went through since February 14, 2011, and what they led to, subjecting the country's security to an unprecedented threat and putting it on the brink civil war, [...] we call on the commander in chief in his capacity as the one lawfully competent and authorized to order the National Safety state [law], to implement Article 10, clause (c) of the Citizenship Act, which stipulates that it is permissible to revoke the Bahraini nationality of whomever caused harm to the security of the state, as a necessary legal measure to punish anyone involved, whether by instigation, implementation or participation in any way in threatening the security of the country, regardless of his position, title or occupation, in order to enforce the law and maintain the security of Bahrain⁽²⁾.”

Similarly, president of the National Walaa (Loyalty) Society, Sharikh bin

¹ Alayam Newspaper, Edition 8026, Friday 1, April, 2011.

² Alayam Newspaper, Edition 8025, Thursday 31, March, 2011.

Saif Al-Dosari, issued a statement, which was published in Al-Watan newspaper, calling for the same demands. Also, the Salafist MP Jassem Al-Saidi followed suit. This is how newspapers stood together in a united front and adopted a single rhetoric, demanding that the people who oppose them in their political view be stripped of their citizenships, punished and retaliated against, also associating them with attributes of betrayal and treason.

The press reiterated these attributes on a daily basis and threatened those, who were associated with these attributes, that they will either end up being imprisoned, tortured, dismissed from their jobs, stripped of their nationality or killed. Through the reiteration of these attributes, they [the attributes] become confirmed and validated as a fact not as false political propaganda. Subsequently, honor and treason become defined. The traitor becomes the citizen who demonstrated in the Pearl Roundabout and raised slogans against the government, while the good citizen becomes the one who participated in Al-Fateh rally and held up pictures of the King, Prime Minister and Crown Prince, and informed the Ministry of the Interior and intelligence services about his neighbors, colleagues or classmates who went to the roundabout. Treason here is to write something

contrary to what the government wants you to write, and allegiance to the homeland is to chant the King's name and participate in dances and parades, waving a sword in an expression of dedication to the King's customs, traditions and celebrations. The majority of citizens were stripped of their honor, allegiance to the country and entitlement to citizenship, so they were taken to prison and subjected to abuse, displacement and revocation of their nationality.

41. Did someone attack you in the press?

As I explained to you, newspapers launched inflammatory campaigns to prepare the public for what the government will do to the people. I believe that the first piece of paper placed in the case that was being built for the purpose of revoking my nationality was (Al-Dairy .. New Al-Waqt newspaper [emerges] from the plains of Lebanon). This was the title of a newspaper column written by Aqeel Swar, with whom I had a special friendship since 2001. We used to meet a lot in his home with a group of common friends, and I met his wonderful family. I still consider those to be beautiful days and worth recalling. However, as I told you, the government in Bahrain divided society very deeply, and did not leave common grounds where people could meet, so writers and journalists were either compelled

to join the government's camp or wanted to, or were actually outbidders of "loyalty" to the government. The government stripped them of their journalistic identity, so they became writers serving in its royal court, or "drummers" as we call them in popular speech. They do not have the same journalism ethics that call for defending society, the truth, freedom and citizens. This is confirmed by the decline in the classification of Bahrain in the world press freedom index. Reporters Without Borders ranked Bahrain on the Press Freedom Index for 2009 at 119. Its ranking dropped to 144 in 2010, and then to 173 in 2011 out of 178 countries worldwide.

The article by veteran journalist Aqeel Swar was as a public calumny or security information report similar to the reports filed by those who informed the police about their colleagues at work. It is a culture that has proliferated in Bahrain since 2011. Why do I describe it as a calumny? It is because the security authorities were looking for the one behind the Bahrain Mirror newspaper, a well-known online newspaper established during the emergency law state (National Safety state) that gained a professional, popular and distinctive position. Swar's article came to provide the alleged answer to the intelligence services: *"I am writing this to let Al-Dairy and his team face their moral accountability for falsely covering up, in return*

for material gain, Al-Wefaq's media projects that will be launched abroad, and will include a rich satellite channel with a modern touch [...] It will not differ in essence from what we have seen so far of the contributions of Bahrain Mirror, which is led by Al-Dairy with Wefaqi members and means. Bahrain Mirror with its false flavor is a station from where Al-Dairy will then head, along with his team, from the remnants of Al-Waqt newspaper whose bankruptcy and closure they caused towards running a media project called (The New Waqt 'time')⁽¹⁾”.

Months later, I was banned from entering Egypt, where I discussed my doctoral dissertation months before the February 14, 2011 uprising, and lived for six months after the National Safety period in Bahrain. The message to me was clear. It was Aqeel Swar's column passing over and reaching Arab intelligence services.

Here the banner of another journalist, with whom I had a professional relationship and shared an enlightening cultural message, was given away. He is Saeed Al-Hamad, who wrote: *“It is no surprise that the so-called Ali Al-Dairy, after living in voluntary exile for months in silence and working behind the scenes out of fear of being*

¹ Aqeel Swar, Al-Watan Newspaper, Edition 2014 Thursday 16, June, 2011.

put in the spotlight of the [TV] screens as he has become accustomed to walking in mites and then coming out seeking heroism, has come out to claim that the Government of Bahrain instructed the authorities in Egypt and the concerned parties about the Book exhibition held there to prevent him from entering Egyptian territory and to ban his book⁽¹⁾. ”

Saeed Al-Hamad wrote this article five days after I was officially denied entry to Egypt. This was the first ban on a Bahraini for a political reason following the Arab Spring events. Afterwards, a large number of Bahraini activists were banned. Following this ban, I was certain that my file had already been opened by the intelligence services, especially after an Egyptian security officer told me that my name was added to a list of threats to national security. When I did not comprehend the meaning of that, he said to me that this is more dangerous than being a threat to home security. He then asked me: “What have you done?” I told him: “A PhD degree in Egypt.”

Saeed Al-Hamad did not respect dissimilarity, so he used a vulgar language, reflecting the language that the Bahraini press had come to after 2011, *“For God’s sake, find yourself another*

¹ Saeed Al-Hamad, Alayam Newspaper, Edition 8331 Tuesday, January 31, 2012.

“trick”. Bahrain did not seek to deny your gang and people entry to Egypt, Lebanon or other countries, as it left them move about freely [...] Why would it target you out of all those who caw, curse and insult.. Why would the Bahraini authorities make a move against you specifically.. My brother, be modest and play another card, for you are a player in the choir of curse words and insults⁽¹⁾.”

I would ask myself what Saeed Al-Hamad said so rudely: Who am I to be marked as a target by the Bahraini government and to have its agencies take action and ban me from entering Egypt. I; however, stopped wondering on the day when I discovered it was so small that it stripped me of my nationality.

42. Did you try to release something in the press in Bahrain?

I remember, after publishing my book “Texts of Monstrosity from the Orthodoxy of Seljuks to the Salafism of Ibn Taymiyyah” in the summer of 2015, I was awaiting the release of my interview about the book. A journalist friend who works in the cultural department of a Bahraini newspaper told me that the editorial board apologizes for not publishing the interview, because I was critical of

¹ Saeed Al-Hamad, Alayam Newspaper, Edition 8331 Tuesday, January 31, 2012.

Ibn Taymiyyah, as Ibn Taymiyyah has followers in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, who are more defensive and passionate about him than they are about the Quran. Ibn Taymiyyah is a extremist and fanatical figure who died 700 years ago.

I am no longer a man of words in the Bahraini press, as I am not allowed to write in the press and it is forbidden to write about my books. It is not permissible as well to conduct an interview with me about my books. I have become a subject of insult and defamation. Ironically, Alayam, which led the libel campaign against me, is the newspaper that published my first article after I graduated from the university. The newspaper at the time had announced a writing contest, and I won first place. I continued to write in it and contribute to the Roa cultural addendum after the mid-nineties until the establishment of Al-Waqt newspaper in 2006.

43. What was written against you in the Bahraini press?

With his infamous obscene language, Saeed Al-Hamad under the title “A Film Biography of an Intellectual from the Roundabout”, wrote sarcastically: *“The Roundabout intellectual could not take off the robe of his rural mentality, which he had worn for three decades during which the countryside attempted to ruralize the city,*

benefitting without doubt from the deterioration of the enlightenment culture, and taking advantage of the influence of the rural mentality in its most backward manifestations [...] He did not have the mentality to escape despite the modernist and postmodernist headlines that he resounded, pounding on our heads⁽¹⁾.”

Singing the same tune, the Saudi Ishaq Al-Sheikh wrote an article in the same newspaper in which he repeated my name 18 times, and in almost all of these repetitions no correct information was mentioned: *“On the day the roundabout collapsed under the feet of the sectarian mercenaries, a group of Bahraini intellectuals – only a handful – fled the country trembling in fear and wetting their pants out of terror. Our friend (Ali Al-Dairy), who disappeared under the alias (Qahtan Rashid) was at the head of this group of five or six intellectuals who fled abroad to London⁽²⁾.”*

Anthropologist Dr. Abdullah Yateem, with whom I shared a friendship since the 1990s and who has worked in the Bahrain Cultural Journal and the Information Ministry’s cultural directorate, wrote in the same newspaper a lengthy article entitled “The Shiite Usulism in

¹ Saeed Al-Hamad, Alayam Newspaper, Edition 8131 Friday, July 15, 2011.

² Ishaq Yaacoub Al-Sheikh, Alayam Newspaper, Edition 8533 Monday, August 20, 2012.

Bahrain” of two parts to prove that in my book “Outside the Sect” I was nothing but an evasive Usuli who pins the blame on the government instead of the sect: *“When laying eyes on the title of Ali Al-Dairy's book ‘Outside the Sect’, one would think that the writer recounts the story of how he freed himself from the shackles of the sect to which he belongs, not on a doctrinal religious level for that is a private matter but by subjecting its adopted religious speech to necessary analysis and criticism. Indeed, one would think that he is about to read some sort of theological criticism of Godhood and Priesthood, especially since the author was known for his in-depth study of the thought and practice of the Arab thinker Muhammad Arkoun, who was well-known for his critical theories of theology in Islam.*

Al-Dairy turned away from performing this critical task and preferred to dive deep into his existential crisis between religion and secularism, far away from the lived reality that is practiced through the Shiite Usuli priesthood in Bahrain and its dominance on the religious, social and cultural levels. Al-Dairy criticizes the issue of the state and national identity in Bahrain and its faltering experiences and failures, further

blaming it for not assimilating all cultural and ethnic diversities⁽¹⁾.

I am not going to respond to them here. I will just record their stances. I also did not respond to what was written about me, as this newspaper does not enjoy professionalism that would allow it to publish my response. It is one of the factors that made the index on freedom and professionalism of the press decline each year. I also do not find what was written to have the academic strength or intellectual firmness deserving of a response. They are writings driven by political context, not difference in thought.

¹ Abdullah Yateem, Alayam Newspaper, Edition 8897, Monday, August 19, 2013.

Stripping of History

44. Did people in Bahrain have a citizenship a hundred years ago?

Let us go back to the year 1904, when a small incident occurred and led to a big change in Bahrain. This incident posed the question: “Who is a Bahraini and who is a foreigner?” The ruler then was Isa bin Ali Al Khalifa (1869–1923), the great grandfather of King Hamad. At that time, there were neither courts in Bahrain, nor a judicial authority, and each group of villages (fiefdom) was ruled by one of the Al Khalifa Shaikhs, who was perhaps one of the Bahraini ruler’s brothers or sons. Every ruler had a group of Fidawis (mercenaries), who constituted the security forces serving the Shaikhs and their properties. The Fidawis were cruel men whom the Shaikh used to terrorize and force the people to work in return for nothing (forced labor). They would steal the fishermen’s fish and farmers’ crops. They also did not fail to attack merchants and their merchandise in the market, and commit indecent

assaults against farmers' wives and daughters in the villages.

On the 29th of September, 1904, the Fidawis of Shaikh Ali bin Ahmad, who is the ruler Shaikh Isa bin Ali's nephew, assaulted the employees of a German company. They chased a worker in the market to force him to work in the Shaikh's farm for nothing in return, so he fled to the German company where he worked. A fight broke out there, the German employee was attacked, and the other employees were threatened and assaulted by Shaikh Ali bin Ahmad himself.

In less than two months, another incident took place that was significant in light of the weight of its consequences. On November 14, 1904, a number of Persians in the Manama market were attacked by Shaikh Ali bin Ahmad's men. *"A most serious assault was committed by the servants of Shaikh Ali bin Ahmad Al Khalifah and other Arabs on the family of Haji Abdul Nabi Kazerooni and other innocent Persians who chanced to fall in their way, with the result that two respectable Persians –the father and brother of Abdul Nabi– have been dangerously wounded and seven other Persians less seriously so,"*⁽¹⁾ the political agent reported.

¹ Records of Bahrain 1820-1971, Primary Documents, Archive Edition, Letter No. 421, dated 17 December 1904.

Following the Manama market incident, assault on Persians and attack on the German company employees, Britain found itself embarrassed before both the Persian and German governments; after all, Britain was responsible for the security of Bahrain, the protection of expatriates there and treating them with justice, and did not want anyone interfering in Bahrain under the pretext of protecting their nationals.

45. I do not understand, what is the connection between these two incidents and the citizenship issue?

After these two incidents, several important questions imposed themselves: “How can we improve the performance of the Al Khalifa rule and reduce their acts of oppression that result in chaos? How can we protect foreign nationals residing in Bahrain without allowing their Governments to find an excuse to interfere in the country? What is the proper judicial system we can resort to in the event of a dispute or problem involving a foreign party? Who is a foreigner and who is a Bahraini?”

The latter is the most significant and main question, which urged Britain to impose reforms in Bahrain in order to protect foreigners. Protecting foreigners requires a legal definition of a foreigner, distinguishing this person from a

Bahraini citizen. This eventually led to improving citizenship laws and protecting people from aggression and injustice, in addition to the abolition of forced labor. This issue is mentioned in detail in my book, ‘Who is a Bahraini?’ that will be published soon.

The British imposed the right of jurisdiction over the affairs of foreign nationals, thus non-Bahrainis became under the jurisdiction of the British officer. What does this practically mean?

It means that the ruler of Bahrain had no jurisdiction over non-Bahrainis, so the subjects of Britain, India, Germany, America and Turkey –in addition to non-Bahraini Arab subjects– fell under the supervision and responsibility of the British Agent in Manama.

There was no specific definition of a Bahraini, but there was an explicit view of what a relatively just judiciary looks like. Those who sought a judicial authority that offered them a minimum level of justice claimed to be non-Bahrainis, so that they could guarantee that they would be tried under the judicial jurisdiction of the British. People who came from Nejd demanded that they be treated as Nejdīs, and who came from Persia – both Sunnis and Shiites – demanded to be treated as Persians. On the other hand, Baharnah were left to deal with their fate under the rule of Al Khalifa,

and this led them to protest, write petitions and demonstrate until complete reforms were imposed in 1923. These reforms resulted in the abdication of Isa bin Ali, and transfer of his rule to his son Hamad bin Isa. Thus, the modern state – in which the modern citizen holds a nationality, passport and official documents – was established.

46. When did people use passports in Bahrain?

According to the Primary Documents in the British Archives, the Bahrain Government was not using passports up until the end of 1928⁽¹⁾. The Passport Department started working in the end of 1929 under the authority of the British Customs Manager. A year later, the Passport Department became controlled by the police. It seems that the revenues from the Passport Department used to meet the expenses of the department, the employees and the printed papers. The statements of accounts show that passport revenues reached 18,000 Rs., and at a later time reached 24,000 Rs.

47.4. Did Persians have Iranian passports?

Foreign subjects used to live in Manama, and they had businesses there. The workers worked in the market and in the port. Any disputes between Persians and other subjects were referred to the

¹ Records of Bahrain 1820-1971, Primary Documents, Archive Edition, Letter No. 160, dated 7 June 1929.

British Agent, i.e. the British judiciary. This highlights the importance of a nationality. It determines the authority that must interfere in solving disputes; whether it should be the British judiciary or that of the Al Khalifa ruler of Bahrain. It is noteworthy that the latter was primitive, linked to the ruler and under his authority. It included no civil laws or specialized courts.

In 1922, the officials responsible for Persian passports considered that Bahrainis were Persian subjects, and should be granted Persian passports. The Persian government then asked its officials in the Gulf to treat Bahrainis as Persian subjects, and the Persian Consul in Najaf issued a notice for registering Bahrainis in his consulate as Persians.

In 1910, two Persian merchants issued passports for Persian subjects in Bahrain. Apparently, this custom continued until 1913. Afterward, the political agent pressured the merchant Abdul Nabi Kazerooni to cease such practices. The signature of any well-known merchant or that of the political agent were considered to be an acceptable document for travel or passage.

In the 1920s, citizenship affairs were still unstable, concerning Iranian nationals, and Baharnah traveling between Bahrain, Qatif and Al-Hasa. There is a confidential letter in the

Records of Bahrain⁽¹⁾, mentioning a number of persons from Qatif, who claim that they hold the Bahraini nationality, and are persecuted by the Nejd authorities. After interrogating them, the British agent considered that they had settled in Al-Hasa a long time ago, and no longer had any contact with Bahrain, thus they cannot be deemed Bahrainis anymore.

However, some of these persons were Bahraini citizens, who were without doubt born in Bahrain, still were in contact with Bahrain. Those had only gone to Al-Hasa lately for short-lived purposes, so they acquired identification documents proving that they were Bahraini subjects.

48. I have noticed that most of whom we met here in Canada, who are from Qatif, resemble us in their appearance and accent. Is that because of the history of citizenship?

Yes, the areas in this region were entwined. It was formerly called “Greater Bahrain”. The families were connected and there were mutual travels across the region. Consequently, citizenship was a critical issue to King Abdul Aziz, since he feared that Qatif or Al-Hasa residents would be naturalized, especially that most of them wanted to rid themselves of the harassments practiced

¹ Records of Bahrain 1820-1971, Primary Documents, Archive Edition, Letter No. 10, dated 24 March 1930.

by the Wahhabis against them and of a tribute (contribution) to Jihad (Jizia). The political agent C. G. Prior had to travel to meet with the prince of Qatif to settle the issue, and asked him how the Baharnah are distinguished from others. The prince said that the Bahraini Government only issues passes to those who were born in Bahrain; as the government had no concern for others⁽¹⁾. In other words, he reassured him that Bahrain does not grant the nationality to Shiites residing in Qatif or Al-Hasa.

Imagine that with regards to this matter of citizenship, the British were interested in the case of a Bahraini citizen named Ahmad bin Abbass Al-Dirazi, who acquired an identification document after it was proven that he is indisputably a Bahraini national. Nonetheless, this document was revoked and he was imprisoned as a Nejdite citizen not a Bahraini. Following arduous negotiations, he was released as a Bahraini citizen, whereas the Dirazi Bahraini citizen, Sayed Alawi Sayed Hussein was forcefully hidden by the Bahraini Government, and his family knows nothing about him since 2016 to this day.

C. G. Prior also recorded this incident in 1930: One Muhsen bin Haji Ibrahim, a Bahraini born in

¹ Records of Bahrain 1820-1971, Primary Documents, Archive Edition, Letter No. 10-C, dated 26 January 1930.

Manamah and resident here, went over to Qatif on a Bahrain pass. He was forced to take out a Nejd pass describing him as a Nejd subject, and he was also forced to pay a contribution of 60 Rs. as a contribution to Jihad. He has no property in Qatif, but owns a mortgage over a house in which he keeps an Iraqi wife. The Qatif authorities refuse to allow her to leave Qatif and return with her husband to Bahrain⁽¹⁾.

49. We have talked about the Parliament's citizenship law amendment, but when was the citizenship law first established?

We must know that laws do not come out of thin air. There are historical and political events that lead to laws. The Bahraini citizenship law came to be in 1937 after a long history of conflicts and strife, as well as historical and political events. It was not until the 1920s – its turbulent history in addition to the periods prior and after that time – that a Bahraini was granted a legal identity at birth with both rights and duties. This history is still full of turmoil, experiencing both ups and downs, while the Bahraini citizen is caught between the tides.

The first article in the former Bahraini Citizenship Act stated:

¹ Records of Bahrain 1820-1971, Primary Documents, Archive Edition, Letter No. 4-C, dated 15 January 1930.

The enlisted below are regarded as Bahraini nationals:

- a. All persons born in Bahrain before or after the promulgation of this law, except as provided in Article (2).
- b. Persons born abroad before or after the promulgation of this law whose fathers or paternal grandfathers were born in Bahrain, except persons whose fathers during the minority of such persons registered at the Political Agency in Bahrain in accordance with Article (2) or might have so registered if resident in Bahrain.

Chapter of Migration

50. I have another concerning question, will we stay Bahrainis after our immigration?

Let me answer you by recalling the article I wrote during the flight that we took in our immigration journey on the 18th of January 2016. It was entitled “About the Revocation of Nationality: The Chapter of Migration to Canada)”.

This chapter began when the decision to revoke nationalities was first issued. This decision accelerated the pace of the official routine. It started taking a serious path, and I began to have a feeling like I am a Canadian citizen in trouble, and that diplomacy (the Canadian embassy) took the procedural measures necessary to help this (Canadian) citizen.

The enquiry about my situation seemed prompt and urgent. For the first time, I had a taste of the feeling of being asked questions by a concerned party, which made me experience the parental affection of a country: “Are you in any danger at

the meantime? Are you safe?”, they asked. For a moment, being asked such questions seemed like a luxury or over-pampering. It seemed as if it were an act of adoption by a mother who does not have enough children to suffice her maternal instinct.

I still have no idea what the outcomes of this Canadian experience will be, as I am still writing my article up in the air between Beirut and Canada, and I do not know how my Bahrani self would look like after going through this experience. I shall recall a detail that is small yet holds great meaning. After months of delay by the Lebanese General Security, the United Nations and International Organization for Migration were informed that my file was settled, and that I was able to travel. The necessary measure to be taken was issuing a Lebanese passport for every member of the family. These passports were to be used only once. The first thing this passport stated was, “this document does not bear proof of nationality” for its holder. In the space allotted for nationality; however, the General Security wrote “Bahrani”.

It is likely that the person who wrote this word does not know the difference between “Bahrani” and “Bahraini” in their social, political and sectarian sense, and does not know the shadows cast by this word (Bahrani), the discrimination it

caused and sensitivity it provokes. Deep inside, I felt the difference was vast. It was like a deep wound dug by politics after 2011. I cannot beat the political facts that confirm that this difference was what led to the revocation of my nationality, or the woes of incorporeal execution that I had to suffer. This act of identifying me as a Bahraini in the temporary passport put salt on an open wound that is still shedding the blood of dozens of Bahraini families.

Socially, a Bahraini's identity is incomplete, since there is no real state in his country that provides him with a full citizenship guaranteeing him his rights and equality. A Bahraini's identity; however, is complete with the force of oppression, robbery, marginalization and discrimination. Being a Bahraini is like a scar or defect that comes with birth, thus designating one's identity with a marked distinction. I wondered, if I were not a Bahraini, would I be stripped of my nationality then; i.e. without declaring my affiliation to a terrorist organization that tears up the Bahraini passport, threatens the King with invasion and death, accusing him of apostasy and deeming him a tyrant?

My Bahraini identity brought me to Canada, and I was given a Canadian identity because of it. By this identity and the marks of oppression it

bears, I was declared worthy of gaining political asylum.

In the interview I had with the consul at the Canadian Embassy in Beirut, the consul said: “We welcome you to Canada, and we appreciate your critical opposition activism. We will provide you with whatever you need to gain stability in your intellectual, political and civil strife.” He asked me bashfully: “Why do you have so many visas to Iran on your passport?” I said: “My father is buried there in a spot that is deemed sacred to my Bahrani identity. I learned from him how to admire that place, and from his library how to develop my relationship with reading and writing. In an expression of gratitude, I visit him annually with my family.”

The Canadian consul did not have in mind a terrorist cell that he could accuse me of being part of as my country’s government, which revoked my citizenship, did. He believed me and wanted to know more about my admiration for this spot of land, and how it became a part of my identity – the identity that I have the right to form and keep, instead of incriminating and turning into evidence of conviction, stripping me of my nationality.

I am not using the word ‘Bahrani’ here in a sectarian or doctrinal sense, but rather in a social

and political sense, linked to the regime's policy of discrimination, incrimination, marginalization and nonrecognition. My use of the word "Bahrani" comes in the sense of the person who suffered the 1783 invasion, and was forced to abide by the feudalism system under the rule of Isa bin Ali (1869 - 1923), before forced labor was banned, and Isa bin Ali was forced to abdicate.

This "Bahrani" is still not recognized and is marginalized. This Bahrani still suffers from acts of sectarian discrimination in jobs, scholarships, religious freedom and political representation, and is still accused of treachery.

I will always remain "Bahrani", not in the sense that boils me down to my religious faith, but in the sense that pushes me to defend my identity, threatened by oppression. I will always remain a "Bahrani" as long as I cannot be a "Bahraini", because the authorities do not want to establish a unifying national identity. For a unifying identity cannot be established unless all marginalized components in the political system are treated fairly.

Timeline of most important Bahraini Government measures linked to the revocation of citizenship

-
- 07 NOV**
2012
Bahraini Ministry of Interior issues first list of citizens stripped of their nationalities, including 31 political dissidents inside and outside the country.
-
- 28 JUL**
2012
Bahrain's National Assembly holds extraordinary session revoking citizenship of those convicted of terrorism in a move targeting the opposition.
-
- 23 APR**
2014
Shiite cleric Ayatollah Sheikh Hussein Najati deported from Bahrain two years after his nationality was revoked among the list of 31.
-
- 07 JUL**
2014
Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa issues decree amending the Citizenship Law, broadening citizenship revocation powers.
-
- 06 AUG**
2014
Criminal court in Manama decides to revoke the citizenship of nine Bahrainis, accused by the authorities of contacting foreign governments, in a first verdict.
-
- 28 OCT**
2014
Bahraini court issues decision to deport 10 people, stripped of their Bahraini nationality among the list of 31 on November 2012.
-
- 31 JAN**
2015
Decree issued withdrawing the Bahraini nationality of 72 individuals.
-
- 28 APR**
2015
Bahraini stripped of his nationality notified that his bank accounts were withheld by Interior Minister decision.
-
- 27 DEC**
2015
Heated debate in the Shura Council over the withdrawal of government housing units from those stripped of their citizenship.
-
- 20 JUN**
2016
Top Shiite cleric in Bahrain Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim stripped of his citizenship.
-
- 24 JUL**
2016
Interior Minister issues an executive decree obliging those stripped of their nationalities to adjust their status as foreigners.
-
- 09 JUL**
2017
Shura approves a decree to suspend pension benefits of Bahrainis whose citizenships were revoked and raises it to the King for approval.
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With our first migration to Canada, I decided with Amaseel to hold our first meeting to start this project. We sat together on Sunday morning, January ,22 2017 at Tim Hortons, asking her to read an Amnesty International statement about the lists of Bahraini citizenship. (Why the reasons for the overthrow of Bahraini nationality is ambiguous, as Amnesty says?) And found him a key question to start the dialogue of the book, and from which the rest of the questions were generated, the issue of this book became our main topic, which we talk about in the road and at home and in the cafe. Later according to the logic of the answers to I did not make any effort to reformulate it according to the age of the -13year-old Amasil. I wanted to keep the book with her for the years to come, and she believed that my answers would open up to her as her maturity, age and potential grew.