

Palestine International Institute

**Aspiring to Bind Palestinians in Diaspora
and Expatriates to the Homeland**

The Palestinian Community in Germany

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Foreword

The Palestine International Institute (PII) pioneers in producing studies provided by researchers in the Diaspora in coordination with the Institute under the broad category, 'Palestinians in the Diaspora'. This time we are pleased to present our readers with the 2008 reviewed and updated edition of our study entitled 'The Palestinian Community in Germany'. This study falls in the 'Horizontal Studies' series which examines the emergence and evolution of communities and tackles issues related to the origins, structure, makeup size, problems and challenges of Palestinian communities in the Diaspora. The PII also issues the 'Parallel Studies' series which are supplementary studies with indirect bearing on communities, such as the study on Arab European relationships. These studies are overseen and supervised by the executive chairman and the research team. In addition, our scientific committee (comprising Dr. Mohammad Mikdashi, Dr. Hasan Al-Charif, Dr. Emile Nemah Khoury, and Dr. Nabil Dajani), looks over the upgrading and maintenance of the PII website, as well as the update of the 'Vertical Studies' series which are studies on the elite, focusing on the activists of the Palestinian communities in the Diaspora.

Before scrutinizing the data, statistics, and information contained herein, we wish to indicate that this study presents academic insight based on scientific and objective research. This is one of the goals for which the PII has been established. Our researchers have exerted considerable effort in order to overcome the difficulties imposed by the scarcity of resources and documents in an attempt to achieve integrated, rather than fractured, data, at a time when scientific research is considerably lacking and insignificant. The importance of this study, as well as other PII studies, springs from a number of factors, the most important of which are the following:

- It comes as an early harvest in virgin territory, where documents and sources of information on these subjects, in both Arab and foreign

libraries, are virtually nonexistent, including the Internet and centers that specialize in Palestinian issues.

- No scholar or institution has come up with a partial, needless to say complete, series of studies about 'Palestinians in the Diaspora' in countries where they exist, or about communities of countries that have hosted Palestinians. Despite all that has been said, we acknowledge the fact that the present study is in its early stages and is open to further development and expansion on the basis of professionalism, authenticity, transparency and documentation, and with the intent of being broadened and updated. Our mission and duty dictate that we make sure it is subject to the above processes in each of its new editions.

PII welcomes any comments on the development of its studies and scientific and research references, with the aim of achieving its final goals and aspirations. If it appears that we are slightly lagging, it is because our human and financial resources are limited, and the conditions under which the research is being conducted are difficult..

The time to pick the fruit of our efforts is near. All this has been the result of an effort exerted by a dedicated team, despite our humble resources. Our gratitude goes to all scholars and researchers who have contributed to this and other studies, which aim to reach those interested, address their patriotic, national, human and intellectual aspirations, and reveal some facts and data that were previously unknown to those who have had no access to such information.

We further reiterate our desire to receive feedback and urge our readers to send us their comments and suggestions which would serve to improve or advance our studies.

As'ad Abdul-Rahman,
Executive Director

Acknowledgment

The Palestine International Institute wishes to extend its sincere appreciation and gratitude to all those who contributed to this study in various ways including research, searching for information, translation, editing and typing.. etc.

Special thanks go to Dr. Yazid Shammout and Dr. Mahmoud Issa for their valuable contributions to this study. We would also like to thank Monica

Khaddour and Fadia Fidda, the two researchers in the Berlin-based Palestinian Refugees' Department for allowing us to quote from their trailblazing study, 'The Cycle of Isolation: Reality of Female Palestinian Refugees', which was compiled in January 2002. Our thanks and appreciation go also to Dr. Othman Nasser, Muneer Abu Taha and Abdulrahim Almuhtasib as well as members of the Palestinian community in Hanover.

Furthermore, we thank Dr. Ralph Ghadban for his study about Palestinians in Germany and especially the laws of asylum in the country; Dr. Azmi Hashem for his valuable efforts in editing and correcting; and Dr. Mohammed Al-Aza' who allowed us to cite from his book 'Arabs of the Diaspora'.

Thanks are due to all PII staff, including researchers and technical support for their hard work and dedication, which is the reason why this study has been produced with useful content and in proper form. Without their efforts this study would not have been possible.

Germany: The Host Country

After World War II, in the advent of the Cold War, two German states were formed in 1949. These were the Western Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the Eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR), which became part of the Soviet Eastern Bloc. Present day Germany evolved following the decline of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War which allowed for German reunification in 1990.

Previously, immigration was restricted to West Germany (FRG) since the Eastern bloc was virtually walled off from the rest of the world. Berlin was divided into four zones analogous to the occupation zones into which Germany was divided. Three sectors were for the Western allies, namely the U.S., the U.K. and France while the fourth sector belonged to the then-Soviet Union and formed East Berlin. Inhabitants of West Berlin were awarded special status by the Western allies such as flexibility in the right of residence exemption from military service and tax cuts. These facilities encouraged Palestinians (and others) to target Berlin as a place of residence.

Post-war Germany was in need of skilled and semi-skilled laborers and labor immigration measures encouraged immigration to the country. At that time German politicians believed that foreign laborers, especially Turks and Italians, would work in the country for few years and then return home. Their assumptions proved wrong, for those who lived and worked in the country for many years married and had families and consequently became eligible for certain rights and commitments which encouraged them to stay and permanently settle in the country.

Legally, immigration is not permissible in Germany as German laws are void of any article that deals with this issue despite the presence of more than 6.5 million foreigners in the country.

The German constitution allows for the right of asylum for all those who are politically persecuted in their countries of origin. Although no clear-cut definition of 'political persecution' has yet become available, the constitution remains the only legal basis for newcomers to claim residency in the country. This has created a loophole in the German laws which was seized upon by some newcomers, who claimed to be politically persecuted, to gain residency while German authorities found it difficult to verify their allegations. To discourage potential newcomers, German authorities have often resorted to various forms of pressure, especially economic. Would-be asylum seekers are not allowed to work during the time their applications are being acted on a process which might drag on for years. Instead, authorities offer free housing and a small stipend. This policy has adverse repercussions as newcomers have made it a habit to live on government handouts even after they have been granted legal residency.

The adverse social implication of this practice affects Palestinians as well as others. This problem is more evident in Berlin than in other parts of Germany due to the special status the city enjoyed prior to reunification. This also explains the presence of the majority of Palestinians in Berlin. These Palestinians, who have come seeking work and not education, come mainly from Palestinian camps in Lebanon. This partly explains the low percentage of Palestinians who hold university degrees and the high percentage of those on welfare. The percentage in Berlin greatly exceeds any other German city where Palestinians live.

Chapter One

The Arab and Islamic Communities in Germany

The Arab Community

Germany is home to more than 400,000 Arabs. The majority of them came to the country as students and laborers, while a small fraction came seeking political asylum. The largest waves of immigrants are from Tunisia and Morocco through labor or employment agreements with their governments. Germany, suffering from a severe labor shortage after WWII, accepted immigrants for purely economic reasons. Since the early 1990s, Germany's need of immigrants for economic development and maintenance of a dynamic workforce has increased due to the country's aging population. The remaining

groups of Arabs were admitted for political reasons and granted political asylum. Some qualified and highly trained Arabs were admitted to the country by special decrees. In terms of numbers, the Palestinian community is the largest, followed by the Lebanese and Moroccan, while the Moroccan and Tunisian communities are the oldest. The Arab community assimilated easily into German society because of their relatively high education and their work in various sectors of German society. The majority of them are now naturalized.

Arabs form about 0.5% of the total population of Germany (roughly 82.5 million). Their small number minimized their overall effect on society despite their smooth assimilation. This is attributed to limited interaction among the various Arab communities which was caused by their dispersal in various German cities like Berlin, Stuttgart and Munich. In addition, inter-Arab political differences reflected on the Arab community as every Arab embassy catered to its own citizens. Arab communities steered clear of each other, which weakened cohesion and shared feelings of belonging. Moreover, the majority of Arabs married Germans and became more imbedded in German society, which distanced them from their own community.

The Islamic Community

Moslems began to arrive in Germany in the 1950s and 1960s. Most of them were badly needed Turkish laborers who came to help rebuild the ravaged German economy. Official statistics in 2004 put the number of Moslems in Germany at 3.2 million or roughly 4% of the total population. Islam has become the second largest religion in the country. Turks constitute the majority of Moslems followed by Arabs, Yugoslavs, Iranians and Afghans. A considerable number of Germans converted to Islam and some of them are currently playing a prominent role in Islamic organizations and in the current dialogue about Islam taking place in the country. The number of German converts to Islam is estimated at 30,000 and some estimates put their number at double that figure. The difference in estimates is due to the absence of a clear definition of who is German. An average of 650 Germans convert to Islam annually, 90% of who are university graduates.

Islamic Organizations in Germany

There are many Islamic organizations in Germany active in the social fields and in teaching the Quran and Arabic. Most of these organizations are affiliated with the Higher Board of Moslems in Germany which acts as an umbrella for all Islamic organizations in the country. The board promotes inter-organizational dialogue and acts as coordinator for its activities and efforts. In its capacity, the board conducts dialogue with the German

government and its various agencies and other social institutions. Likewise the board acts as a representative of all its affiliated organizations before the state. The board consists of 19 different organizations which oversee hundreds of mosques and together form a qualitative base representing German, Turkish, Arabic, Albanian and Iranian nationalities.

Statistics indicate that few Moslems are actually affiliated with Islamic organizations. The most important of these are:

- ▶ The Turkish-Islamic Federation for Religious Affairs (DITIB) in Cologne was established in 1985 with more than 110,000 members and maintains close relations with the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Turkey.¹
- ▶ The German Branch of the Conservative Turkish Suleiman denomination in Cologne.
- ▶ The Arab Moslem Organization in Frankfurt, which is related to the Moslem Brotherhood.
- ▶ The Islamic Center in Hamburg is stationed in one of Germany's oldest Shi'ite mosques. This center was established in the late 1950s by a group of Iranian immigrants and businessmen, and it has grown to become one of the largest and most important Shi'ite centers in the West.
- ▶ The Bosnian Moslem Organization in Duisburg.

After September 11th, some of the less important centers were closed down because of their infringement on the German constitution.

The Arab and Islamic Communities Post September 11th

The events of September 11th cast its shadow on the foreign and especially Islamic communities in the country. It is widely believed that the perpetrators of the attacks were living in Hamburg, named 'the Hamburg Cell'.

German suspicions were compounded because these were supposedly average students leading normal lives. Suspicions of Arab and Islamic communities grew among Germans. These events notwithstanding, Germans' desire to understand Arab culture and Islam was on the rise. Consequent to

the September 11 attacks, the acquisition of a visa to any Western country and even to some Arab countries became extremely difficult.

Thorny Subjects Facing the Islamic Community

In Germany, wearing the *hijab* is not considered an infringement of law. In the post- September 11th era, some German states enforced laws which banned state employees from wearing any religious symbols during official working hours. Some states banned Moslem female employees from wearing the *hijab* and public schools were forbidden to hang crosses in classrooms.

Islam, as a religion, is being taught in some German states even though unofficially. The idea of teaching Islam officially and including it in the official syllabus of public schools, in a manner similar to Catholicism and Protestantism, has been under consideration for sometime. Differences among Islamic schools of thought and organizations, and the state are delaying implementation.

Historically, Germans have been open to other religions and cultures especially Islam, despite some recent negative attitudes caused by the September 11 attacks. Many German scholars and philosophers have studied Islam in depth. Chancellor Angela Merkel's call for an Islamic summit to be held in her constituency in early 2006 fit within this context. The summit discussed the educational syllabus and means of assimilating Moslem youths into German society and of promoting constructive multicultural dialogue in Germany. Community dignitaries and the federal minister of the interior and heads of Islamic centers and societies attended. Professors of various religions and ethnic minorities gave presentations during the summit.

Chapter Two The Palestinian Community in Germany

Early Beginnings

The Palestinian community in Germany is the largest in Europe. The special status of West Berlin as an open city and the lax legal measures that prevailed then facilitated the influx of immigrants, especially Palestinians, into the city.

During the last 10 years, numerous Palestinian communities were established in various German cities. These communities were officially registered as

societies, comprising 50-150 members each. Despite their differences, Berlin had two such societies with more than 1,200 active members. All Palestinian societies in various German cities are members in the Palestinian Community Society in Germany. Activity of this all-embracing society is still ineffective.

One of the reasons behind the weak performance of Palestinian societies and their continued dispersal through Germany is attributed to the reluctance of the Palestinian representative office to champion and encourage the establishment of such societies. Such an approach has often resulted in confusion and the rise of numerous differences.

Waves of Palestinian Immigration to Germany

Palestinians arrived in Germany in four different stages:

1. The first stage began a few years after the end of the Second World War and consisted mainly of few hundred students. In the early 1960s another batch of immigrants came to the country, again consisting mainly of students who were seeking higher education. They numbered around 3,000 individuals. Most of them, trained as doctors and engineers, married Germans and settled in the country after graduation, where they fully assimilated into society. Their relations with other community members were limited to personal friends from their school days. The same can be said about Arab immigrants who arrived around the same time. German society was still narrow and new ideas and traditions were not easily accepted. Faced with German indifference, newcomers had no other choice but to merge into German society. The absence of effective organizations to help these newcomers keep and hold on to their original identities facilitated this trend.

2. The second wave of immigrants came to the country in the late 1960s and early 1970s and was characterized by their diverse composition. While the first newcomers consisted mainly of students, the second, mainly hailing from Palestine and Jordan, came to live and work in the country, often accompanied by their families. The presence of some Palestinian women had a profound effect and helped preserve Palestinian traditions and customs.

3. The third wave of immigrants took place during the late 1970s and early 1980s especially after the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war and the fall of the Tel-Al-Za'tar refugee camp in 1976. The influx of immigrants increased after the Israeli invasion of south Lebanon and the demolition of Al-Nabatiyeh refugee camp. Subsequent events:

accelerated the rate of immigration especially the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Sabra and Shatila massacres in the same year and the 'war of the refugees' between 1985-1987. Whole families entered the country and settled mainly in West Berlin. Unlike previous waves, students comprised only a small number.

4. The fourth wave arrived in Germany from Kuwait via Jordan in the early 1990s after the second Gulf war. It consisted predominantly of unskilled youths who were mainly seeking employment.

It's worth noting here that immigrants in the first wave were not immediately awarded asylum because according to German authorities, prerequisites for asylum were not completely met and hence 95% of all such applications were declined. This policy conforms with a law enacted in 1995 which deals with stateless refugees. In 1985, this law was amended to make it harder for Palestinian refugees to enter and settle in the country. All Palestinians sponsored by UNRWA were denied the right to asylum. This law was adopted by the federal government under items 30, 85 and 9C in accordance with article 16GG of the Basic Law. This law caused a lot of social unrest among Palestinians. Stiff opposition by religious and human rights organizations forced the government to reverse its position. All who had been living in the country for five years or more were granted full citizenship.

Numbers of the Palestinian Community

Palestinians reside mainly in major German cities and suburbs. Most families work hard to earn their living and the majority do not receive government handouts or welfare benefits. Most members of the community work in the medical and engineering sectors, and some in commerce and other fields that do not require special training.

Accurate statistics about the number of Palestinians in Germany do not exist because the term 'Palestinian nationality' does not exist in official German records. Most Palestinians, including those seeking to settle in Germany often hold passports from the countries they come from. According to the figures of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the number of Palestinians may reach 100,000, with 25,000 of them residing in Berlin. Palestinian researcher Monica Khadour, who works for the Palestinian Refugee Department in Berlin, says that 72.5% of all Palestinians living in Berlin hail from Palestinian camps in Lebanon, and the rest come from Syrian and West Bank camps. According to official German figures released in 2000 immigrants designated as 'unknown nationality' are estimated at 47,439, of whom 35,579 come from Lebanon. One-third of all Palestinians were born in Germany. Lebanese researcher Ralph Al-Ghadban estimates their number

to be around 80,000, with 20,000–25,000 living in Berlin. 60% of all Palestinians are fully naturalized.

German Laws of Residence and Naturalization

Palestinian citizenship is not yet recognized by the Federal Government. Until the year 1948, all Palestinians were registered as *staatenlos*² or 'stateless' in accordance with Administrative Order 997. Later, the federal ministry of the interior issued a circular dated December 12, 1984 requiring all Palestinians to be registered as *ungeklart* or 'unknown nationality' under Administrative Order 998. This included all those who do not possess national passports, or hold *documents de voyage* or *laissez-passer* and those who have no identification papers at all, or have hidden or destroyed their passports. Other groups, in addition to Palestinians, fit into this category.

Comment [j1]: PLEASE NOTE: THERE IS NO #3 TO CORRESPOND TO THE NO# IN THE AFTERNOTES!!!!

During the 1960s, the number of *staatenlos* was negligible. In 1969 there were 96 individuals, most from the Baltic states, while a few came from Palestinian camps in Lebanon. After the events of September 1970 in Jordan the number of *staatenlos* increased, the bulk of whom were Jordanians of Palestinian origin. The number of Palestinian *staatenlos* coming from Lebanon increased considerably after the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war. In 1976, some Lebanese who fit into this category began arriving from southern Lebanon. Those were overwhelmingly followers of the Shi'ite sect holding Palestinian *laissez-passer* documents issued by the Lebanese authorities. They originally came from seven villages which were annexed by the British mandated area in Palestine in 1924, and in 1948, they sought refuge, along with other Palestinians, in Lebanon. Like other Palestinians they were holding Lebanese *documents de voyage*.

These three groups together formed the *staatenlos* category until the end of 1984, when immigrants coming from the former Soviet Union especially the three Baltic republics were sorted out and retained their designation as *staatenlos*. The rest were classified under the *ungeklart* category. For the first time, this categorization enabled an estimate, with a high degree of accuracy of the number of non-Lebanese immigrants, mainly Palestinians, arriving in Germany from Lebanon.

A comparative analysis of the two categories, *staatenlos* and *ungeklart*, for the subsequent years shows that the percentage of immigrants hailing from Lebanon amounted to 95% of the total of the two categories. This also applies to those refugees classified under the *staatenlos* category for the years 1970-1985, while some refugees from other categories claimed to be Palestinians in order to obtain extra benefits Palestinians are entitled to. This made things easier because the *ungeklart* category was only confined to Lebanese

immigrants until 1992.⁴ Officially, however, German authorities did not make a distinction between Palestinians from any country, and those hailing from the seven Palestinian villages mentioned earlier, holding a Lebanese *laissez passer*. They were all recognized as Palestinians and so the term *staatenlos* was synonymous with Palestinians.

The right of political asylum is embedded in the German constitution making it the first country in the world in this regard, although the post-September 11 era forced German authorities to closely examine the exercise of this right. Any individual arriving in Germany has the legal right to claim asylum. Should his/her application for asylum be turned down, he/she is entitled to resort to the law. Asylum lawsuits are treated like any other administrative case; the plaintiff has the right to appeal the ruling and even take the case to the supreme court. Legal procedures can take between 5–8 years. Sympathy and a lax attitude towards immigrants and asylum seekers is partly explained by the fact that Germans themselves were victims of political persecution and oppression and many of them sought refuge in other countries.

Unlike the laws enforced in Germany, other countries which are more liberal towards immigrants regulate the process through brief legal procedures that usually take a minimum of two months, but not exceeding three years. During this time, the potential asylum seeker is entitled to all rights awarded to foreign laborers, such as the right to work, but has additional rights, such as lodging assigned by the state and social security benefits, which foreign laborers are not entitled for. For example, foreign laborers may face deportation if they lose their jobs or seek aid from the state.

According to German law, victims of civil wars are not treated as asylum seekers or as victims of political persecution. This explains why only 2% of all Lebanese refugees who applied were granted asylum. Palestinian victims of the war of the refugees were awarded asylum in accordance with provisions of the Geneva Convention which prohibit extradition of refugees to their original countries where their lives might be in jeopardy. Lebanese refugees victims of the Israeli invasion of 1982, took advantage of this article and accordingly were allowed to stay in the country as long as their lives were in danger in Lebanon. ⁵

There are vast differences between those who reside in Germany as 'asylum seekers' and those who are classified as 'victims of civil wars'. The former enjoy legal residence with vast privileges while the latter enjoy only limited rights and prerogatives because they are categorized as *doldrings* which means, in lay terms, a postponement of deportation. In the 1980s, the majority of Lebanese and Palestinian immigrants were categorized as *doldrings*. Those who applied for asylum in the 1970s took advantage of then

lax immigration rules while those who applied later were denied the same benefits of earlier refugees because of the more stringent measures. ⁶

Tightening Immigration Rules

The new stringent immigration rules which went into force during the tenure of Chancellor Kohl and Minister of the Interior Kauter from the Christian Democratic Party, worsened conditions for the refugees (especially Palestinians and Lebanese). Some even left Germany for neighboring countries. There was a wide belief among Germans that immigrants come to Germany for purely economic, not political, reasons. Accordingly, the new laws were intended to limit the abuse of this right. Legal procedures were tightened and economic benefits were reduced. For an entire year, new German laws denied refugees the right to work. The moratorium was then extended for a second year and then for five years. Lodging was confined to makeshift camps and the area assigned to each individual was limited to 4-6m². The law also cancelled financial assistance, except a personal allowance. Food was offered as packaged meals. Health care dwindled and allowances for children were cancelled and only second-hand clothes and furniture were given to them.⁷

In 2005, the law of naturalization and residence was rephrased and German citizenship was only offered to those who had legally resided in Germany for eight years. For any immigrant to be eligible for citizenship, four conditions must be met:

1. Relinquishment of original citizenship
2. Any interruption of residence should not exceed six months
3. Fluency in German
4. A clean legal record.

Students who pursue higher education are the main beneficiaries of this law. Education in Germany is free and students are allowed to work to cover expenses. The language barrier is a discouraging factor for many Palestinian students, which explains their limited number which does not exceed 2,500 students. All who legally reside in Germany enjoy full rights like their German counterparts except for running for office and voting.

Xenophobia is virtually non-existent in contemporary Germany. The image often portrayed in the media about the Germans being racist towards foreigners is untrue. Foreign laborers are found in almost every German

enterprise. In 2004, foreigners accounted for more than 51% of all births in the country, which is another indication of assimilation of foreigners into German society.

The 'Entry to Germany' Agreement Reconsidered

Germany is trying to return a large number of refugees, particularly Lebanese who have been denied the right to asylum, to their original countries. A draft re-entry agreement was drawn between Germany and Lebanon and when the agreement is signed and ratified, more than 10,000 Palestinians might be affected and could be returned to Lebanon.⁸

Palestinian Gatherings in Germany and Fields of Work

The greater number of Palestinians in Germany reside in Hanover, Munich, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Essen, Cologne, Bonn, Vuppertal and Berlin.

Unlike Palestinians who arrived in Germany in the 1980s when work conditions were difficult and laws were stringent, those who came to Germany in the 1960s easily obtained residency permits. Employment opportunities were abundant and some made good money and returned home; the rest stayed in the country and assimilated smoothly into society. They were more skilled than the Turks who lived in their ghettos and walled themselves off from the rest.

It is worthy to mention that Arab university graduates, including Palestinian doctors, engineers and lawyers, have exclusively held good positions at hospitals, clinics and governmental departments. Non-graduates have worked as food sellers or in unskilled jobs.

Chapter Three Active Palestinian Organizations in Germany

Medical and Financial Assistance to Palestinians

Despite the problems these organizations are encountering in Germany, they nonetheless have been able to extend much-needed assistance to the people of the occupied territories. Medical aid and financial assistance were sent to Palestinian institutions in the occupied territories and scores of wounded

Intifada activists were treated. Various services were provided to Palestinians inside and outside Germany.

Palestinian Organizations

▶ Palestinian Representative Office

In July 2000, the Palestinian representative office was relocated to Berlin, which became the capital of Germany after reunification. At the time, the office was not on good terms with most branches of the Palestinian community in Germany due to the absence of an effective strategy to forge strong relations with the community aiming to safeguard its interests and to deal with future challenges.

In early 2006, within the framework of renewing Palestinian embassies and representative offices around the world, the staff of the Palestinian office in Berlin was replaced and Hayel Al-Fahoom became head of the office. The community hopes that this change will help initiate a new strategy designed to jump-start Palestinian activities in Germany.

▶ Palestinian Communities Society

The society was established in 1996 as an umbrella organization for Palestinian communities in Germany with the aim of uniting all Palestinians and to provide moral and financial support for Palestinians inside and outside Germany. The society, with other influential societies and groups, hopes to be able to build a lobby to influence German parties and media outlets. Currently, eight communities are members in the Palestinian Communities Society, whose head office is in Hanover, while four are not, including the community in Berlin. Most Palestinian communities are officially registered in Germany, some as welfare societies. All abide by German laws and submit periodic reports mapping out their various activities in addition to cultural and media reports. Many attempts were made to unite all Palestinian communities in Germany especially the community in Berlin, but all such attempts fell short.

▶ Union of Palestinians Doctors and Pharmacists

This union includes scores of Palestinian doctors and pharmacists and often participates in Palestinian activities, and extends media and moral support to the community. The union played a significant role in

sending medical aid and personnel to Palestine, particularly during the *Intifida*.

► Union of Palestinian Engineers

The union, which has a number of Palestinian engineers in Germany, shares in the activities of Palestinian communities and provides moral and other types of support.

► Union of Palestinian Students

This union is active in receiving and assisting new students and providing advice in regards to their studies. It is also involved in cultural matters and with members of the Palestinian community.

► German-Arab Women's Society

The society includes Palestinian, Arab and German women. Its activities are not confined to different events dealing with the Palestinian cause but extend to other areas and interests as well.

► Relief Society

The Relief Society Includes Germans, foreigners and Arabs, mostly Palestinians, and conducts various activities in the political, media and cultural fields. Most outstanding activities include fundraising to help Palestinian citizens of the occupied territories and in refugee camps in Lebanon and other Arab countries. Although small in size, it is considered to be one of the most active organizations in Germany.

► Al-Karama Organization

The scope of Al-Karama's work includes teaching Arabic, German and computer courses to community members, besides providing sports services and organizing social activities. It has various centers in Germany employing some members of the community, while others work on voluntary basis. The organization is officially registered in Berlin and its members often attend official meetings of local municipalities.

Other non-official centers also exist in Germany which represent family or tribal allegiances like the Karmel and Houleh networks, the, Nahr Al-Barek network and private societies like Ali Iraqi. They all have similar cultural and social activities and make financial contributions.

Non-Palestinian Organizations Supportive of the Cause

Many German-Palestinian and German-Arab Friendship societies are found in several cities in Germany. Moreover, Palestinians participate effectively in some German societies. One of these is the Palestinian Initiative Society in Hanover which supports and assists Palestinians through cultural and media activities.

Arab Organizations

These include the Arabs Rights' Society, the East-West Dialogue Committee, the Lebanese Immigrants Society, the Moroccan Friendship Society, the German-Egyptian Friendship Society and the Palestinian-German Friendship Society.

German Organizations

These include the Human Rights Organization, the Solidarity Organization, the Red Cross, the Caritas Welfare Society, the Evangelical Church, the Catholic Church and the SOS Welfare Society.

Challenges Facing the Community in Germany

Germany is obsessed with its past history towards the Jews with German parties still harbor feelings of guilt for the Jewish suffering under the Nazis. This in mind, Germany, which is the most generous European country in extending financial aid to the Palestinians, rarely criticizes Israel or its policies in Palestine. Although some German politicians are very critical towards Israel or its policies, they never voice their views in public in accordance with German policy.

During Al-Aqsa *Intifada*, feelings of empathy towards the Palestinians became evident among the German public while the official media maintained a more or less neutral attitude. This is due to the fact that all official media organizations are required to have representatives from the Jewish community on their boards to ensure that anti-Israeli rhetoric is subdued. Private media companies are controlled by Jews or pro-Israel organizations. Any criticism of Israel is considered anti-Semitic. Personal relations between Palestinian individuals and German officials may pave the road to exacting a change in this respect.

Socially speaking, the older generation of Palestinians in Germany faces serious problems in communicating with the younger generations especially

those born in Germany within the last two decades. These have been brought up in a totally different society and are imbued with a different set of values. Accordingly, clashes often ensue between the two generations. The situation is even worse if children are born to parents of two different nationalities, as might be the case if the father is Palestinian and the mother Turkish or German, or if a son or daughter marry a German. In many cases, teenagers often leave their families to live alone, which in Arabic and Islamic cultures, is considered unnatural. This is one of the most intractable obstacles that face the community in Germany.

Summary

Germany is home to more than 400,000 Arabs. The majority of them came to the country as students and laborers, while a small fraction came seeking political asylum. The largest waves of immigrants are from Tunisia and Morocco through labor or employment agreements with their governments. Germany, suffering from severe labor shortages after the Second World War accepted immigrants for purely economic reasons. Since the early 1990s Germany's need for immigrants to support economic development and maintain a dynamic workforce has greatly increased due to the rapid aging of the country's population. The remaining groups of Arabs were admitted for political reasons and granted asylum. Some qualified and highly trained Arabs were admitted into the country by special decrees. In terms of numbers, the Palestinian community is the largest, followed by the Lebanese and Moroccan while the Moroccan and Tunisian communities are the oldest. The Arab community assimilated easily into German society because of their relatively high levels of education and their work in various sectors of German society. The majority of them are now naturalized.

Moslems began to arrive in Germany in the 1950s and 1960s. Most of them were badly needed Turkish laborers who came to help rebuild the ravaged German economy. Official statistics in 2004 put the number of Moslems in Germany at 3.2 million or roughly 4% of the total population; Islam became the second largest religion in the country. Turks constitute the majority of Moslems followed by Arabs, Yugoslavs, Iranians and Afghans. A considerable number of Germans have converted to Islam and some of them are currently playing a prominent role in Islamic organizations and in the current dialogue about Islam taking place in the country. The number of German Moslems is estimated at 30,000 and some estimates put their number at double this figure. The difference in estimates is due to the absence of a clear definition of who is German. An average of 650 Germans convert to Islam annually 90% of whom are university graduates.

The events of September 11 cast its shadow on foreign and especially Islamic communities in the country. It is widely believed that the perpetrators of the attacks were living in Hamburg, named 'the Hamburg Cell'.

German suspicion, as a result, increased because these were supposedly average students leading normal lives. Suspicions, particularly of Arab and Islamic communities, grew among Germans. These events notwithstanding Germans' desire to understand Arab culture and Islam was considerably on the rise. Following September 11, the acquisition of a visa to any Western country and even to some Arab countries became extremely difficult.

The Palestinian community in Germany is the largest in Europe. The special status of West Berlin as an open city and the lax legal measures that prevailed then facilitated the influx of immigrants, especially Palestinians, into the city.

During the last ten years, numerous Palestinian communities were established in various German cities. These communities were officially registered as societies comprising 50-150 members each. Despite their differences, Berlin had two such societies with more than 1,200 active members. All Palestinian societies in the various German cities are members in the Palestinian Community Society in Germany. The activity of this all embracing society on German soil is still ineffective.

The greater number of Palestinians in Germany resides in Hanover, Munich, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Essen, Cologne, Bonn, Vuppertal and Berlin.

Unlike Palestinians who arrived in Germany in the 1980s when world conditions were difficult and immigration laws stringent, those who came to Germany in the 1960's easily obtained residency permits. Employment opportunities then were abundant and some of them made good money and returned home; the rest stayed in the country and assimilated smoothly into society. They were more skilled than the Turks who lived in their ghettos and walled themselves off from the rest by choice.

It is worthy to mention that Arab university graduates, including Palestinian doctors, engineers and lawyers, have held good positions at hospitals, clinics and governmental departments. The rest worked as food sellers or as unskilled laborers.

Germany is obsessed with its past history towards the Jews. German parties still harbor feelings of guilt for the Jewish suffering under the Nazis. This in mind, Germany, which is the most generous European country in extending financial aid to the Palestinians, rarely criticizes Israel or its policies in Palestine. Although some German politicians are very critical of Israel and its

policies, they never voice their views in public in accordance with German policy.

During Al-Aqsa *Intifada*, feelings of empathy towards the Palestinians became evident among the German public while the media remained more or less neutral. This is due to the fact that all official media organizations are required to have representatives from the Jewish community on their boards to ensure that anti-Israeli rhetoric is subdued. Private media companies are controlled by Jews or pro-Israel organizations. Any criticism of Israel is considered anti-Semitic. Personal relations between Palestinian individuals and German officials may lead to exacting a change in this respect.

Socially speaking, the older generation of Palestinians in Germany faces serious problems communicating with the younger generations especially those born in Germany in the last two decades. These have been brought up in a totally different society and are imbued with a different set of values. Accordingly, clashes often ensue between the generations. The situation is even worse if children are born to parents of two different nationalities, as might be the case if the father is Palestinian and the mother Turkish or German, or if a son or daughter marry a German. In many cases, teenagers often leave their families to live alone which, in Arabic and Islamic cultures, is considered unnatural. This is one of the most intractable obstacles that face the community in Germany.

Endnotes

1. Information contained herein was taken from a study by Friedrich Ebert organization entitled 'Islamic Organizations in Germany' by Thomas Lemen written in 2000 in Bonn. For more information refer to www.wshoffmann.de
2. Pronounced 'shtaatenlos'.
3. This paragraph is a direct quotation from Ralph Ghadban Study entitled: 'Palestinians in the Federal Republic of Germany'; Berlin 12-1-2000.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. An interview with MP Qassim, Berlin, December/January 1999.

Comment [j2]: Reference in the text is missing