

The Palestinian Community in Austria

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

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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 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 Austria'. 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 supplemental 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 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 PII has established.

Our researchers have exerted considerable effort, with relentless pursuit and exploration, 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 a virgin land, where documents and sources of information on these subjects, in both Arab and foreign libraries, are virtually nonexistent, including centers that specialize in Palestinian issues, and the Internet.
- No scholar or institution has come up with a partial, needless to say complete, series of studies about 'Palestinians in 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 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 hard.

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 the 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 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

Acknowledgement

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The greatest gratitude goes to the Khaled Shoman Institute for fully financing this project, without which this study would not have been possible.

Thanks are due to all PII staff, including researchers and technical support, for their hard work and dedication, which was 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.

Introduction

A number of problems often confront researchers who study Palestinian communities in Europe. Foremost among these is the scarcity of documented reference on the subject, especially concerning the number of individuals and their locations. In this context, the absence of information and diversity of the composition of Palestinian communities are often cited as obstacles facing researchers. Moreover, any impartial study would mirror the image of Palestinian political with its rifts and differences. Ideological differences among Palestinians in the Diaspora are even more active and evident than among Palestinians in heavy concentrations such as the West Bank, Gaza and neighboring Arab countries.

With the decrease in national activities of Palestinian institutions, members of the community have been paralyzed, bar some activities of various gatherings and clubs. An overall institution that is supposed to shoulder Palestinians in their countries of emigration, irrespective of their political allegiance, is also absent. Such a binding institution would have been able to collect information and observe developments at large community gatherings.

With the exception of these factors and difficulties, places of emigration and dispersion are seen by the migrants as having new dimensions and meanings

To be specific, immigration centers, since the 1990s, are no longer places for learning or working. They have become long-term stations for naturalization through marriage, or for those opting for permanent residence in search of security and economic stability. This means distancing oneself from what might bring Palestinians in the Diaspora together because individual common interests have shrunk in regard to collective work. Also, a general state of frustration and disappointment which has prevailed since the second Gulf War is still fresh in mind.

This study is primarily based on testimonies given by many first generation Palestinians immigrants to Austria. They either gave written testimonies to Dr As'ad Abdul-Rahman personally, or were interviewed by the researcher in Austria. In the absence of written documents on the community, these testimonies have basic historical value when writing the history of the Palestinian community in Austria. Moreover, these personal testimonies give this study a much desired human dimension. Statistics depend on the historical data documented by relevant Austrian institutions.

This study is the first of its kind on the Palestinian community in Austria. It is the first step toward documenting information, with the possibility of adding to it by those who are interested in the Palestinian issue, whether at home or in the Diaspora.

Austria after the Second World War

Chapter One

Formation of the Second Republic

The Austrian Union was established in 1955 when all Soviet and allied forces withdrew from its territories, on condition it would adhere to political neutrality since it was liable to partitioning between the Soviet Union and its allies after the defeat of Hitler, in the same manner that Germany was. Austria, a member of the European Union, is considered one of the richer countries in Central Europe enjoying social peace. Although a secular country, Austria comprises a majority of Catholic Christians, hence the active role of the Catholic Church in public life. The population of Austria is 8.5 million, 10% of whom are foreigners, most from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey.

Political System

The Austrian union is composed of nine autonomous provinces, each having a capital, a government, a president and a parliament elected once every four years. This is in addition to the federal government, parliament and president

The Austrian president enjoys limited powers, mostly representative and ceremonial. The chancellor of the federal government is the actual leader of the country. The president is directly elected by the people once every six years while parliament is elected once every four years. The executive branch of government is formed from the parliamentary majority (half plus one). The necessary majority needed to amend the constitution is two thirds of the members of parliament.

Austrian Political Parties and their Stances on the Palestinian Cause

There are three historical Austrian parties, and a relatively recent fourth currently represented in parliament:

The Austrian People's Party

(This is the party of the Christian Democrats)

The Social Democratic Party of Austria

The Freedom Party of Austria

(Composed of businessmen and former Nazis)

The Austrian Green Party

Since the mid-1980's this became the 4th power in Parliament.

The 2002 elections brought to power a coalition government between the People's Party and the Freedom Party, with Wolfgang Schüssel, of the People's Party, as federal chancellor. In 2004, Heinz Fischer, of the Socialist Party, was elected as federal president, and Andreas Khol, of the People's Party, was elected as president of the national council (the lower house of parliament).

The Palestinian issue was given a boost by the coming to power in 1970 of Bruno Kreisky whose party enjoyed a comfortable majority in parliament. The fact that Kreisky was of Jewish origin, enabled him to publicly criticize Israel with apparent impunity. This is something no other politician was able to do due to guilt feelings Austrians still harbor towards the Jews and their ordeal under the Nazis. In addition, the presence of many Jews and Zionists in prominent positions in Austrian media outlets made it easier to lash out at critics of Israel. Even Kreisky was very often attacked by American and Zionist media as someone who 'hates his religion and Jewish origin'.

Kreisky's political weight in both Austria and Europe enabled him to silence his detractors. In 1974, Kreisky met the late Yasser Arafat in Egypt at a meeting of the Socialist International in Cairo. In 1979, Kreisky invited Arafat to attend a summit meeting in Vienna with Willy Brandt, the chancellor of West Germany at the time. The meeting was followed by official recognition of the PLO by Austria and the opening of a PLO representative office in Vienna in March 1980, the first PLO office in Western Europe.

The political attitude of Kreisky was personal, but his clout within his party made his party adopt it. This, however, urged the opposition to attack him on many occasions. The Palestinian image was tarnished by some untimely operations such as the attack on a Jewish synagogue and the assassination of a socialist politician from Vienna Municipality for being a Jew, and the Vienna airport attack. These intimidating acts resulted in the interrogation of some Palestinian community members.

To conclude, these parties agree on the right of Palestinians to an independent state and they condemn terrorism. However, they are unable to publicly criticize Israel.

The Austrian Public Opinion Regarding the Palestinian Cause

The Kreisky era in Austria must be given credit for being able to craft a basic role in defining the Palestinian-Austrian relationship and in making the Austrian public aware of the legality of the Palestinian issue. However, despite the fact that this issue received relatively great attention in Austria compared with the situation in neighboring European countries, future political developments caused attention to wane. One of these developments was Kreisky's departure from the Social Democratic Party and the nomination of Kurt Waldheim of the People's Party as Austria's new federal president. Waldheim's Nazi past was uncovered by the Social Democrats and consequently he became *persona non grata* in the USA.

With the soaring popularity of Joerg Heider, of the right-wing Freedom Party, and his formation of a government together with the People's Party in the year 2000 Austria again was subject to European and international pressure. Israel withdrew its ambassador from Vienna and reduced its diplomatic mission, putting further pressure on Austria. What added fuel to the fire of political difference is that Heider considered Saddam Hussein and Mu'ammarr Al-Qathafi as his personal friends. What is ironic is the fact that Heider himself had slammed Kreisky in the past for his closeness to these two Arab leaders.

The first Palestinian *Intifada* (uprising) in 1987 had a positive effect on Austrian public opinion, despite pro-Israel stances taken by some parties. Criticism of Israel shifted afterwards from public opinion to the media. During the period of the Oslo accords, a state of relative optimism for the possibility of a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli dispute prevailed. The onset of the second *Intifada* in 2000, with its military nature, and the subsequent change in photographs and reports transmitted by the media, changed the atmosphere to a negative and hostile one. This condition was even more aggravated by the September 11 attacks and the increased Islamic ideology. Like other European public opinions, Austria experienced a negative change.

Austrian public opinion is, in general, partial to the Palestinian cause as a result of stances taken by the parties, the Church and various human institutions. Since the 1990s, when Austria became a member of the European Union, various parties took similar stances towards international issues, especially since these powers form common parliamentary blocs in the European Parliament.

To sum up, it is important to mention that the Palestinian cause has attracted many supporters who, in fact, had Nazi leanings. This resulted in great harm to the cause in certain official as well as public media.

Laws of Political Asylum in Austria

In later years, especially after Austria became a member of the European Union the laws regarding political asylum became stricter. The present government, a coalition between the people's and the freedom parties, became active in the last few months in enacting stringent laws that would render asylum virtually impossible. In the year 2002, for example, this right was granted to only 5% of the total number of applicants for asylum in Austria.¹ The last official statistics prepared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Austria² on May 31, 2005 show the following data:

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Table 1 Applications for Asylum in 2004 and 2005

Month	Applications in 2004	Applications in 2005	Difference
January	1531	1357	- 11.37%
February	1834	1244	- 32.17%
March	2553	1611	- 36.90%
April	3132	1703	- 45.63%
May	1289	1617	- 25.45%
Totals	10339	7532	- 27.15%

According to these statistics, the number of men totaled 5504, whereas the number of women totaled 2028. The statistics³ regarding the countries where those refugees came from showed the following distribution in 2005:

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Table 2: Number of Refugees According to Country of Origin in 2005

Country and Number			
Afghanistan: 350	Czechoslovakia: 2	Liberia: 28	South Africa: 1
Algeria: 77	Egypt: 10	Libya: 2	Sri Lanka: 7
Angola: 12	Eritrea: 1	Lithuania: 3	Stateless: 111
Armenia: 157	Ethiopia: 5	Macedonia: 164	Sudan: 30
Azerbaijan: 55	Gabon: 1	Mali: 18	Switzerland: 24
Bangladesh: 119	Gambia: 68	Moldavia: 181	Syria: 24
Belarus: 133	Georgia: 406	Mongolia: 205	Taiwan: 15
Benin: 2	Germany: 1	Morocco: 16	Tajikistan: 1
Bosnia and Herzegovina: 80	Ghana: 37	Nepal: 25	The Philippines: 1
Brasilia: 1	Guinea Bissau: 38	Niger: 2	Togo: 11
Bulgaria: 19	Guinea: 20	Nigeria: 399	Tunisia: 5
Burkina Faso: 1	Hungary: 4	Pakistan: 148	Turkey: 415
Burundi: 1	India: 426	Poland: 6	Turkmenistan: 2
Cameron: 28	Iran: 100	Romania: 81	Uganda: 3
China: 219	Iraq: 93	Russia: 1	Ukraine: 96
Colombia: 1	Ireland: 1	Russian Federation: 1119	Unknown: 20
Congo: 23	Israel: 14	Rwanda: 2	USA: 1
Congo: 6	Ivory Coast: 6	Senegal: 10	Uzbekistan: 21
Croatia: 9	Jordan: 7	Serbia: 1597	Vietnam: 8
Cuba: 2	Kazakhstan: 6	Sierra Leone: 23	Zimbabwe: 2
Czech Republic: 3	Kerghistan: 31	Slovakia: 1	
	Lebanon: 19	Somalia: 28	
Grand Total: 7532			

According to the statistics, the number of applicants for asylum from Arab countries amounts to 283 (mostly from North Africa, particularly Algeria). There are also fourteen applicants from Israel though it is hard to tell whether these include Palestinians. This puts the percentage of Arabs and those from Israel at 3.94% of the total. A portion of the Palestinian refugees in Austria, depending on their travel documents, may be categorized as “stateless” or “unknown”; these number 131, which represents 1.74% of the total. As clear in the table, most applicants for asylum come from the former Soviet Union. This is not strange, as Austria has always been East Europe’s gate to Western Europe.

Despite the fact that Palestine is not mentioned in these statistics, we notice that it has lately appeared in some reports on asylum. In its report, the Foreign Ministry periodical mentioned that a total of 24 illegal immigrants entered Austria on June 10, 2002, eight of whom were Palestinians.⁴ Among them was a journalist from Hebron, Kawthar Salam, who was granted political asylum in Austria a few years ago.

Strict Austrian laws regarding the safeguarding of personal information make it difficult to get accurate data regarding individuals coming from any country. Statistics from 1985 to 2001 show the following regarding countries of origin of aliens who have been naturalized in Austria:

Table 3 Statistics on Naturalized Austrians Based on Previous Nationalities During 1985-2001

Year	Germany	Yugoslavia	Poland	Romania	Czechoslovakia	Turkey	Hungary
1985	12142	1449	453	149	417	296	279
1986	2342	1463	1218	159	460	334	290
1987	1397	1416	896	135	504	392	272
1988	1146	1731	978	178	498	509	269
1989	914	2323	795	139	431	723	206
1990	516	2641	930	294	561	1106	256
1991	455	3221	949	667	421	1809	253
1992	410	4337	543	547	371	1994	275
1993	406	5791	583	672	251	2688	297
1994	328	14495623	759	904	330	3379	355
1995	202	4538	681	874	432	3209	316

Year	Germany	Yugoslavia	Poland	Romania	Czechoslovakia	Turkey	Hungary
1996	140	3133	499	692	264	7499	302
1997	164	3671	667	1098	385	5068	333
1998	157	4151	749	1501	542	5683	416
1999	91	6745	532	1639	381	10350	409
2000	102	7576	546	2684	544	6732	352
2001	108	10,760	607	2818	543	10068	322
Total	11020	70569	12385	15150	7326	61839	5202

Table 3 Statistics on Naturalized Austrians Based on Previous Nationalities During 1985-2001 (Continued)

Year	Egypt	China	India	Iran	Philippines	Other Countries	Stateless
1985	109	75	88	259	335	2195	242
1986	99	139	109	235	297	2660	210
1987	125	95	175	217	186	2107	195
1988	146	118	165	258	169	1842	225
1989	151	123	138	218	195	1942	172
1990	277	194	185	348	297	1418	175
1991	357	253	273	416	444	1740	136
1992	333	323	275	375	411	1570	156
1993	418	332	293	320	537	1670	144
1994	386	306	359	361	533	2457	190
1995	407	328	500	532	519	2571	200
1996	318	276	402	304	342	1912	160
1997	448	415	540	354	474	2445	212
1998	641	424	430	431	290	2779	127
1999	580	400	304	500	212	2740	149
2000	663	561	498	482	383	3370	152
2001	819	737	658	451	453	3630	115
Total	6277	5099	5392	6061	6077	39048	2960

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According to the above, 254,405 aliens were naturalized between 1985 and 2001. Those who used to hold Yugoslavian nationality form the majority with 27.7% of the total, followed by those of Turkish origin, with 24.3%. Egyptians form 2.5%, whereas 'stateless' or those of 'unknown' origin form 0.01%. It must be mentioned here that it is virtually impossible to get official information on countries categorized as 'other countries' or 'stateless'. If we take Vienna for example, where 80% of the Palestinian community reside, the official statistics of the province regarding alien population show the following figures:⁶

Table 4 Total Number of Alien Population by Year

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Total	284,691	291,717	254,693	268,882	276,964

The statistics also show the following distribution of alien residents by country of origin:

Table 5 Distribution of Alien Residents by Country of Origin

Country	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Egypt	4827	4696	3067	3152	3142
Tunisia	943	925	697	743	773
Libya	490	533	241	237	234
Israel	1536	1558	1191	1251	1317
Lebanon	367	376	241	249	242
Jordan	230	350	234	260	251
Syria	524	545	393	431	454
Iraq	1097	1123	838	750	781
Other Countries	9492	10410	8160	9591	10850
Stateless	1561	1461	845	838	767
Unknown Nationalities	381	396	2968	2342	2115

Included in the statistics shown in the previous tables, are alien residents in the city of Vienna who hail from various countries and nationalities. This study however, has been confined to Arab countries and to the entries where Palestinians may fit within, as it may serve the purpose of this study. Other countries, like former Yugoslavia and Turkey, for example, are irrelevant to this study.

With reference to the above, we find that the majority of foreign population in Vienna in particular, and Austria in general, hails from the former Yugoslavia followed by Turkey (see Table 3). The population of Arab origin, in general, and of Palestinian, in particular, constitutes a very small ratio compared to others.

The Palestinian Community in Austria

Chapter Two History of the Palestinian Arrival at Austria

The history of the Palestinian community in Austria, compared with other communities, is relatively new. It is also small compared with other communities or with other Palestinian communities in neighboring European countries, such as Germany. One may say that there are three generations of Palestinians living in Austria.

The arrival of Palestinians to Austria came in various periods, beginning in the 1950s with the arrival of students. We can consider the year 1958 as the first main period when the Palestinian community started to crystallize in Austria with the arrival of Palestinian students and their residence in Graz and Vienna for education. The second main period followed in the late 1970s with the movement of UNRWA's primary office to Vienna. This period had several stages, the first of which was temporary and ran from late 1975 through 1976, fueled by the hope of a return to Beirut, which took place in 1977. A second stage started in mid-1978 which was a turning point in the nature of the Palestinian existence in the country. At that time, Palestinians, mostly from Lebanon, started coming to Austria for permanent residence.

The third main period extended from the mid-1980s to the -late 1990s, and was characterized by the arrival of new Palestinian students from the West Bank and Gaza. In addition, a number of immigrants seeking political asylum arrived in the country. For them, Austria was more of a transit point than a place for permanent residence. It is worthwhile to mention that the number of arriving students decreased considerably after the mid-1990s. This is due to the difficulties of leaving Palestine and the introduction of strict immigration laws in Austria after it became a member of the European Union.

The fourth and most recent main period started with the onset of the second *Intifada*, and was characterized by the arrival of a number of Palestinians seeking political asylum. This number, however, was very limited, for Austria, unlike Scandinavian countries, was not a country that would easily grant political asylum for Palestinians. It was also not among countries where Palestinians could seek work, like Germany.

Approximate Statistics of the Community

Accurate statistics regarding the number of Palestinians in Austria do not exist. This is due to:

1. Arrival of Palestinians from various geographical regions with various travel documents
2. Absence of the name of Palestine in any Austrian statistics
3. ~~Categorization~~Categorization of those holding refugee travel documents and arriving from Arab countries, as well as those carrying the Palestinian authority documents, as 'unknown nationality'
4. Granting Austrian nationality to a great number of Palestinians

Based on the above, it is very difficult to specify the approximate number of Palestinians or those of Palestinian origin in Austria. This is not only due to statistical difficulties but also because some Austrian activists concerned with the Palestinian question treat these numbers as an issue that has political dimensions. Whereas some people put the number at 1,500, others estimate it at 5,000. However, one may speculate the number to be around 2,000 to 3,000. Palestinians distributed in various Austrian provinces. The majority, approaching 80%, is in Vienna, followed by Graz.

Social Structure of the Community

As previously mentioned, the first wave of Palestinians was mainly composed of students. The community, then, lacked laborers as well as political immigrants. Therefore, the community was basically composed of students who chose to work in Austria after graduation, which meant that the majority of its members belonged to the middle class.

In general, the community in Austria, compared with those in neighboring European countries, is distinguished by its high number of academics. There are, for example, around 150 Palestinian physicians in the country in addition to a large number of officials and professionals. This explains the mixed marriages among many of the first generation and their children's assimilation into Austrian society, as no Palestinian institution has been able to attract members of the second generation.

The great majority of the community comes from the West Bank and Gaza Strip followed by Palestinians from Lebanon who came with UNRWA and resided with their families in Vienna, although UNRWA moved back to Beirut by the end of the 1990s. Palestinians from Jordan, Syria and the Gulf come next in number. Palestinians carrying Israeli passports were the smallest.

Political Formations within the Community

The history of the Palestinian community in Austria has been affected over the past 50 years by political developments. The most important milestones were the formation of the various Palestinian organizations, the PLO, the 1967 war, the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the first *Intifada*, the peace talks in 1991-1992, the second *Intifada* in September of 2000, etc. The study of the history of Palestinian political activity in Austria is a reflection of the general Palestinian status, whether at home or in the Diaspora. The Arab nationalist thought was prevalent in the late 1950s, having its effect on the community. The schism in the national movement in 1961 cast its shadow on the political trend of the Palestinians in Austria. With the rise of Fateh and the establishment of the PLO Palestinians in Austria started showcasing the Palestinian identity in service of the cause, with Fateh rising to prominence in the community. Ever since the mid 1980s, with the rift that struck Fateh movement, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) emerged as an effective organization through the General Union of Palestinian Students, the Arab Club of Palestine and a group of Austrian friends of Palestine. However, PFLP hardly participated in these activities in its name. In addition, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Palestinian Communist Party and the Israeli Communist Party RAKAH were present. Since the early 1990s, movements of political Islam especially Hamas, began to emerge on the Palestinian political arena.

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Office

The PLO office was unofficially inaugurated (without having diplomatic status with the Austrian government) in the mid-1970s by Mr. Ghazi Hussein. The office was officially inaugurated in Vienna in March of 1980. Hussein, the first Palestinian ambassador, had a distinguished presence, as he was active in responding to hostile articles, as well as writing articles about the Palestinian cause in Austrian newspapers. In 1981, however, he was deported after being accused of gun-running. This was a politically motivated media scandal. In addition, he aroused the anger of Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky who was considered a friend of the Palestinians.

In 1982, Abdullah Al-Afranji took over the PLO representative office for a short time, together with his administration of the West German office. Soon after the Palestinian state [in exile] was declared in Algeria, Dawood Barakat, who succeeded Al-Afranji, was granted the title of ambassador by the Austrian government. He remained on the job until 1990, when the late Faysal Uwaidhah assumed command. The latter, however, did not speak German, and chronic illness hindered his activity. These two factors dampened the effectivity of the Vienna office. Ambassador Zuhair Al-Wazeer took over the office in April of 2005.

Development of Institutional Work within the Palestinian Community

Chapter Three

The first generation of every community usually finds it difficult to establish an institutional ground that may help the community communicate with the homeland. One such difficulty is having a platform for cultural, political and social activity in the country of immigration. However, looking into the history of the first Palestinian generation in Austria, one is impressed by the scope of activity and the effective institutions this generation was able to create on various levels. Several important factors were helpful in this respect:

1. The education of the majority of the first generation immigrants, mainly the students
2. The difficult political situation at home and the expatriates' feeling of the necessity for political activity
3. The nationalist dimension of the Palestinian cause
4. The political affiliation with various organizations
5. The beginning of Palestinian syndicate activity
6. The effective Arab presence in Austria, which gave cover to the Palestinian community
7. The presence of Kreisky as chancellor in the 1970s

Historical Context

Historically, the Fateh movement had a positive impact on Palestinian students in Austria. Since the mid-1960s, Fateh was active under the cover of existing Arab institutions, like the General Union of Palestinian Students and the Palestine Arab Sports Club. Among Palestinian institutions established by Fateh activists until the early 1980s, this movement had the most conspicuous political presence in Austria. By the late 1970s, with the crystallization of a Palestinian political left supported by the left-wing political trend in Austria and Europe, the Palestinian political and informational activity in Austria took a new direction which reflected on the identity of the active Palestinian institutions and those that were re-established. The Palestinian political informational activity in Austria increased between the 1960s and the 1980s, as it did elsewhere. The second Gulf war in 1991 and the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993 had a negative impact on Palestinian activities and morale. By the 1990s, especially with the outbreak of the second *Intifada*, Islamic political movements, especially Hamas, became active among the Palestinian community in Austria, as in other European countries.

Comment [S1]: Which movement???

Palestinian presence and activity in Austria is characterized by the presence of a relatively large number of institutions despite the small size of the community. Although this number was a reflection of the community's activity, it was also a reflection of the state of the prevailing political schism, a case which also reflected the situation of Palestinian society at large. Some activists, could not overcome their personal differences for the sake of the common interest. Basically, this information depends on live testimonies of Palestinian activists who witnessed the past 50 years of the Palestinian presence in Austria and who were active in institutions of various political sects. Objective and unbiased information was difficult to obtain due to the differences that characterized Palestinians in Austria.

The First Generation

Motivated by the political situation in Palestine in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, Palestinian students in Austria worked to establish a circle for political activities. They expressed themselves through Arab gatherings in Austria, like the General Union of Arab Students and Palestine Arab Sports Club. In 1961 Palestinian students in Graz were so active that in 1962, a year after the establishment of the student movement in the city, the Palestinian cause became the center of its activity. One of those who participated in this preliminary activity was Yahya Ashour, a member of Fateh, as well as Khaleel Hammad and Ismaeel Al-Ashshi. These three were able to attract a large number of students from Gaza, as well as non-Palestinians, like Dr. Shawqi Badr from Egypt. The Palestine Arab Sports Club, which also sponsored Palestinian activities, was established in 1960 by a number of students from Egypt, Syria and Jordan.

In 1964, Palestinian students in Gratz worked to establish a network for Palestinian students. Austrian authorities, however, refused the name because at that time, Palestine did not have any defined political or geographical entity that was internationally recognized. This forced the students in 1965 to register this institution under the name of the General Union of Arab Students.

With the increase in the number of students in the mid-1960s, and as a result of the political differences that befell the **Palestine Arab Club**, another branch of the club was established in Vienna in 1965, where Palestinian students were most active. At that time, Palestinian students established the Youth Club for Arab Students, which was also active under the umbrella of the Union of Arab Students.

In the early 1960s, Germany was full of Palestinian students. Geographic proximity and the heightening of Palestinian political activity urged Palestinian students in both countries to coordinate and organize a conference for all Palestinian students in both countries. The conference was held between February 28 and March 2, 1962 in Bonn, Germany. It was followed, in 1963, by a meeting in Mainz, Germany, for Palestinian students in Europe. In 1965, a

Comment [S2]: Palestine Arab Sports Club???

confederation was established for the Union of Palestinian Students in Austria and Germany. In 1966, both unions adopted the political line of Fateh. The activity of this confederation continued until 1972. Prominent figures in this confederation were Yahya Ashour, Hani Al-Hassan, Ameen Al-Hindi, Nabee Quleilat and Abdullah Al-Afranji. These students played an important role in the rise to prominence of Fateh and the reorganization of the Union of Palestinian Students. Al-Afranji became the Palestinian representative in Germany, under different titles.

It must be mentioned here that the first generation in Austria was active in left wing political movements (Trotskyists, Maoists, Communists), along with some Austrian Jewish figures who were supportive of the Palestinian cause. Due to the armed operations, Austrian authorities started to clamp down on Palestinian students by imposing house arrests, refusing to renew their residence permits or denying their return to Austria.

The 1980s and the 1990s

The first visit to Austria of Yasser Arafat in 1979, and the inauguration of an official office for the PLO in Vienna, was a fresh boost to morale toward activation of the Palestinian community in the country. This translated into attempts to bring together the community under one umbrella. However, contention between the PLO and the community club on representation, and later among Fateh activists themselves regarding matters related to positions, led to schisms that weakened Palestinian performance and resulted in the growth of the number of their institutions.

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Palestinian Institutions in Austria

The Palestinian Community Club in Austria

On May 8, 1980, the establishment of the Palestinian Club in Austria, an outgrowth of the activity of the first generation of Palestinians who were loyal to Fateh, led by Bilal Musa and Awni Qaraman, was officially celebrated. In his inaugural speech, Musa emphasized that the idea of establishing a community was out of necessity. He said: 'The idea of establishing the community in Austria was not the outgrowth of an emotional or enthusiastic whim. It was rather a response to a necessity dictated by the actual situation of the Palestinian cause, a response to our awareness, as Palestinian Arabs, of our actual status in Austria which is characterized by disassembly and dispersion, a response to our belief that organized work is the basis for facing division and weakness and for achieving strength.'

The necessity that Musa referred to in his speech, early in the 1980s, became a driving force with an increase in the number of the community members. In the speech, Musa emphasized (a) the intra-Palestinian dimension of the community

when he limited its activity to the PLO framework (b) the Arab-Palestinian dimension of the community, with respect to the necessity of coordination with active Arab institutions in Austria, and (c) the Austrian-Palestinian dimension particularly with respect to being open-minded, while, at the same time safeguarding Palestinian identity.

The club indulged in various activities, like seminars, demonstrations, sit-ins printing and distributing informative materials, etc. The lack of official venue and financial support, however, had a negative effect on its activities. The rifts in Fateh and the tense relationship with the PLO office also had a negative impact.

The General Union of Palestinian Students in Austria

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon gave rise to certain political changes and urged some Palestinian students to establish an active Palestinian student union in Austria. Early in 1983, work on crystallizing this idea started and concluded on November 26, 1983, with the reactivation of the General Union of Palestinian Students in Austria. The new administrative committee comprised Basheer Sha'ban, A'del As-Sa'di, Hassan Habqazah and Waleed Ma'roof. The union was officially registered with the Austrian authorities. In its capacity as a syndicate the union assisted Palestinian students in registering at universities, gave them information on Austrian conditions and helped them find residence. In other aspects, the union was active in strengthening relations with Austrian, Arab and international student unions. It was also active in holding seminars and festivals and distributing political leaflets, etc. Since its inception, the union had a left-wing character. The PLO office repeatedly tried to take control of the union. During the 1990s, it finally succeeded when Fateh had a political voice within it. One development which negatively affected the union was the political conflict between some members of Fateh and others from PFLP, when they clashed for the first time during one of the official meetings. The second Gulf war also had a negative impact on the union. New elections were held in 1991, and Abdullah At Turk was elected chairman of the union. Problems in the union increased between 1991 and 1993, and one may say that between 1993 and 2001 the union was paralyzed.

Currently, Waleed Al-Yusuf chairs the union. It should be mentioned that the union, by its nature, is an institution that was established by the students, not by the first generation like most of the other institutions.⁸

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The Palestinian Community Institute in Austria

As a result of the first *Intifada*, and the activities of the General Union of Palestinian Students, a group of first generation Palestinians established, in 1989, a new institution named the Palestinian Community in Austria, under which it was officially registered. The administrative committee comprised several members and was chaired at that time by Dr. George Nicola, followed by Mustafa

Abdul-Hadi. It was plagued with problems exacerbated by the signing of the Oslo accords. The general assembly of the community did not meet for a long time and activity on the Palestinian level was greatly reduced. In late 2005, there were continuous disputes between the new administrative committee, chaired by Munther Mari'e, and the previous chairman, Mustafa Abdul-Hadi, who declared that the last elections held in September 2005 were illegal. Despite this, the community is still officially registered with Austrian authorities. It is worth mentioning that in Vienna, there is a section of the police department concerned with issuing licenses to clubs. All clubs and various institutions are organized according to a general and unified internal constitution maintained by the police department, irrespective of their goals. One of the most important requirements in this system is the selection of an administrative committee of three persons and also an annual general assembly meeting. Once these two conditions are met, registration is considered valid, activities notwithstanding.

Attempts to Unify the Community through Institutional Work

Although this subject took a great deal of thought on the part of many people over time, it is difficult to pinpoint historical facts about it. In his testimony about the 1990s as mentioned in his book, 'Tuyoor Al-Sabbar' (Birds of Aloe), Jameel Shammout pointed to the many attempts to unify the two communities and to the numerous meetings that took place between representatives of the Palestinian Community Club and the Palestinian Community in Austria. He documented his testimony with an official declaration that pointed to liquidating both institutions for the sake of establishing a unified Palestinian community. The following quotation is taken from the said declaration: 'Our brothers, in view of the vitally important new situation, members of both communities have seen that the existence of two bodies for one community will only lead to its weakness paralyzing its potential and hindering achievement of its goals. Therefore, as members of both gatherings we are well aware of the situation and are highly responsible people, we are pleased to announce the joyful news that is long overdue: the agreement on the 10th of January 1991 on liquidating both the Palestinian Community Club and the Palestinian Community in Austria. Based on this, it was decided to call for a general congress with the purpose of establishing an active Palestinian community that serves our sacred cause...'

With the eruption of the second *Intifada* and the common feeling among community members of the necessity for action, as well as with an increase in activities of the Islamic movements, new attempts to reactivate the community grew. After various discussions and meetings, a new administrative committee was formed on May 27, 2001 composed of Omar Al-Masri, Sua'ad As-Sa'di Tareq Shaushariyya, Mahmood Qaddouha and Ja'far Sha'th. The new committee was officially registered under the name of the Palestinian Community in Austria chaired by Omar Al-Masri. Mustafa Abdul-Hadi and Jamal Hishma were appointed as two members of the board of trustees. On the same day, all papers

and seals were received from Dr. Sami Ayyad, and passed on to the community as they had been in his custody since the 1990s.

Insurmountable past differences led some members of the first Palestinian community, established in 1989, to call for an emergency meeting of another general assembly on June 28, 2001. A new five-member administrative committee for the community, chaired by Mustafa Abdul-Hadi, was elected. Two of the activists who worked on reactivating the Palestinian community, Mustafa Abdul-hadi and Jamal Hishma, were instrumental in reactivating both communities. Since 2001, two Palestinian communities in Austria bearing the same name, but having different administrative committees, have been present.

The Palestinian community chaired by Mustafa Abdul-Hadi, with Dr. George Nicola (for the first time as a noticeable activist), inaugurated a venue for the community in the city of Vienna in 2001, where various activities are held. A website was also established with the purpose of distributing periodic messages about new Palestinian political events and other various activities.⁹

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Palestinian Expatriate Society in Austria

The Palestinian Expatriate Society in Austria was founded in 2002 by Jama Hishmah, who is the society's current chairman. It is a member of the right-of-return committees in Europe. This society is active on the informational, cultural and social levels in Austria and is mainly concerned with activating Palestinian expatriate issues and demanding the right-of-return to their homeland. This society is considered an academic information outlet endeavoring to become an adjunct source of information and political activity to the Palestinian cause. Vienna was chosen to be the location for the society. Main objectives of the society include:

1. Highlight the Palestinian right-of-return considering it to be both a political and a human issue
2. Preserve the Palestinian Arab identity
3. Focus attention on Palestinian concerns in their whereabouts
4. Keep European public opinion abreast of the true dimensions of the Palestinian cause and concentrate on national right of Palestinians.

In addition, numerous Palestinian institutions were also formed in Austria over the past 50 years. Some of them remain active, some are officially registered but without any activity, and others have been disbanded. Some of these institutions are:

Palestine Network in Austria

This institution was established in 1993 and qualifies as an independent body. It is officially registered as a charitable institution, with Adel Abdulla as its

secretary general. Its activities increased after the onset of the second *Intifada*. The nexus emphasizes social and cultural dimensions in its activities including supervising a project for the adoption of 850 Palestinian orphans from the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan and Lebanon.

On the Austrian level, activity is mainly informative addressing public opinion. Although all members are Palestinians, it receives moral and financial support from both Islamic and Arab communities in Austria, especially the Turkish and the Bosnian communities, which share in offering financial aid to needy families in the West Bank, Gaza and refugee camps in Lebanon.

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Union of Palestinian Physicians and Pharmacists in Austria¹⁰

This union, sponsored by the PLO, was registered in 2002 by a group of Palestinian physicians and pharmacists, with Dr. George Nicola as chairman. The union defines its objectives as encouraging cultural and medical interaction between Palestine and Austria. It works on establishing good relations with Austrian physicians, and acquainting Austrian people with the history of Palestine and events taking place there. The union also organizes periodic seminars for Austrian teachers on the Palestinian cause, so that they may teach it to their pupils.

In one of its activities, the union, in cooperation with the Evangelical Church, established the Anbar Clinic, which offers free medical service to Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims visiting Austria. It is also used as a meeting place for families to get together and have food during Ramadan. President Fischer visited the clinic and thanked those in charge.

So far, the clinic treated 52 of those wounded during the *Intifada* and offered them the necessary medical care. In September 2005 a man arrived from Palestine, accompanied by his 7-year-old daughter, seeking medical treatment for a hearing problem. The union covered all her medical expenses, and secured residence for the father and his daughter throughout the period of treatment with a Palestinian family. The clinic also undertook a mission to dispatch 5 to 7 Austrian physicians to Palestine to perform surgical operations.

Palestine Philanthropic Nexus

This institution was established in 2004, but dates back to the early 1990s when it was then known as the Palestine Arab Nexus. Currently, this nexus has an Islamic leaning.

Political and Cultural Presence in Austrian Society

It can be said that official occasions and political setbacks are the two major factors that activate a Palestinian presence in Austria through celebrating a certain event, organizing demonstrations, inviting Palestinian celebrities to give lectures, organizing fund-raising campaigns, or any such cultural and political

activities. It is not odd, therefore, that major events in the history of the Palestinian issue over the past 50 years, (the 1967 war, the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the first *Intifadah* of 1987 and the second of 2000) were wake-up calls which activated the Palestinian community in Austria. However, without minimizing their importance, the majority of these activities target the Palestinian community in particular, and the Arab and Islamic majority in general. They rarely target Austrian society itself. The schisms that befell the community confuse the ordinary Austrian citizen who cannot find the way through these various institutions. This is to say nothing about its negative effect on the community's activities and their cultural, political and informational roles.

Negative Factors that Affect the Community

Some factors that have had negative effects on the community and the Palestinian image in Austria were, doubtless, the armed operations and assassinations that took place in Austria and neighboring countries, leading to the visualization of Palestinians as terrorists. These operations led politicians as well as laymen in Austria change their opinions about the Palestinian cause, for these incidents put Austria at loggerheads with Israel because they were carried out on Austrian territory. Following are some of these operations:

- 1970 Explosion of a bomb aboard an Austrian plane en route to Vienna from Frankfurt
- 1972 The Munich Olympic operation (against Israeli sports team) that led to a clampdown on Palestinian students by the Austrian police
- 1973 Attack on a train in Austria carrying Soviet Jews immigrating to Israel
- 1975 Attack on the main OPEC office in Vienna and taking the oil ministers hostage
- 1979 Attack with explosives on a Jewish synagogue
- 1981 Apprehension of some Palestinians at the airport carrying weapons said to be dispatched to Ghazi Hussein, the PLO Representative in Austria, which led to his deportation
- 1981 Assassination of Vienna Jewish MP, Hainz Nihil.
- 1984 Assassination of Issam As-Sartawi, who was a personal friend of Bruno Kreisky and paved the way for the Austrian-Palestinian relations
- 1985 Attacks on targets at the Vienna and Rome airports by the Abu-Nida group

In addition to these external factors, there are numerous internal factors that affected the Austrian-Palestinian relations in the community and its activities like:

1. The presence of two institutes bearing the same name, the Palestinian Community in Austria

2. The numerous, officially registered Palestinian institutions, many of which, do not actually exist
3. The strong personal disputes that sometimes assume political cover, even inside the political organization itself
4. The weak performance of the PLO office after the Oslo accords
5. The lack of concern for activities outside the Palestinian gathering, which weakened Palestinian public relations in Austria
6. The behavior of Fateh members, especially since it is the largest organization, with many factions and poor performance
7. The interaction with institutions on temporary, emotional and electoral bases, without real allegiance, leading to a reduction in credibility
8. The lack of coordination and prevalence of negative competition on the level of the organization and activities
9. The lack of capable Palestinian figures, with a deep understanding of Austrian history and the type of discourse that suits Austrian public opinion, capable of playing a significant political role
10. The adverse political repercussions of the Oslo accords and their role in dispersing the national consensus
11. The state of depression that prevailed after the second Gulf war and the political differences that resulted due to misunderstanding of the Palestinian stance

Aspects of Strength in the Palestinian Community in Austria

The presence of a community in a foreign country carries a lot of difficulties or various levels. This is the case with the relatively recent Palestinian community in Austria. This community, however, has some positive characteristics that are related to the nature of its structure. Examples are:

1. The relatively small size of the community and its concentration in major geographical regions
2. The fact that most community members belong to the middle class, which gives them a feeling of financial security
3. The high ratio of academicians in the community
4. The low ratio of unemployment among community members
5. A good command of the German language among community members, which facilitates geographic settlement
6. The Austrian nationality of most Palestinians carry the which facilitates geographical stability
7. The presence of a second generation born and raised in Austria
8. The presence of an institutional activity framework for the community
9. The association of some community members with Austrian political activities, through the student union and Austrian parties

Arab and Austrian Institutions Supporting the Palestinian Cause

Chapter Four

Arab Institutions

Palestinian

The Palestine Arab Club¹¹

The club was inaugurated in 1961. It served as a political cover for Fateh and the General Union for Palestinian Students. Its membership was open to all Arabs. The name, Palestine Arab Club, was adopted in 1978. It identifies itself as an Arab club that is mainly concerned with cultural and sports activities. Among its objectives are concentration on informational activity for the purpose of acquainting people with Arab culture, and supporting Arab and other downtrodden people in the world.

Committee of the Wounded in Austria

This was established after the second *Intifadah*, by an initiative of a group of Palestinian and Arab physicians in Austria, with the objective of treating some difficult cases of *Intifadah* casualties. About 52 wounded Palestinians were treated. The committee was financially supported by funds from the Austrian ministry of defense and OPEC. However, due to political conflict among Palestinian organizations, activities of this committee were discontinued.

The Arab Women's Organization

Chaired by Maria Terese Kiryaki, this organization is active in the cultural and informational fields, as well as in giving courses in Arabic for second generation Arabs.

The Egyptian Women's Organization

This organization is chaired by Maria Attiyya and is active in the cultural field, observing Arab days, musical evenings, film shows, etc.

The Palestine Committee

This committee was established in the early 1980s by left-wing Austrians and Arabs and was active in the field of political information in Austria. It was officially registered in the late 1980s but was later liquidated in 1995.

Arab Human Rights Organization

Syrian Physicians Nexus

Dr. Abdur-Rahman Abu-Rumia is chairman.

Syrian Expatriates Nexus

Committee for Helping Iraqi Children

The committee was chaired by Dr. Muhammad Khamees.

The Egyptian and Tunisian Club

The Arab Chamber of Commerce

Austrian Institutions

Friends of Palestine Committee

The committee was established in the early 1990s by a group of Austrians and Arabs who were associated with the PFLP. It was active in extending financial support to the first 'intifada' but was later liquidated in 1997.

Peace Initiative for Palestine¹²

This includes a group of activists of various nationalities in the information field.

Austrian-Arab Friendship Society¹³

The society was established on April 13, 1982 with the objective of increasing awareness of the Austrian society in regard to the Arab world and its political, economic and cultural problems. The first administrative committee had representatives from all political parties in Austria. It is active on three levels: political (exchange of delegations), informational (seminars and publication of a periodical) and providing support for projects. It is currently chaired by Mr. Fritz Edlinger.

Arab-Austrian Cultural Center (Okaz)¹⁴

The center was inaugurated in 2004 in Vienna. Its active members are a group of left-wing Arabs who were active in the Palestine Arab Club, together with supporters of PFLP (Arab nationalists) and supporters of DFLP. It is officially registered in Austria and aspires to 'participate in an Arab, cultural, enlightening

project, couched in a humanitarian context. The center rests on the principle of solidarity between the Austrian and the Arab nations, looks for communication with civil society in Austria, and calls for the support of constructive interaction and solidarity for the purpose of serving just issues and establishing an Arab Austrian solidarity committee.' 15

The center is active in cultural and educational fields.

Kanafani Cultural Institute¹⁶

This is an Austrian establishment that brings together a group of various nationalities. It is concerned with dialogue among civilizations and discussing such subjects as Islamophobia and xenophobia. It is also active in the publishing field and publishes a periodical.

Austrians-of-Arab-Origin Society

The society is chaired by engineer Nasouh Toujar and Dr. Tareq Malandi.

Women-in-Black Movement¹⁷

The movement was established in Austria in June, 2001 with the efforts of a group of women led by Mrs. Paula Abrahms-Haurani. This group is mainly active in the political and informational fields, like demonstrations and sit-ins in support of the *Intifada* and the Palestinian cause. It demanded imposing economic sanctions against Israel, and was active in collecting signatures against the Apartheid Wall, together with other issues, like distribution of leaflets and following up with material published in the media in Austria on the Palestinian problem. The group has also supported social projects in Palestine and conducted television interviews locally and in Europe. At the present, the Movement organizes sit-ins —on the first Friday of every month — demanding evacuation of all Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, terminating the occupation, pulling down of the Apartheid Wall, and establishing an independent Palestinian state based on a just solution for the refugees problem and including a comprehensive peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

Jews-for-Just-Peace Group¹⁸

This Austrian group is a member of the European Jewish Gathering for a Just Peace that was established in Amsterdam in 2002. It was established in November 2003 by a number of active Jews. More of a committee than an organization, it is active on the informational level and participates in cultural and political activities.

International Women's Peace Movement¹⁹

This group is composed of women who hail from the village of Hares, near Salfeet, Nablus. They are active in documenting and publishing violations of human rights in the occupied territories, urging Palestinians to participate in direct, nonviolent actions against the said violations, as well as against confiscation and destruction of Palestinian land and property. They closely cooperate with some Palestinian groups who struggle against the Apartheid Wall. This movement is represented in Austria, where Austrian women have become involved in their program. An Austrian woman from this movement has recently participated in a project to import olive oil from Palestine.

Austrian Development Agency

Early in 2004, the mechanism of work at the international development section of the Austrian foreign ministry was rearranged; as a result, the Austrian Development Agency was established. It is mainly concerned with Palestine and is responsible for developmental projects. Ever since its inauguration, it has been headed by Mr. Gerhardt Buffler, who previously worked with the UNDP in the Gaza Strip. Austria supports sanitation projects in Palestine in cooperation with the Union of Medical Relief Committees. It also supports various nutritional projects in cooperation with UNRWA, the Psychological Support for Children in Gaza and UNICEF. It cooperates with the UNDP for creating employment opportunities for young people.²⁰

Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue²¹

This was established in 1991 and headquartered in the same villa that once belonged to the former chancellor of Austria, Bruno Kreisky. It is concerned with continuation of Kreisky's political legacy that encourages dialogue and understanding. This institution has had numerous projects in Palestine, like bringing together young people from the Middle East (Palestine, Israel, Egypt and Jordan), sponsoring meetings for women, as well as seminars and lectures. The head of the institution at the present time is Madame Gertraud Borek d'Olmo, with Dr. Rudolf Scholten as President.

North-South Institute²²

This is an Austrian institute concerned with supporting developmental projects in southern countries in various fields. For many years they have managed a project for qualifying Palestinian graduates from Austrian medical schools, offering three annual scholarships in Palestine in cooperation with the Union of Palestine Medical Relief Committees.²³

International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) ²⁴

The Austrian branch was established in 1920, promoting nonviolence as a way to solve disputes. Active in the educational information fields, it supports

some educational projects in Palestine, where it has also dispatched numerous official delegations.

Summary

The arrival of Palestinians in Austria came at various periods. The beginnings were in the 1950s with the arrival of students. 1958 can be considered as the year when the Palestinian community started to crystallize in Austria with the arrival of Palestinian students and their residence in Graz and Vienna for educational purposes. The second period followed in the late 1970s with the movement of UNRWA's main office to Vienna. This period had several stages the first of which ran from late 1975 through 1976, whereas the second stage started mid-1978. The first stage was temporary, with the hope of returning soon to Beirut, which in fact took place in 1977. The year 1978 was a turning point in the nature of Palestinian existence in the country. At that time, Palestinians mostly from Lebanon, started coming to Austria for residence.

The third period extended from the mid-1980s till late 1990s, and was characterized by the arrival of new Palestinian students from the West Bank and Gaza. In addition, a number of immigrants seeking political asylum arrived in the country. To them, Austria was more of a transit point than a place for permanent residence. It is worthwhile mentioning that the number of arriving students decreased considerably following the mid-1990s. This is due to the difficulties of leaving Palestine and the introduction of strict immigration laws in Austria after it became a member of the European Union.

The fourth and most recent period started with the onset of the second *Intifada* and was characterized by the arrival of a number of Palestinians seeking political asylum. This number, however, was very limited, for Austria, unlike Scandinavian countries, was not a country that would grant political asylum to Palestinians. It was also not among those countries where Palestinians could seek work, like Germany.

It is very difficult to specify the approximate number of Palestinians or those of Palestinian origin in Austria. This is not only due to statistical difficulties but also because some Austrian activists concerned with the Palestinian question treat these numbers as an issue that has political dimensions. Whereas some people put the number at 1,500, others estimate it at 5,000. However, it may be speculated that the number is around 2,000 to 3,000 Palestinians distributed in various Austrian provinces. The majority, approaching 80%, is in Vienna followed by Graz.

In general, the community in Austria, compared with those in neighboring European countries, is distinguished by its high number of academics. There are for example, around 150 Palestinian physicians in the country, in addition to a large number of officials and professionals. This explains the mixed marriages

among many first generation Palestinians and their children's assimilation into Austrian society, as none of the Palestinian institutions has been able to attract members of the second generation.

The Palestinian presence and activity in Austria had been characterized by the presence of a relatively large number of institutions, despite the small size of the community. Although this number was a reflection of the community's activity, it was also a reflection of the state of prevailing political schism, a case that also reflected the situation of Palestinian society at large. Some activists could not overcome their personal differences for the sake of the common interest. This study depends on live testimonies of Palestinian activists who witnessed the past 50 years of the Palestinian presence in Austria and who were active in institutions of various political stripes. Objective and unbiased information was difficult to obtain due to differences that characterized Palestinians in Austria.

The public activity of Palestinian students reached its climax between 1968 and 1972. The hunger strike taken by the students in the autumn of 1970, due to the political and military situation in Jordan, was the pinnacle of public, political and informational activities in Austria.

In March of 1971, a conference was held in Vienna for the left-wing societies that showed solidarity with Palestine in Europe (Trotskyists, Maoists and Communists). The objectives of this conference were to lay a unified informational plan, to communicate with the Palestinian revolution and to publish a common magazine. Seventy people, coming from ten European countries, participated in the conference. The personal and political differences among Palestinian students in Austria, members of Fateh led to the termination of this project, as well as freezing all activities of the General Union of Palestinian Students. One may say that Palestinian activity became almost absent between 1973 and 1980.

It can be said that official occasions and political setbacks are the two major factors that activated a Palestinian presence in Austria through celebrating certain events, organizing demonstrations, inviting Palestinian celebrities to give lectures, organizing a fund-raising campaign, or any such cultural and political activities. It is not odd, therefore, that the major events in the history of the Palestinian issue over the past fifty years, (the 1967 war, the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the first *Intifadah* of 1987 and the second of 2000) were wake-up calls that activated the Palestinian community in Austria. However, without minimizing their importance, the majority of these activities target the Palestinian community in particular, and the Arab and Islamic majority in general. They rarely target Austrian society itself. The schisms that befell the community confuse the ordinary Austrian citizen who is unable to find his way through these various institutions. This says nothing about the negative effect on the community's activities and their cultural, political and informational roles.

General Epilogue

In studying the history and activities of the Palestinian community in Austria, one is bound to have a mixed feeling of pride and agony. It is a feeling that may be considered part of Palestinian history irrespective of geographical location. Historically, the Palestinian community in Austria was distinguished by having the necessary fundamentals for golden opportunities that would have made it highly effective. However, its poor effectiveness in the past decades, especially since the 1990s, is not only a reflection of the general Palestinian situation but also one of the consequences of the various disputes that have befallen members of the community. Palestinians in Austria, like other Palestinians, tend to resort to collective cooperation and coordination in times of great crisis, on the grounds of sinking their differences and opening a new page that is doomed to be closed again.

In studying the history of the community, one can deduce that political competition is the prime mover of activity. When PFLP's activity in the 1980s intensified, Fateh followed suit. In later years, especially after the second *Intifada*, the activity of Islamic political parties prompted Fateh to become active again. In other words, the absence of competition drove everyone to inactivity. No one in the community has given his/her full time for political activity.

No doubt that having a center for the community is essential as a social and political meeting point for many Palestinians. At the same time, from an institutional point of view, it is sad to note that one man (Dr. George Nicola) bears alone the expenses of the center, for it means that the center is associated with a person, and not with an institution.

The association of certain Palestinian establishments like the General Union of Palestinian Students and the Union of Palestinian Physicians and Pharmacists with their central Palestinian headquarters, do not override the necessity for a unified local Palestinian establishment like the Palestinian community. Being local, it should abide by local laws, taking into consideration forthcoming generations that will find it difficult to identify themselves with existing Palestinian establishments. This means that the community must overlook the central Palestinian political agenda and work on a unified local one instead. Here common social and educational interests of Austrian Palestinians, as well as the interests of the new generation brought up in Austria, will take shape.

Palestinians in Austria, by virtue of their social structure, should be able to have an institutional organization. This will secure a natural **identity** with their mother cause and promote their status in their host country. Institutions, as such, must act as a venue for Palestinians in prosperity as well as adversity.

Comment [j3]: Does 'identity' belong here?

Endnotes

- 1 “Who Can Get Asylum in Austria?”, taken from the web site:
www.asyl-in-not.org/rechtslage/oesterreich/index.htm
- 2 “Immigration and Immigrants Statistics”, taken from the web site:
www.bmi.gv.at/downloadarea/asyl_fremdenwesen_statistik/052005.pdf
- 3 idem
- 4 “Illegal Immigration”, from the periodical of the Austrian Ministry of Interior, on the following site:
www.bmi.gov.at/oeffentlsicherheit/2002/07_08/artkel_1.asp
- 5 The Austrian Forum for Immigration Studies, at the following website:
www.oefm.org/findit.html
- 6 “Vienna for Internet Services”:
www.wien.gv.at/ma66/aktuell/pdf/bev_stbg.pdf
- 7 We, at PII, are about to get additional information on these and other institutes to be mentioned in the forthcoming paragraphs. This information will be included in the updated copy of this study.
- 8 The website of the Palestinian Student Union in Austria is: www.gupd.at
- 9 Its website is: www.palaestinensische-gemeinde.at
- 10 Its website is: www.paav.at
- 11 Its website is: www.intifada.at
- 12 Its website is: www.members.aon.at/friedenfuerspalaestina
- 13 Its website is: www.saar.at
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