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THE PALESTINIAN DIASPORA

PALESTINIAN EXPATRIATES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

Felix Dane / Jörg Knocha

Today, Palestinians living in the diaspora outnumber by far those who stayed in their homeland. Many were displaced by conflict, but to speak only of the suffering of Palestinian refugees in this context would not at all reflect the complexity of the matter. While almost half of all Palestinians are refugees, many of whom live in difficult conditions in camps, there is also a large number of expatriate Palestinians spread all over the world who benefit from a comfortable position in society and who are organized in various networks. It is due to them that the Palestinian population as a whole can be considered as a cosmopolitan people, exerting influence on the Middle East conflict through a global network.

DIASPORA, EXILE, FLIGHT

Over half of the 10 million Palestinians worldwide live outside the Palestinian Territories.¹ One should take into account that not every Palestinian living in the diaspora is an exile, and not every exile is a refugee. Another contentious issue is who should be designated a refugee and how many of them there actually are. Added to this is the fact that not every refugee is part of the diaspora. According to the United Nations, two out of five Palestinian refugees actually live within the Palestinian Territories.²

1 | Cf. Ingrid Jaradat Gassner, "Palestinians Living in the Diaspora", *This Week in Palestine*, 2008, No. 119, <http://thisweekinpalestine.com/details.php?id=2402&ed=151&edid=151> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

2 | Cf. UNRWA, "UNRWA in figures", 2010, <http://unrwa.org/userfiles/2011080123958.pdf> (accessed 16 Jan 2012). Another problem lies in the fact that the definition of refugees of the United Nations is incomplete and that no census has ever been taken within the diaspora community.

In this article, the “diaspora” encompasses all Palestinians living outside the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, irrespective of the reason. This does not equate to the community of Palestinians in “exile”, i.e. those who live in the diaspora and have no prospect of returning or who could only do so under the threat of serious consequences such as imprisonment or persecution. This affects mainly Palestinians who do not have an ID card issued by Israel. The term “refugee” is applied to all Palestinians who had to leave their homeland against their will. For reasons of simplicity, we will only consider the period since 1948, the beginning of the Israeli-Arab conflict. This article also covers the refugees who were driven out or had to flee from the land they owned within the British Mandate Territory and are now living in the Palestinian Territories. They find themselves in a grey zone: Since they live in the Palestinian Territories, they do not form part of the diaspora. Still, most of them live in a kind of exile, as their former home is located in present-day Israel. A group not covered separately in this article is that of the Palestinians living in Israel, who make up around 20 per cent of the population. Their history and the degree to which they have become integrated are matters that are too complex to be adequately dealt with by a single approach within this article.

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THE PALESTINIAN DIASPORA

The decisive moment in the history of the Palestinian diaspora is the foundation of the state of Israel. This has been described as a paradoxical chapter of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:³ While the Jews, a diaspora people themselves, found a national homeland in 1948, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians left their homeland or were driven out of it. This trauma has entered Palestinian historiography as *al-nakba*, the catastrophe. According to UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, nearly three million Palestinian refugees live in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria alone. This means that almost three out of ten Palestinians

3 | Cf. Helena Lindholm Schulz and Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of identities and politics of homeland*, London, Routledge, 2003, 1.

are refugees in these countries. A further two million live in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. Thus almost half of all Palestinians are refugees according to UNRWA.⁴ One is therefore justified in talking of a "refugee nation".⁵

Even if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be considered the main cause of the exodus, a sizable diaspora community had already existed previously. Christians especially had been emigrating to Europe and the Americas from the Holy Land since the late 18th century. One reason for this was hope of finding better living conditions. Today, several hundred thousand (predominantly Christian) people of Palestinian descent live in Chile alone, more than anywhere else outside the Middle East. Throughout Latin America, the descendants of Palestinian immigrants have played and are still playing a defining role in politics, the economy and culture. Presidents of Palestinian descent have held office in both El Salvador and Honduras. While most Palestinians have integrated into their new home countries in the Western world without any problems, they have been prevented from doing so in many cases in the Middle East. A counter-example to Chile, El Salvador and Honduras is Lebanon, where over half of the up to 450,000 Palestinian refugees are living in twelve official camps.⁶

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The shared fate of being a refugee and the unfit living conditions in many parts of the Arab world resulted in the consolidation of a national Palestinian identity. This started to develop in the time after the First World War, when nationalist movements were emerging in the Middle East. The ideas of the ultranationalist and modernist movement of the Young Turks imported from Europe, quickly spread through large parts of the collapsed Ottoman Empire. Nationalism found a large following particularly in the area of the subsequent Mandate Territory of Palestine, as the intellectuals in that region maintained good contacts with

4 | Cf. UNRWA, "UNRWA in figures", n. 2.

5 | Cf. Schulz and Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora*, n. 3, 1.

6 | Cf. International Crisis Group, "Nurturing Instability: Lebanon's Palestinian Refugee Camps", *Crisis Group Middle East Report No. 84*, 2009, <http://crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/084-nurturing-instability-lebanons-palestinian-refugee-camps.aspx> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

the Young Turk elite.⁷ The division of Palestine in 1948 and the streams of refugees then became the symbol that every ethnic group needs in order to define itself and set itself apart. The “right of return” was one of the mainstays of this symbolism. Palestinian political movements, from Fatah to Hamas, have adopted this mantra, thus nurturing the hope that millions of refugees might one day “return” to the homeland of their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents – to what is now Israel. This community of refugees has thus become the cornerstone of the Palestinian diaspora.

THE ROLE OF UNRWA

The “United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East”, UNRWA, was established in 1949 to supply the Palestinian refugees of the first Israeli-Arab war with the basic necessities. Today, the remit is no longer restricted to emergency aid, but includes education, health care and social services. Especially in the area of education, UNRWA’s work is of great importance. By providing over 650 schools, in which hundreds of thousands of children are taught free of charge, UNRWA is the most important institution for the schooling of Palestinian refugees. UNRWA is responsible exclusively for Palestinian refugees and thus separate from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Today, UNRWA is responsible for nearly five million refugees. At first glance the criteria to qualify as a refugee appear arbitrary: “These are persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict. Palestine refugees and descendants of Palestine refugee males, including legally adopted children, are eligible to register for UNRWA services.”⁸ Added to this is the fact that UNRWA operates exclusively in the Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan and that those are the only places where refugees can register. But there

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7 | Cf. Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The reconstruction of Palestinian nationalism. Between revolution and statehood*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999, 23-24.

8 | Cf. UNRWA, *Consolidated Eligibility and Registration Instructions (CERI)*, 2009, <http://unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=87#beneficiaries> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

are also refugees, although limited in number, living in countries such as Egypt, where UNRWA does not operate. The total number of Palestinian refugees is therefore unknown. The fact that UNRWA only operates in a certain number of countries is partly due to its limited resources. In 2009, it received USD 948 million⁹, which translates to just USD 190 per registered refugee.

UNRWA has repeatedly been criticised for its definition of refugees, especially by Israel. Under this definition Palestinian refugees do not lose their UNRWA status even if they acquire citizenship in another country. One must bear in mind in this context that this is a humanitarian definition and not a political one. The period from 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 was chosen because this period represented the height of the first Israeli-Arab war and produced the greatest number of refugees.

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But UNRWA has also been subject to criticism in other matters. An Israeli secret service report from 2002 alleged that Palestinian militants were using UNRWA schools for munitions storage during the Second Intifada and smuggling weapons in its ambulances. Israel subsequently failed to provide any proof of the allegations.¹⁰ However, Peter Hansen himself, who headed UNRWA during this period, conceded in October 2004 that there probably were some Hamas sympathisers on UNRWA's payroll, but he added that this sort of thing could scarcely be avoided in view of the thousands of employees in the Gaza Strip alone.¹¹

9 | Cf. UNRWA, *Frequently asked questions*, 2011, <http://unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=87#funding> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

10 | Cf. Michael Wines, "Killing of U.N. Aide by Israel Bares Rift With Relief Agency", *The New York Times*, 4 Jan 2003, <http://nytimes.com/2003/01/04/world/killing-of-un-aide-by-israel-bares-rift-with-relief-agency.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

11 | Cf. Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006, 95.

Relations between UNRWA and the Arab countries in the region were not always free from tension either, but they have improved considerably over recent years. Initially, the Arab League, which was founded in 1945, showed hardly any interest in the Palestinian refugees or UNRWA's work. Instead of concentrating on the fate of the Palestinians in the Arab countries, the Arab League merely criticised the way Israel dealt with the Palestinians. It was not until 1959 that the first department was created within the League that also dealt with the concerns of the Palestinians in its member countries.¹² The Arab countries did cooperate with UNRWA from the start. But the Arab League instructs its members not to participate in projects that violate refugees' rights in any way or jeopardise the political future of Palestine. The main point here is that the League is explicitly opposed to the naturalisation of Palestinian refugees. Instead, they should retain their Palestinian nationality so as to keep up the pressure on Israel with respect to the refugee issue. At the same time, especially Lebanon and Syria oppose full integration of the refugees not just for political but also for economic reasons. However, most of the Arab countries have come to realise that UNRWA is a great help to them, since without it the burden imposed by millions of refugees would have long since overstretched especially Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In 2009, the proportion of Arab funds in UNRWA's total budget was around 10 per cent. The Gulf States, most notably Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, have increased their contributions considerably.¹³ In the 2002 peace plan, the Arab League retreated to a large extent from its demands regarding the right of return of millions of Palestinians. The plan merely calls for a just solution to the refugee problem.¹⁴

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12 | Cf. Mohammad Khaled al-Aza'r, "Arab Protection for Palestinian Refugees", BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights Working Paper No. 8, 2004.

13 | Cf. Daoud Kuttab, "Filippo Grandi: The New UN Official Intent on Defending Palestinian Refugees Rights and Living Conditions", *The Huffington Post*, 16 Feb 2010, http://huffingtonpost.com/daoud-kuttab/fillipo-grandi-the-new-un_b_463982.html (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

14 | Cf. BBC News, *Text: Beirut Declaration*, 28 Mar 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/monitoring/media_reports/1899395.stm (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

CASE STUDY – LEBANON

In large parts of the Arab world, there is an informal consensus between those in power and the population with respect to Palestinian refugees. Their efforts to return to their homeland enjoy widespread support, but the situation of Palestinians in the host country is not part of the debate. Things are different in Lebanon. To many people there, the presence of the Palestinian refugees is seen as one of the causes of the civil war from 1975 to 1990 and of the Israeli invasion of 1982. In other Arab countries domestic political discourse rarely features the marginalisation of the Palestinians, the lack of basic political and economic rights or life in the camps without prospects.

All parties bear some responsibility for this situation. In the course of the 1948 war, some 100,000 Palestinians fled to Lebanon. Over subsequent years, 15 official camps were set up, whose residents initially engaged in very little political activity (three camps were destroyed during the civil war). Since the country, which was dominated by a Christian elite, had no interest in a new conflict with Israel, the Palestinians were monitored by the military secret

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service. Refugees needed special permits to move from one part of the country to another. People in the camps were forbidden to assemble in groups of more than two.¹⁵ But this could not prevent Palestinians becoming part of Lebanese politics following the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War of 1967. Palestinians began to radicalise with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) providing the lead. Headed by Yasser Arafat, the PLO promoted the armed struggle against Israel. Repeated military operations against Israel were conducted from Southern Lebanon. This also caused tension with the Lebanese army, which tightened its control over the camps. The first incidents of unrest occurred in the late 1960ies. While the Christian population was hostile to the Palestinian "resistance", most Muslims supported it. The situation was complicated further by the fact that the PLO was forced to move its headquarters from Jordan to Lebanon in 1970 after the fighting between the Jordanian army and Palestinians.

15 | Cf. International Crisis Group, "Nurturing Instability: Lebanon's Palestinian Refugee Camps", n. 6, 4.

The internal Lebanese conflict became increasingly severe. On 13 April 1975, over 20 Palestinian civilians were killed by a Christian party militia. Shortly beforehand, four members of the Christian Kataeb party had been killed during a failed assassination attempt on the Christian politician Pierre Gemayel. The party's supporters accused the Palestinians of having carried out the attack. This assassination attempt is regarded as one of the triggers of the Lebanese civil war, which continued until 1990. The first phase of the civil war was characterised by fighting between followers of the Kataeb known as Phalangists and various radical Palestinian groups. The fighting escalated into a war that engulfed large parts of Lebanon and developed into more than a conflict between Christians and Muslims. Two rival blocks emerged: On the one side were the factions that tried to defend the status quo. This block consisted mainly of Christians, as they were the beneficiaries of the existing political system. They are entitled to the powerful office of President to the present day. The other side consisted of an alliance of Sunni Lebanese, Druze and Palestinians, many of whom had leftist leanings and were trying to change the socio-political system. Following several massacres of Palestinian refugees, the PLO began to deploy its entire military forces. The PLO's military arm was so strong that it was able to control parts of Lebanon, in particular the camps and the area bordering Israel in the south ("Fatah Land"). Although the social services provided by the PLO went some way to improve the situation of the Palestinian refugees, the high-handed conduct of the PLO militiamen led to tensions with the indigenous population. They were also held responsible for the Israeli revenge attacks in response to Palestinian assaults. The Israeli invasion of 1982 resulted in the destruction of the PLO institutions, and its leadership fled to Tunisia. The situation of the refugees deteriorated once again. Massacres in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in September 1982 came to be seen as a symbol of this development. With the Israeli army looking on, Christian party militiamen killed up to 3,000 Palestinian refugees because they held the PLO responsible for the death of the newly elected Christian President.¹⁶

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The civil war ended with the Palestinians marginalised once again. Outside the camps, in which the Palestinians organise themselves, they do not play a significant role either militarily or politically. There is currently little hope that their precarious situation will change any time soon. There is a consensus across denominations and parties in Lebanon that naturalisation of the refugees is out of the question. The official reason is the desire to maintain the hope that the refugees would one day "return" to their old

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homeland. In actual fact, the real cause is more likely to be the refugees' poverty and the fear that the finely adjusted denominational balance between Christians, Sunnis and Shiites might be jeopardised. As there is virtually no state presence in the camps, it is Palestinian civil society and UNRWA which supply the residents with the basic necessities. Even though there have been some improvements over the last few years, Palestinians are still not permitted to work in certain professional disciplines such as medicine, law and engineering.¹⁷ Since neither Fatah nor Hamas could improve the lives of the refugees, a niche for fundamentalist groups emerged. That is why a steady political radicalization has taken place inside the camps. After a Jihadist splinter group, Fatah al-Islam, raided a bank in May 2007, a three-month-long battle began in and around the refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared between this group and the Lebanese army. All in all, it cost the lives of 50 civilians, 179 soldiers and 226 Islamists and large parts of the camp were destroyed.¹⁸ Should there be no change in this precarious situation, which is the result of years of neglect and mismanagement, such clashes may well reoccur.

One counter-example to Lebanon seems to be Jordan, where the Palestinian refugees are more effectively integrated into society, the economy and politics. But even here there are some unsatisfactory conditions under the surface.

17 | Cf. Nada Bakri, "Lebanon Gives Palestinians New Work Rights", *The New York Times*, 18 Aug 2010, <http://nytimes.com/2010/08/18/world/middleeast/18lebanon.html> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

18 | Cf. International Crisis Group, "Nurturing Instability: Lebanon's Palestinian Refugee Camps", n. 6, 11.

CASE STUDY – JORDAN

As a result of the Israeli-Arab war from 1947 to 1949, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled to the West Bank, which Jordan annexed in 1950, and into the heartland of Jordan itself. The six-day war in 1967, in which Israel conquered the West Bank amongst other areas, produced a further stream of refugees to Jordan. These influxes of refugees changed the demographics of the country even more than in Lebanon. Since many refugees were granted citizenship, Palestinian Jordanians are a majority in the kingdom today. The crucial criterion is Article 3 of the 1954 Jordanian Citizenship Law, which contains the following definition of a Jordanian citizen: "Any person with previous Palestinian nationality except the Jews before the date of May 15, 1948 residing in the Kingdom during the period from December 20, 1949 and February 16, 1954."¹⁹ However, being granted citizenship did not affect the refugee status assigned by UNRWA, with the result that there are nearly 2 million Palestinian refugees living in Jordan today.

But problems comparable to those that later arose in Lebanon soon began to manifest themselves. After the Arab defeat of 1967, the PLO intensified its attacks on Israel from Jordanian territory. The period from 1968 to 1970 saw a steady escalation. Initially, the PLO forces received support from the Jordanian army in their attacks. But after the U.S. had exerted some pressure on the King of Jordan, he tried to make the Palestinians see sense. As was the case in Lebanon, sections of the PLO began to undermine the authority of the state. After Israel had destroyed two Palestinian strongholds in Jordan, suffering high losses in the process, and the fighting had been glorified as the "Battle of Karameh" by the Palestinian side, the PLO became increasingly self-assured. A state within a state developed within the refugee camps. When PLO forces hijacked several planes in 1970 and blew them up on Jordanian soil in a symbolic gesture having released the passengers, the King of Jordan decided to take military

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19 | Cf. Oroub Al Abed, "Palestinian refugees in Jordan", 2004, 4, <http://forcedmigration.org/research-resources/expert-guides/palestinian-refugees-in-jordan> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

action against the militant Palestinians. The fighting, which became known as the “Black September”, extended over several months and resulted in the PLO leadership having to flee to Lebanon.²⁰

Even though these events did not affect the integration of refugees directly, they did have long-term implications. Parts of the Jordanian elite harboured increasing doubts about the Palestinians’ loyalty. Consequently, a system of yellow and green cards was introduced on 1 June 1983 for Jordanians from the West Bank. Palestinian Jordanians who lived east of the river, i.e. in the heartland, were given yellow cards. The residents of the West Bank, on the other hand, were given green cards. The official reason for introducing the cards was to facilitate the movement of Palestinians between the West Bank, which was occupied by Israel, and the Jordanian heartland. According to official law, this was not intended to have any impact on citizenship or on the right to reside in a particular part of Jordan. But in fact a yellow card implied full Jordanian citizenship. The green card was nothing more than a temporary Jordanian ID card without right of residence east of the Jordan. This

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interpretation was confirmed in July 1988 when the King relinquished Jordanian sovereignty over the West Bank in a Speech from the Throne by declaring the administrative and legal separation of Jordan and the West Bank. In consequence of a directive from the Jordanian Ministry of the Interior, 1.5 million Jordanians of Palestinian descent who were living in the West Bank at the time lost their citizenship. They retained their temporary ID cards, which they have to extend regularly, but they lost their full Jordanian citizenship status. The legal basis for this is unclear.

The fact that some Palestinian Jordanians are still second-class citizens is illustrated by the fate of some 200,000 Jordanians of Palestinian descent who lived in Kuwait in 1988. After the 1990/91 Gulf War, they were expelled due to the pro-Iraq stance of the PLO and of the King of Jordan (including Rania al-Yasin, now Queen Rania of Jordan). They are living in a legal grey zone, since they

20 | Cf. *ibid*, 4-6.

resided neither in Jordan nor in the West Bank in 1988. The consequences of this scenario extend right up to the present day. Human Rights Watch speaks of over 2,700 Jordanians of Palestinian descent who had their citizenship revoked between 2004 and 2008. Many of these are Palestinian Jordanians who lived in the West Bank or in Kuwait between 1983 and 1988.²¹

What then is the life of the average Palestinian Jordanian like? Currently, there are 13 refugee camps, but in terms of urban infrastructure they are hard to distinguish from other parts of town. Added to this is the fact that the majority of Palestinians now live outside the camps.²² Refugees with full Jordanian citizenship are entitled to use all the available state services and to own property. They have access to jobs in the public and private sector. One should bear in mind, though, that the bureaucracy and state institutions continue to be dominated by non-Palestinian Jordanians. And hardly any Palestinians occupy leading military positions. They do, however, dominate the private enterprise sector and have played an important role in the strong economic growth in Jordan over the last few years. But in politics in particular the persistent discrepancy between old-established and Palestinian Jordanians is evident. Where parliamentary elections are concerned, the constituencies are delineated in a way that ensures that the rural areas, which are considered loyal to the King, are always overrepresented compared to urban areas.²³ During the 2010 parliamentary elections, a candidate from the royalist tribal areas only required 2,000 votes to get into parliament, while it took up to 80,000 votes to win a seat in the predominantly

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21 | Cf. Human Rights Watch, *Stateless Again: Palestinian-Origin Jordanians Deprived of their Nationality*, 2010, <http://hrw.org/news/2010/02/01/jordan-stop-withdrawing-nationality-palestinian-origin-citizens> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

22 | Cf. Marwan Khawaja and Åge A. Tiltnes (eds.), "On the Margins: Migration and living conditions of Palestinian camp refugees in Jordan", *Fafo-report*, No. 357, Oslo, 2002, 12-13, <http://fafo.no/pub/rapp/357/index.htm> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

23 | Cf. Martin Beck and Lea Collet, "Das jordanische Wahlgesetz 2010: Demokratisierung oder Stagnation?", *KAS-Länderbericht*, 2010, 3-4, <http://kas.de/jordanien/de/publications/20947> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

Palestinian Amman.²⁴ In spite of the described discrimination, no other Palestinian refugees in the Middle East enjoy as good a quality of life as those in Jordan.

Outside the Middle East, life of the members of the Palestinian diaspora has been considerably less complicated, with integration and advancement going hand in hand.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE DIASPORA

The diaspora has been a defining element of Palestinian politics, economics and society for decades. Most sections within the PLO were founded by Palestinian activists living in the diaspora. There are many types of networking between the diaspora and the Palestinian Territories. Besides family networks, it is particularly village-based (including the Bethlehem and Birzeit clubs in the USA), political, politico-religious, but also cross-faith as well as cross-national networks that are of importance. Especially after the Arab defeat in the war against Israel in 1967, Palestinians started to organise themselves in order to assist their beleaguered fellow countrymen and give them a voice. In 1967, the first cross-denominational pan-Arab organisation was founded in the USA. Palestinians played a crucial part in setting up the "Association of Arab-American University Graduates" (AAUG). Other groups formed to support their former home communities. Their work focused on social matters, culture and the media. Palestinian activists in Europe and the USA have held thousands of demonstrations and vigils since then.

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However, many of the old-established Palestinian diaspora groups experienced a decline from the mid-nineties onwards. This affected in particular those organisations that were linked to established political groupings. They were not capable of providing services to the Palestinians, especially to recent arrivals, or of representing them adequately, which led to a decline in membership for many

24 | Cf. Hans-Christian Rößler, "Wo selbst die Islamisten loyal sind", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 05 Feb 2011, <http://faz.net/aktuell/politik/arabische-welt/protteste-in-jordanien-wo-selbst-die-islamisten-loyal-sind-1594768.html> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

organisations. This development was also partly due to the feeling of optimism amongst many Israelis and Palestinians after the Oslo Accords. The pressure to engage in political activism declined. But when the events did not result in a conclusive peace agreement, the urge to make their voices heard soon increased again amongst members of the diaspora in Canada, the USA and Europe. A number of organisations sprang up, and the activities of expatriate Palestinians increased. It was mainly young people who initiated these activities. Most of the leadership of the student networks SPHR in Canada and PSC in the USA is still composed of Palestinians under the age of 35.²⁵

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After the Second Intifada had broken out in September 2000 and the attacks of 11 September 2001 had taken place, this trend intensified. The Palestinian diaspora was exposed to allegations that it supported terrorism in Israel and around the world. The sight of bombed-out civilian buses and restaurants in Jerusalem made it necessary to present not only the Middle East conflict but also the lives of the members of the expatriate Palestinian community to international society, from a realistic but also self-critical perspective. Palestinians in the diaspora therefore regularly write opinion pieces, give interviews and use blogs as well as social networks. One example is the website *Electronic Intifada*, which publishes articles on the Middle East conflict and which, according to the Israeli newspaper *The Jerusalem Post*, is "very professional, user-friendly and well written".²⁶

Other Palestinians started to become involved in the areas of economics, the sciences or culture. Successful Palestinian businesspeople assisted in the funding of hospitals and

25 | Cf. Laith Marouf, "Palestinian Diaspora: With or against collaboration?", *The Electronic Intifada*, 14 Sep 2007, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/palestinian-diaspora-or-against-collaboration/7142> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

26 | Cf. Hannah Brown, "Virtual war", *The Jerusalem Post*, 27 Sep 2002, <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/jpost/access/208068391.html?dids=208068391:208068391&FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&type=current&date=Sep+27%2C+2002&author=Hannah+Brown&pub=Jerusalem+Post&edition=&startpage=24&desc=Virtual+war> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

universities in the Palestinian Territories. There are villages and towns in Palestine where over half the donations come from diaspora Palestinians.²⁷ A number of Palestinian academics are among the most highly regarded in their respective fields. Examples include the literary scholar Edward Said and the historian Rashid Khalidi. By reflecting the suffering of the Palestinian population in their publications they too act as lobbyists for their people. The same applies to the cultural sphere. Palestinians such as fashion designer Rami Kashou represent a diaspora generation which has not only integrated fully, but which is also making its way professionally in areas that have no direct relation to the Middle East conflict. This is also part of the normalisation process within the Palestinian diaspora community.

Influence in the Economy, the Sciences and Technology

In 1997, the virtual network PALESTA (Palestinian Scientists and Technologists Abroad) was established in order to “harness the scientific and technological knowledge of expatriate professionals for the benefit of

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development efforts in Palestine”.²⁸ It symbolises the significance of the Palestinian diaspora for the development of the Palestinian Territories. Internet-based networks such as PALESTA might not be capable of overcoming all geographical borders, but they can create links between the dispersed parts of a community in virtual simultaneity. That is of great importance particularly for the Palestinian diaspora, because it lacks a proper centre. The Palestinian Territories can only be a virtual focal point, as many Palestinians cannot visit their ancestral home in person because of the Israeli occupation.

27 | Cf. Mazin Qumsiyeh, “Role of Palestinians in Diaspora: Palestinian activism in the US”, *Qumsiyeh: A Human Rights Web*, 2009, <http://qumsiyeh.org/palestinianactivismintheus> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

28 | Cf. Sari Hanafi, “Reshaping the Geography: Palestinian Communities Networks in Europe and the New Media”, Second Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, 2001, 2, <http://lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EMTEL/Minorities/papers/palestinianweb.doc> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

In that respect, the diaspora in Europe and the USA differs fundamentally from that in the Middle East. The Palestinian community of the Western industrialised nations comprises mainly former students who decided to remain in their host countries. This is why the USA, the UK and Germany in particular have a relatively high proportion of well-educated, well-integrated Palestinian migrants. After 1982, this trend was slowed down by regional events. The war between Israel and Lebanon resulted in thousands of Palestinians fleeing mainly to Scandinavia. These included only a small number of academics and professionals. The predominantly poor level of education and qualifications as well as language difficulties meant that many of them only found work in the low-wage sector or remained unemployed. In Denmark, Sweden and Norway, these refugees from Lebanon form around three quarters of the Palestinian community. Large numbers of them rely on social benefits.

Germany, on the other hand, occupies a special position because it has accepted Palestinians from both waves of refugees. After the First Intifada, which broke out in 1987, the German authorities decided to admit a fairly large number of Palestinian asylum seekers. This resulted in the formation of a sizeable Palestinian community in Berlin originating from the Gaza Strip. As many of them were relatively young when they entered the country, they had better opportunities to carry on with their academic and vocational training than the Palestinian immigrants to Scandinavia, who were on average around 40 years old.²⁹ On the one hand, this means that there are many well-educated Palestinians who benefited from the German education system and who are fully integrated in society. On the other hand, some of the Palestinians who fled to Germany from Lebanon after 1982 continue to live a life in the shadows.

The advancement of the Palestinian diaspora also benefited the Palestinian Territories. The return of well-educated Palestinians, even if only for a temporary period, is of crucial importance to their development. Several approaches are being pursued in this context. One of the most important

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29 | Cf. *ibid.*, 5-7.

is TOKTEN, a United Nations programme, the purpose of which is to mobilise skilled professionals and experts and send them to their home countries as consultants. With the aid of this programme several hundred Palestinians returned to their old homeland. Some of them wish to remain permanently, but because Israel controls the granting of visas this is not always possible. Most of them come from Jordan, where they form the backbone of the private economy, as well as from the USA and Canada. The TOKTEN programme benefits mainly ministries and other public institutions but also non-government organisations and private institutes.

Political Influence and Misuse of the Refugee Issue

Within the Palestinian diaspora, it seems that it is mainly the refugees who have enormous political influence. At the same time, the refugee issue is misused to put political pressure on Israel. Efforts are made, for instance, to engender the unrealistic hope that around five million refugees could "return" to their old homes in present-day Israel, although most of these no longer exist. The importance that this issue has for the PLO is illustrated by the fact that it has made considerable political concessions over the last three decades in many disputed areas. It now accepts the two-state solution, for instance, took part in the 1991 Madrid Middle East Peace Conference and signed the Oslo Accord in 1993. But it has never formally relinquished the right of return for all refugees.

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Since the refugees are not organised and are geographically dispersed, their influence is of an indirect nature.³⁰ It is not they themselves that are putting Israel and the international community under pressure. It is political decision-makers of all leanings who often act in a populist manner and utilise the refugee issue for their own agenda. The Palestinian leadership has so far failed to engage in a serious dialogue with the population about the refugee

30 | Cf. International Crisis Group, "Palestinian Refugees and the Politics of Peacemaking", *Crisis Group Middle East Report*, No. 22, 5 Feb 2004, <http://crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/022-palestinian-refugees-and-the-politics-of-peacemaking.aspx> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

issue. The publicly stated ultimate demands to Israel and the simultaneously demonstrated willingness to compromise in peace talks have resulted in the Palestinian population questioning the credibility of its own leadership and in Israel doubting the sincerity of the Palestinian commitment to a two-state solution. There is little doubt that a future Palestinian state will be the homeland of the Palestinians and that only a symbolic number of refugees will “return” to Israel. The fact that the PLO has recognised this can be seen in its agreement under the Oslo Accord to postpone the refugee issue to a later date. This is why there has subsequently been an increase in activism outside the PLO, which is seen to be willing to compromise. In order to calm the anxious population, leading PLO functionaries have reverted to repeating the central importance of the refugee issue again and again like a mantra. Resolution 194 of the United Nation’s General Assembly of December 1948 has become the crucial frame of reference for this; one of its points concerns those Palestinians who wish to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours, stating that they should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date.³¹

So, on the whole it is not the refugees who are keeping their concerns on the agenda. They do not represent themselves to any great extent and where they do, it is only in the form of very small local groups. The most important representative bodies within the Palestinian refugee camps are actually the camp committees, which deal primarily with humanitarian concerns and work closely with UNRWA. It is the PLO Department for Refugee Affairs that is responsible for the coordination between the different committees. Particularly in the camps in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, there are additional executive committees whose work is mainly political. They draw up petitions, organise demonstrations and strikes and hold meetings with high-ranking national and international representatives. However, most of these

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31 | Cf. UNISPAL, “General Assembly Resolution 194”, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

committees are under the control of Fatah, the dominant party within the PLO. They are therefore not independent, but at times serve as the mouthpiece of the official political powers.³²

Political institutions provide another form of representation. The Palestinian parliament, which has not been operational since 2007, includes a number of refugees who represent their constituencies and therefore the refugees. Refugees are also represented in other institutions, such as the most important Fatah bodies, the Central Committee and the Revolutionary Council, last elected in August 2009. The PLO continues to remain the driving force behind the mobilisation of support for or opposition to agreements concerning the refugees.

For Hamas, the refugee issue is a useful tool for discrediting the PLO and the Palestinian Authority. They refuse to compromise on the refugee issue.

But there are also forces outside the PLO that keep the fate of the refugees in the mind of the (international) public. For Hamas, the refugee issue is a useful tool for discrediting

the PLO and the Palestinian Authority (PA). While there are repeated reports of the Islamists being prepared to enter into a long-term truce with Israel and to recognise the 1967 borders,³³ they refuse to compromise on the refugee issue. This is partly due to the fact that the percentage of refugees living in their stronghold in Gaza is considerably higher than in the West Bank, which is dominated by Fatah. According to UNRWA, almost three out of four residents of the narrow coastal strip are refugees.³⁴ Any concession made by the PLO in this area is usually used in propaganda, condemning it as a selling-out of the Palestinian cause. Consequently, the PLO feels under pressure to publicly pursue ultimate demands. Hamas' bigotry became obvious when the beleaguered Syrian President had Palestinian refugees bombed because they were allegedly undermining

32 | Cf. International Crisis Group, "Palestinian Refugees and the Politics of Peacemaking", n. 30, 14-17.

33 | Cf. Avi Issacharoff and Amos Harel, "Fatah sources: Meshal tells Hamas to end attacks on Israel", *Haaretz*, 29 Dec 2011, <http://haaretz.com/print-edition/news/hamas-forces-ordered-to-cess-attacks-on-israeli-targets-palestinian-sources-say-1.404226> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

34 | Cf. UNRWA, "Gaza", 2011, <http://unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=64> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

the authority of the regime with their demonstrations.³⁵ Despite the large number of dead and injured, this did not cause the Hamas leadership in Damascus to distance itself from the regime in protest.

There are also other organisations accusing the official Palestinian representatives of having been involved in selling out refugees' rights. These are often referred to as "right of return movements". Two of the best known are Badil in Bethlehem and the global Al-Awda network. Their measures include the mobilisation of refugee communities within and outside the Palestinian Territories, public awareness campaigns, conferences and publications. Whilst they may not have had a long-term effect on relevant decision-making processes and peace negotiations to date, they have managed to ensure that the political elite cannot ignore this issue.³⁶ But should a comprehensive peace agreement between Palestinians and Israelis be reached, we can expect the majority of Palestinians to be prepared to make substantial concessions in this area. This was shown by a survey conducted in 2003 by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), a long-term partner of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Ramallah, in which Palestinian refugees from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon and Jordan were canvassed. According to PSR, only ten per cent of the respondents would "return" to Israel given a two-state resolution and Israel's recognition of the right of return. Provided they received fair compensation payments, over 70 per cent stated that they would prefer to remain in the newly created Palestinian state or in their host country.³⁷

Should a comprehensive peace agreement between Palestinians and Israelis be reached, we can expect the majority of Palestinians to be prepared to make substantial concessions in this area.

35 | Cf. Anthony Shadid, "Syrian Navy Joins Attack on Key Rebellious Port City", *The New York Times*, 15 Aug 2011, <http://nytimes.com/2011/08/15/world/middleeast/15syria.html> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

36 | Cf. *ibid.*, 17-19.

37 | Cf. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), "Press Release: Results of PSR Refugees' Polls in the West Bank/ Gaza Strip, Jordan and Lebanon on Refugees' Preferences and Behaviour in a Palestinian-Israeli Permanent Refugee Agreement, January-June 2003", 2003, <http://pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2003/refugeesjune03.html> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).

CONCLUSION

The fate of the Palestinian refugees and the diaspora are inextricably linked. The activities of expatriate Palestinians, many of whom are refugees themselves, are frequently concerned with the fate of the some 5 million refugees. The great complexity of this issue precludes one-sided perspectives. Many of the refugees in the Middle East, especially those in Lebanon, suffer miserable living conditions. Without the work of UNRWA the refugee camps in the Middle East would be in an even more desolate state and thus an ideal breeding ground for political radicalism and religious fanaticism. Also, by extending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to various countries in the region, the Palestinian leadership has contributed to refugees being seen in Lebanon and in Jordan as being partly to blame for two civil wars and suffering ongoing discrimination as a result.

However, the diaspora, which comprises more than half of the over ten million Palestinians, also includes those who have forged careers in Europe and in the USA. Through political activities, financial support and the temporary return of skilled professionals they help raise international awareness of the Palestinian issue and support further development in the Palestinian Territories. Although the exile factions of Hamas and Fatah are considered

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particularly uncompromising, a stance that is in part due to the fact that they do not have to suffer the consequences of their own conduct, it is the great mass of the diaspora that guarantees the existence of a Palestinian cosmopolitan citizenship, the size of which hardly any other diaspora community can boast of. Visitors to Palestinian communities quickly notice how many residents speak English and other foreign languages, not infrequently with an unmistakable American accent, which they acquired during an extended stay in the USA or as a result of the global networking via the Internet and the access to American television programmes and movies. This is also why Palestinians are regarded as particularly secular and liberal amongst the peoples of the Middle East. Muslims and Christians live

peacefully side by side.³⁸ Ethnic, religious or denominational violence is virtually unknown in the West Bank and even in the Gaza Strip, which is controlled by Hamas.

The Palestinians in the refugee camps of the Middle East and the worldwide diaspora community represent a political and social influencing factor without which the complexity of the Middle East conflict is barely conceivable. It is unlikely that this conflict will be resolved without a consensual settlement of the refugee issue.

38 | Cf. Felix Dane and Jörg Knoch, "The Role and Influence of Christians in the Palestinian Territories", *KAS International Reports*, 12/2010, 53-71, <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.21240> (accessed 16 Jan 2012).